

Hosea 14

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[0 : 00] God, let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, be with us now this night as we come before thee once more together to seek thy face in prayer.

We know, Lord, that thou hast covenanted to be in the midst wherever thy people gather, whether by many or by few. And we ask thee now, Lord, to grant thy blessing upon our time.

The fulfilment of thy word that thou wouldst instruct us indeed in the way that we should go, that we would be able, Lord, to have our way lit through thy word in all its density and the fullness and richness thereof, which, Lord, we cannot plumb the depths of.

As we come to this final chapter in the latter part of the prophecy of Hosea, most of you will be aware of the working through the latter part, chapters 8 to 14, since we resumed our study of Hosea several weeks ago.

And many of the chapters, not to put too fine a point on it, have been speaking of the difficulty or the wrath or the conflict between Israel, particularly northern Israel, sometimes given the title Ephraim here, the northern breakaway kingdom of Israel, the ten tribes, as opposed to Judah, which was based in Jerusalem, although sometimes Judah is also included in the prophecy from Hosea to the Romans people.

[1 : 28] But it is usually northern Israel that is in view. And often, as we can see from the preceding chapters, it has been a relationship of conflict. It has been a situation of the people being at loggerheads, at war with the Lord of their fathers.

They have gone their way, they have followed other gods, they have worshipped idols, and they have reaped the bitter consequences of that. And all of this, remember, begins in the opening chapter with Hosea being told to take a wife of Horeb's and the family that he produces with her, the relationship that he has with her is one with the pain and the heartbreak of infidelity, the brokenness that goes with a relationship that is vitiated, that is broken by the infidelity of at least the one party there.

And in Hosea's marriage, his wife who goes off and leaves him and has affairs with other people, he brings her back. And then the relationship, however, is still fraught with difficulty.

And this was to be the living illustration of God's relationship with his people. They have played the heart against him. And all the pain and all the heartbreak that came with that is the subject of these preceding chapters.

If anything, this final concluding chapter is, it might sound superficial to say, a happier chapter, but it is one where the conflict is at an end.

[2 : 59] It is one where the Lord receives Israel back, or it's a prophecy of the time when Israel will turn back to her God because the conflict is over.

The conflict isn't over, not because suddenly they've all decided to bury the hatch and say, oh, well, that's fine, and throw away their weapons as though a war ever ended that way.

Wars, conflicts end usually when one side is defeated. One side is completely defeated, and then the other side is the victor, and then they have to decide how they're going to relate to each other after that.

Now, Israel has been defeated. Israel has come to see by the painful reality of experience that idols are empty. That they have been foolish to have wandered from their God.

It is as the prodigal in the parable who awakens and says, I will arise and go to my father. Who wakes up, as it were, in his own mind to see that here he is, destitute, in poverty, hungry, feeding pigs.

[4 : 05] That which would be an abomination to any kind of devout Jew in his day and culture. And here he is, longing to fill his own stomach with what he is feeding the pigs.

And eventually he says to himself, I will arise and go to my father. This is the situation Israel is in here. And the Lord is encouraging them to this. O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity.

You have learned by bitter experience that iniquity simply brings you down. As we saw in chapter 13, at verse 9. O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help.

There is always that blimmer of hope, that opportunity, that hand reach down as though to lift them out of the gutter. And here again is the invitation.

O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God, for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. It's your own sin, your own problems that are brought about this breach. I didn't send your way.

[5 : 08] I didn't drive your way. Again, if we take the parable, the prodigal son is our pattern here. The father does not say to his son, off you go.

Disappear into a far country. Here's some money to help you. The son comes to his father. He wants his father's money. He wants what he sees as belonging to him. And off he goes and squanders it.

Israel has received the riches of their father, the Lord, and squandered it. Wasted it. And now here they are recognizing, or be urged to recognize, their lostness.

Take with you words and turn to the Lord. Say unto him, take away all iniquity, receive us graciously, so will we render the calves of our lips. Now, various things in this verse here.

First of all, take with you words. Now, it's prophesying a time where Israel would itself be in captivity. Where they can no longer render physical calves, physical oxen, physical sheep.

[6 : 08] Not because they wouldn't have any. Though initially they would be slaves in the land of their captivity. In due course, they would be able to perhaps settle and maybe accumulate a wee bit of flocks and herds.

Build up a wee bit of property eventually in the land of their exile. The problem is not the absence of any livestock. The problem in exile is they no longer have the temple.

