

Hosea 5:1-15

CC 9 & 10.30 7th July 2013

Heinrich Heine was a German poet of the 19th Century. Born a Jew he converted to Christianity though whether that was a pragmatic or real step was never sure. Certainly one of Heine's friends, anxious for his conversion, asked him shortly before his death if he were at peace with God. "Set your mind at rest," answered Heine "Dieu me pardonnera. C'est son metier" that is 'God will forgive me. It's his job.'

Just think about that for a moment because I believe it is a common idea and not just amongst people who would not see themselves as Christians.

The idea is that ultimately it doesn't matter how we live, our little foibles and wrongs doing don't really matter because God will forgive us and it will be alright at the end.

As I say it is not unusual for Christians to have this idea that God forgives and so I can live with sin in my life.

However, what we see in the prophecy of Hosea that we are looking at in this series of studies and in the rest of the Bible is the picture of a holy God who hates evil and who, to be true to himself as a just God, must punish evil.

Just to bring us up to date. Hosea was a prophet in the northern Kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II who ruled from about 782-753BC. He was asked by God to marry a woman, Gomer, who was in effect a whore, totally unfaithful to Hosea so that through his marriage God's people could see how they had been unfaithful to God. Here were God's people who may well have been fulfilling some of their religious duties to God but who were also clearly involved in worship of other gods. We see that by looking at 4:12-13, "A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God. They sacrifice on the mountaintops and burn offerings on the hills, under oak, poplar and terebinth, where the shade is pleasant." Now we may say but that is them it has nothing to do with us we don't set up little stone gods or wooden altars on hill tops. Indeed we don't but still there is that same spirit in us which leads us away from God and to the gods we worship are money, possessions, sex, work and so on.

I was listening to a radio programme last autumn and they were talking about supporting football teams and the idea of having a second team you support was mentioned and the point was made that this is impossible, especially if they are in the same league.

Even more with God, ultimately there can only be one God in our lives, Jesus made it clear "you cannot serve both God and money" (Matt 6:24).

There is in humanity a spirit which leads us away from God to finding our enjoyment, purpose, meaning, fulfilment in other things than him and that is sin.

For these people their “adultery”, as God puts it, with other deities was sin and for us our search for things other than God to bring us satisfaction or whatever is sin and God hates sin. The jealous God we thought about in Hosea 1 is also a holy God.

So what we see in this chapter of Hosea is the holy God giving his verdict on his people, explaining how this has come about, sounding a warning but with no expectation that his people would take the right steps to be reunited with God.

1. God’s verdict on his people v1-3

The verdict is very clear as we read v3, “I know all about Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution; Israel is corrupt.” Israel and Ephraim here mean the same thing and that is the people of the northern kingdom. God knows all about them and they are corrupt. They have turned from God and that is sin. Did God mean all of Israel? Well yes and no.

There may have been some who had not been involved in this worship on the hill tops but as we read in Romans 3:10, “There is no one righteous not even one”. Everyone is involved in sin.

Yes as we look at vs 1-2 those who should have lead the people to God, the priests and kings had done the opposite but the people had followed willingly and now were deep in sin.

Here is the bottom line expressed elsewhere in the strong image that “we all like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). We all have rejected God in favour of other things we are all sinful all in that sense corrupt. But how has this come about?

2. It is a matter of the heart v4-7

The basic problem is easy to see if we look at these verses. “A spirit of prostitution is in their heart” (Hosea 5:4). God through Hosea here is speaking of a mindset to which they have clearly become enslaved, a mind set which leads them away from God and so immerses them in their sin that as it says in v4 there is no way back. As one writer puts it, “Idolatry and its immoralities had become so ingrained and habitual that here was no likelihood of them amending their ways.”

Does that ring bells with you, sin that has become ingrained? It was a problem of a heart that was not given over to God, a heart where other things reigned and resulted in sinful actions. Jesus said the same “For from within, out of men’s hearts come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft...” (Mark 7:21). Our hearts instead of being full of God become filled with other things.

Why was this so? Well God gave the answer, “they do not acknowledge the Lord” (Hosea 5:4) or perhaps better they do not know God. Their actions show that in their heart they do not really know God. They show they don’t know God by acting in this way and thinking that it is OK that God will be pleased, that God will forgive. They do not know that God is holy and is not pleased when they or we go searching after other things to satisfy us rather than him.

Back in the 1970's there was an advert for R.White's lemonade, which had a man creeping downstairs in the middle of the night declaring "I'm a secret lemonade drinker" and then going on "I'm trying to give it up but it is one of those nights" as he raids the fridge for lemonade.

It is humorous but actually it hits a point of reality in terms of a desire for something that is hard to overcome, something ingrained and habitual from which it is hard to break free. It points us to the sin which enslaves. So, thinking of God's people at the time of Hosea, perhaps we could substitute worship of these false gods which they could not give up and, for ourselves, perhaps we could substitute our sin whatever it may be which we seem unable to put aside and which has become so much part of us that we no longer see it as sin or as serious because well God will forgive – c'est son metier!

He will forgive...won't he?

3. The warning of judgement v8-12

God's response to his people's corruption is to tell them to sound the trumpet of warning because, rather than forgive them, God's judgement lies ahead, "Ephraim will be laid waste on the day of reckoning" (Hosea 5:9), "I will pour out my wrath on them like a flood of water" (Hosea 5:10). Then if you look at v12 you see God describing himself as moth and rot, he was at work amongst his people like a kind of decay brought on them by their following the wrong way.

God is holy and sin, however it is manifested, must be punished.

God announces his judgement on sin both then and now.

We must not imagine that God is happy with us when we turn away from him and replace him with other things. We must not imagine he will just forgive as if it doesn't matter.

But then of course we don't need to be told that because we know that sin matters and that sin does damage.

Is God just to forgive and act as if these things had not happened? Our sense of justice cries out for the children damaged by abuse and so many other issues in our world today. Is God's sense of justice any less – of course not.

God is Holy and hates sin he is just and must punish the sinner. So through Hosea God announces the coming of his judgement and that judgement would come in the shape first of Assyria as the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed and then later in the shape of the Babylonian forces as the southern kingdom of Judah was taken into captivity. Similarly in the N.T. we see that there will come a day of judgement.

In the light of this what did God expect the people then to do and what does he expect you and I to do in the light of our sin?

4. The only way is God v13-15

What God expected of his people was that they would get it wrong! He expected them, faced with troubles, to try and find human help. They looked to Assyria for help, which is a bit ironic as they would be the ones to come and conquer Israel and severely weaken Judah. The great King of Assyria might have been powerful but he could not put right what was wrong with God's people. Instead through Assyria God would carry out his judgement and, like a lion, God would rip the nations apart and carry them off into exile. God's people then were a hopeless case. However, as we saw last week and will see next week with Dima this didn't mean the total destruction of God's people. God's punishment for them would not