They no longer have the priesthood. They no longer have the altar. They no longer have any kind of means of sacrifice. All they have is their prayerful relationship with the Lord.

They can come to the Lord in prayer anytime. They can approach the Lord from the heart anywhere at any time. And this is the lesson they are being compelled to learn.

Take with you words and turn to the Lord. But there's more to them than that. In the Hebrew, in which of course this is originally written, the word for words doesn't just mean that which is spoken with the lips.

[7 : 10] It means things. It means matter. It means realities. That is the same word that is used to convey and to describe all of these things.

So it is not just, you know, speak the right words. Because the Lord can see through all of these empty vanities. You know, Psalm 78, we read verses 36 and 37.

Nevertheless, they did flatter him with their mouth. And they lied unto him with their tongues. For their heart was not right with it. Neither were they steadfast in his covenant.

So it's not enough just to sort of say the words as though the Lord's too stupid to recognize where they're empty or where they're lying. In Isaiah 29, at verse 13, Therefore the Lord said, For as much as these people draw near me with their mouth and with their words, their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.

Therefore, behold, I have received to do a marvellous work among these people. A marvellous work and a wonder. For the wisdom of the wise men shall perish. God is not fooled by mere words.

[8 : 25] So when he says bring with you words, it doesn't mean just say the right physical words. It means bring matter. Bring the reality of your worship. Let it be the genuine, heartfelt truth that you bring.

Your true repentance take away all iniquity. Receive us graciously. It's what they're encouraged to plead. It means so much more than just the sound that comes out of your mouth.

It is the reality. Bring your reality with you. The reality of your worship. The fullness of matter. Now remember, of course, that John the Evangelist, when he, or John the Apostle, when he is writing his account of the Gospel, he begins it with these words, In the beginning was the Word.

And the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made. And it was life, and the life was the light of man.

Now, of course, John is writing in Greek. But he is himself a Jew, a Hebrew. And he will have, as he is writing, even though he's writing in the Greek, or it's being transmitted to us in the Greek, which doesn't have the same sense for word, what is in his mind, undoubtedly, is the sense that not just, in the beginning was the right thing to speak, but in the beginning was the Word.

[9 : 48] The reality, the matter, the fullness of truth is there in the Word. Take with you words. That is what is meant here, that fullness of reality.

Take away all iniquity. That's what we just say to the Lord. Receive us graciously, by free gift, as it were. So will we render the calves of our lips. We don't have physical, animal sacrifices that we can offer, even if we have them in the land of our exile, we haven't got the temple, we haven't got the altar anymore, we haven't got the priesthood.

We cannot, even if we wanted to, bring these beasts as once we could. There was a time, the Israelites might think, well, we could have done that, but we scorned it. We passed by the temple, we scorned the sacrifices of the Lord, we built idle temples to ourselves, we built shrines in high places, and we neglected the Lord.

Oh, how we wish now, we could be back in the courts of the Lord's house, offering up our physical calves, and sheep, and goats, and oxen, but now it is but the calves of our lips, and yet that is acceptable to God, if it is the reality.

Hebrews 13, we read in verse 15, by him, therefore, let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually. That is the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name.

[11 : 14] Now, what is the essence of his sacrifice? It is that which costs us. And they go, well, if it's just the things we're saying, it's not costing us. No, but if it is reality that we are offering up, then the sacrifice of praise is that we are praising God with time and energy and strength that we might otherwise be frittering away on the things of the world.

We are giving God the time that we are not spending for our own pleasure and distraction and worldly amusement. We are giving God the energy, the strength that we get if we are able to sing, if we are able to pray, whether silently or publicly, whatever it is we are able to bring to the Lord, we bring it all.

The reality, the truth, the fullness, the matter, the calves of our lips, the sacrifice of praise. It is sacrifice because we could be frittering it away somewhere else, but instead, we are making the most of it, the best of it.

We are taking this time, this energy, this effort, this worship, that which is his, that which he gives us, we give back to him. It is as though the prodigal son had taken his father's money, gone into a far country, and instead of squandering it with righteous living, had said, now this is my father's money, I've got to do the best I can with it, and he invested it, and he worked it, and he got land with it, and he got a good return, and he brought it back to his father, saying, here father, you gave me this much, and I so appreciate it, this is what I've made with it, I'm giving it back to you now.

That would be a sacrifice of praise. Maybe we're not able to do that, if we're not that particular, haven't got ability or strength, as we would see it. But God desires from us this sacrifice of praise, the fruit of our lips, the calves of our lips.

[13 : 02] Here is the recognition in verse 3, Asher. That is the city from which the Assyrian Empire takes its name. Asher shall not save us. We will not ride upon horses, and this is a more subtle reference to Egypt, because the Egyptians, the cavalry of Egypt, the horses of Egypt, were the great envy of so many of the peoples of the ancient East.

Egypt was famous for its cavalry, and always when they were attacked, or when they were under threat, we find the Israelite kingdoms being pulled in one of two directions, either looking eastward to the Assyrians or the Babylonians, or westward and southward to the Egyptians, looking to come under the wing of some superpower to protect them.

Just as some of you may be old enough to remember, as I am, that at one stage, within the comparatively near history, most countries in the world, especially if they were comparatively newly independent countries, were quickly wooed by either the Soviet Communist Bloc or the American-led capitalist so-called free world.

And all of these independent states all over the world became effectively little satellites, either of the Communist Bloc or of the West, one way or another. And resources would be poured into these countries by whichever superpower it was.

And here we have Israel slap-bang in the middle of that area, which is pulled in this direction or that direction, sometimes turning to Egypt, sometimes turning to Assyria or Babylon or the Persians or whatever it may be.

[14 : 43] But what the Lord is saying is the time is to come when you recognize this is not your help. Asher will not save us. We will not ride up on horses to Egypt. Now I don't always say it any more to the work of our hands.

Ye are gods, for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. Now that doesn't just mean those who are either orphaned or on the one hand illegitimate and outcast.

It means that Israel, by their idolatry, by their going astray from the Lord, just as Hosea's wife, Gomer, when she wandered off and had affairs and so on, she behaved or lived as though she had no husband.

Israel, when they abandon the God of their fathers, lives and behaves as though they themselves have no father. Not just that they seem to be illegitimate, not just that they seem to be orphaned, but God is their father or ought to be.

He for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy. Now this is not, as I've mentioned in the past, this is not just a concept that Jesus taught his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount and with the Lord's Prayer.

[15 : 53] We find it repeatedly in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 63, for example, verse 16, Doubtless thou art our father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not.

Thou, O Lord, art our father, our redeemer. Thy name is from everlasting. And likewise, in chapter 64, verse 8, Now, O Lord, thou art our father, we are the clay, and thou art potter, and we are all the work of thy hand.

Likewise, Jeremiah, you know, chapter 3, verse 19, And I said, Thou shalt call me my father, thou shalt not turn away from me. God is the father of his people.

This is why Jesus teaches people again that which essentially they have forgotten. Thou art a father, for indeed a fatherless, findeth mercy.

Those who had lived as though they were without a father, God is to be the father to them, and he will be their father once again. They will find not mere harsh, unbending justice, but they will find mercy in them.

[17 : 02] I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him.

Now, it is part of the nature of the healing of the body. If you cut yourself, or if you have some injury or some wound, then the body begins almost at once to work away to start knitting together that cut or to heal that skin or start healing away that infection, and the body's own defenses.

Fight against whatever the infection or the illness or the antibody might be. They're fighting and they're trying to heal it up the whole time. One reason why a lot of bed rest or hospitalization and medicines may help is that what is happening there is not that, well, there's something magic about going to bed and lying down.

It is that when your body is being rested, all the energy, all the effort, all the life, all the strength that is having to be used up in life and going about and walking and talking and eating and drinking and sleeping and standing up and all these things the body isn't having to do.

When you're resting, when you're hospitalized, when you're in bed, all that energy and all that effort is freed to be focused where the problem is. It stands so much better a chance of being healed from within the body's own mechanism when it isn't having to divert energy and strength and effort elsewhere.

[18 : 33] That's why people say, oh, plenty of bed rest or hospitalization, they put you to bed, you get your medicines, what I mean. It's not the medicines alone that do the healing. The body has so much potential healing power in itself if only it gets the chance to do it.

And when the Lord says, I will heal their backsliding, he is not going to do that in the midst of when all the idolatry and sin and all the other carrying on is going on because just as the body is not going to be able to heal when you're carrying on just as much exposure to infections, expending just as much energy, weighing out the strength, he never gets a chance.

But rather, when you desist from sin, when you turn away from idolatry, when you turn back to the Lord, then all that energy that was being drained out of you, all that effort, all that strength that was being wasted on idolatry and sin and the witness of the world, that is conserved in the power of the Lord.

It is conserved with the Lord in worship and faithfulness and turning to the Lord again. Sin has ceased to be the drain on your soul that it once was.

And once the plug is put in, the bath stops empty, and once the root cause of the problem has been stoppered up and bandaged, as it were, you stop losing out, bleeding out for spiritual strength.

[20 : 07] Therefore, the Lord says, I will heal their backsliding. The healing begins when we turn to the Lord because then we stop bleeding out, we stop expending that waste and energy.

I will love them freely for my anger is turned away from him. His anger turns away when Israel turns away from sin.

God's desire is to love and save and heal us. I will be as the dew unto Israel. Now, dew is something we don't give a great deal of thought to in this country.

We still think, well, maybe sometimes with summer you look out and there's the dew on the ground, maybe. But the dew in the Middle East and in hot countries is a big deal. It's a major source of moisture to the ground.

And if it lingers for a while, it benefits it even more. I will be as the dew unto Israel. He shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

[21 : 09] Now, this verse 5, this is vitally important. This is our spiritual growth here. The dew unto Israel, this is the refreshing the moisturizing which makes the difference between life and barren dryness and death.

He shall grow as the lily. And we think, okay, well, we think the lilies are sort of flat pads that you find on ponds or else the lily flower, the white lily flower, okay, are maybe pretty to look at and what's the big deal.

The big deal is that the lily is one of the most productive plants known to man. One stem, as it were, or rather one root can produce as many as 50 bulbs.

Now, if you think that's a 50 times growth, one root produces as many as 50 bulbs. It's exponential growth. That's what is being described here.

He shall grow as the lily, an explosion of growth. That's what is promised here. He shall cast forth his roots as Lebanon.

[22 : 13] Now, what it says, as Lebanon, is famous for is the cedar tree. Now, the cedar tree was such that it was described by some as having roots that go down and as wide, as deep and extensive as the branches and the height are above.

so that if you could see us of diagram, you'd have the line of the earth in the middle and the tree would always be a middle imagery to have the trunk and the branches and the foliage going up the way and then you'd have almost the exact replication of that down the way with it spreading out its branches and roots and everything under the soil so as much depth and width of growth under the soil as above the soil which makes it well nigh immovable.

But also, it's not just an imagery of immovable, it's also an imagery of the kind of growth and strength and spreading which is underground, in other words, unseen.

The vast majority of our spiritual growth will be unseen. Yes, yes, we need that the watering showers or perhaps public worship and our Bible reading and our worship with others and prayer and public times of worship, but the vast majority of our spiritual growth will take place in a context that is unseen by the world.

It will be your personal relationship with the Lord. It will be your personal times of prayer, of Bible reading, of growth with the Lord, of what you drink in, of what you're able to stop and think about in your own time with the Lord, how you're able to converse with the Lord in your own time.

[23 : 59] That will dictate how much you get from the public ordinances. That will dictate, likewise, your own enthusiasm, or lack of it, for the public worship.

It's not because this preacher is great or that preacher is great or he's not so good but he goes on too long but he's nice and quick so he's easier. It's not about the vast majority of the time, where you go or what you do or who's in the pulpit there.

It is about our personal relationship with the Lord. It is about the roots going deep and spreading wide. It is his roots as Lebanon, that they are deep, that they are spreading wide, that this spiritual growth which is symbolized here is that which is out of sight as far as the world is concerned.

It is deep and as it goes it is strengthening its hold in that which is unseen. Whatever you see above ground is only half, almost literally half the picture and the difference will be what is under the soil, what is in the depth of the ground.

His branches shall spread, his beauty shall be as the olive tree. Think, well, the olives, that would be beautiful, the name, the olive, plant, is that such a beautiful plant?

[25 : 18] What it means with the beauty of the olive tree is it is a plant which never loses its foliage, its density, its virgin, it is always green, it has always got its leaves, its branches, its foliage, that is its beauty, it is imbuing in its concept, its smell as Lebanon, again, the scent of the cedars there.

We think, for example, of what we read in the Song of Solomon, in chapter 4, verse 11, you know, the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

That's sort of the odor of the cedar tree, and the garments being sort of artificially almost endowed with that scent. Because of the savour of thy good ointments, chapter 1, verse 3 of the song there, because of the savour thy good ointments, thy name is as ointment poured forth.

Therefore, do the virgins love thee, the scent, the smell, as Lebanon. There is a sweetness, a fragrance about the Christian life which affects, and if only it would infect, everybody that it touched and blew upon.

They that dwell under his shadow shall return. Our commentators are divided about whether or not this is shadow. It's a reference to Israel in terms of coming back to the Lord and thereby being a protection and a strength for others who would find shelter in his protection and care, or more likely, as others think, it is a reference to the Lord, they that dwell under his shadow.

[26 : 58] As for example we have in Psalm 91, he that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

Scripture tends to be consistent and if we think we don't know what this means here, then you know you have got that reference in Psalm 91, very clear, who is the shadow, who is the shade there.

Could still refer to Israel as well, but primarily it is a reference I would suggest to the Lord, they that dwell under his shadow shall return.

In other words, if we have the shelter of the Lord, whether we be in exile, whether we be struggle, we will return again to the land of inheritance. They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine, the scent thereof, again, shall be as the wine of Lebanon, famed for its aroma, for its flavour, for its medicinal properties, the wine of Lebanon was, and the scent thereof, again, the smell of thy gardens, is the smell of Lebanon, but revive as the corn.

Now, to revive means to come alive again. We think, well, why does corn need to come alive again? Well, you think of the seed of the corn being planted.

[28 : 14] When it goes underground, you don't see it for months, nothing happens for months, until finally there's the growth and eventually the harvest. Jesus himself puts it this way, John 12, verse 24, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except the corn of wheat fallen to the ground and die, it abideth alone, but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.

They shall revive as the corn, they shall come alive again as the corn, because first they must die. Now, Jesus said, if we are going to follow him, we must die to self.

It means that all the worldly ambitions or hopes or, you know, oh, I want to be rich and famous, I want to do this, I want to do that, I want to do the next thing. We have to die to these things. We have to die to the old self and the old identity and the Lord knows the cost to us in doing that.

If we are to find what is the real meaning, purpose, fulfillment, blessing, enrichment of life, we have to be prepared to let go those empty and vacuous hopes and dreams, die to self.

Let go pride and self-seeking, be prepared to be the one who loses these things that we might gain that which cannot be lost.

[29 : 38] They shall revive as the corn. Ephraim shall say, what am I to do anymore with idols? What do I need these false gods for? I have heard them and observed them.

Now, when we have observed them, it's like regarded them, I've looked upon them. It's the opposite of God hiding his face from his people. You know, when they sin and when they're against him and enmity with him, it's like he hides his face from him.

This is the opposite. He now regards them, observes them with open face. I have heard them. A total contrast there with the idols. What am I to do anymore with idols?

I, says the Lord, have heard them. The idols can't hear. They can't speak, they can't smell, they can't talk, they can't do anything, they can't move, they have to be picked up and carried everywhere.

The idol is useless. It is dead. And that's true also for all the things that become the idols of our lives. We idolize, we make God's small g of anything and everything that we count as more important than the living God.

[30 : 48] it may be we are pursuing football or sports for ourselves or perhaps for our children or we are perhaps investing so much time in our work and our career or financial concerns or whatever it may be and these things are soaking up our time, our energy, our strength.

They have become our idols because these are the things to which we devote most of our being, most of our time, our energy, our strength, it's what we speak about, it's what we focus upon.

Anytime we're not actually learning our living, these are the things we're on about. They have become our gods, small g. But these are gods which cannot hear, they cannot speak, they cannot help you in time of need, you cannot pour out your troubles to them, you cannot bring your petitions to them and ask them for help, they are useless in that sense, they cannot help, they are simply like an item in a stall, you pay your money, you take your item away, you have engaged in a contract and there you've got your bottle and there it goes on a shelf and doesn't look pretty and you can't do anything else with it.

But I, says the Lord, have heard him. When he cries to me, I hear, when he asks, I respond, when he returns to me, I protect him and love him, I have heard him, I am like a green fir tree, evergreen, never loses its foliage, never loses its covering, never loses its shelter and protection and shade, I am like a green fir tree.

But a fir tree, of course, and so many of the evergreens, they don't bear fruit that you can eat, but the Lord says, more than that, but in addition, from me is thy fruit found, that which sustains you, that which brings forth your enrichment, your fruitfulness, from me, does it come.

[32 : 46] And this is a message of the prophecy, and this verse 9 is almost like an epilogue, a conclusion, who is wise, and he shall understand these things, prudent, and he shall know them.

Again, consistency in the word of God, Psalm 107, verse 43, very similar, whoso is wise and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.

To be wise is not to be so intellectually clever, and to be like a super scientist or a professor or whatever, it simply means to see what is going on around you, to have the facts, and to see the reality, the truth that is around you, where things that are happy say that's not right, it shouldn't be happening that way, the world should not be this way, people should not be doing these things, and maybe you don't know why, but you instinctively know something is wrong, the answer to your questions, the fulfillment to your need, the recognition of how all the jigsaw pieces fit together to make the complete picture, who is wise and will understand these things, prudent and he shall know them, for the ways of the Lord are right, they make sense of it all, but the word translated there right doesn't just mean it's the correct thing, it's also what means righteous, they are pure, they are perfect, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall in them, and that's such an intriguing little conclusion there, which again points us on to the

New Testament and to the Gospel, where remember it says about Jesus, that the stone which the builders rejected, the stones become the head of the corner, and whosoever this stone falls on, it will crush unto power, but whoever trips and falls on it, they will break themselves on it, the same stone, the same ways of the Lord, the just will walk in them, the transgressors will fall in them, God's ways haven't changed, the same sun melts the wax and hardens the clay, the sun doesn't change, it doesn't alter, it is the substance down here that alters, are we of those who love the Lord, or those who have enmity with them, because as Paul writes to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 15, we are unto God, a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish, to the one we are the savor of death, unto death, to the other the savor of life, unto life, and who is sufficient for these things, for we are not as many which corrupt the word of

God, but as of sincerity, but as of God in the sight of God, speak of Christ, in other words, what he's saying is, twist and turn the word of God to suit this person's taste, or that person's taste, this is the truth of God, and we come to it and we either walk in the light of it, or we fall, because of the darkness in us, we come to it and it is either sweet to our taste, because it is of God, or it is bitter to us, not because it's not of God, but because it is, and we are enmity with God, that is the measure of where we stand, ourselves with the Lord, are the things of God sweet to our taste, as I've probably used this illustration before, and somebody once asked an old godly elder, how will I know if I'm, you know, being turned to the Lord, I think I am, but how will I have no bright lights, Damascus road experience, how will I know, and he said, well ask yourself how you feel about the people of

[36 : 31] God, the house of God, and the day of God, and the word of God, and how did you feel about these things before, did the Bible used to be boring, and how is it now to you, if it's something that you find interesting, you love to read, you love to know more, that your saviour in it, then God has rather changed there, what about God's day, it used to be all burning, all and all tedious, I just can't wait for money to come, all is it that in which you delight, call the sabbath a delight, because it is God's day, then there has been a change in your heart, if you love the Lord's people, that once seemed to be so stuffy and boring, oh they were all hypocrites anyway, if you now love the Lord's people, as your brothers and sisters in Christ, as fathers in God, and mothers in Israel, if there is a change there in your heart, then you know, God has worked upon it, if you love his word, if you love his people, if you love his day, and how do you feel about the Lord's house and the Lord himself, is it precious to you because it is the house of prayer, or is it just, oh gosh,

I'm going to go to church again, oh it's so boy, oh it's so empty, it's so dull, and from a purely outward sense, this point of view, people may think that, but if it be the place where we meet with the lover of our souls, then if you are in love in your soul with somebody, it doesn't matter where you are, you just love to be with them, you love to be where they are, you love to be with those who love them as well, search your heart and see, are the things of God sweet to your taste, or are they still tasteless, dull, or even bitter, the ways of the Lord are right, righteous, and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall, amen, it is the same stone which the builders rejected, it is the same good news of Christ, it is the same love of the Lord, and we may be as those who love the light, and come to it that we may bathe, as it were, in its glory and beauty, oh we may be as those who think, oh no, light change, that's too right, oh bring down the shutters, but the darkness, oh that's better, a bit of twilight, which are we, what does your heart say to you, are we those who desire, to wander away as

Gomer did from Hosea, as Israel did from God, is that where we ourselves are, then it may be time for us to look around all the so-called attractions of the world and its emptiness and sea, we are surrounded not by bright lights and enrichment and joy and fulfillment and happiness, we are surrounded by swine, and we are feeding them, whilst we ourselves go hungry, it is time for us, like the prodigal of old, to say, I will arise and go to my father, let's pray.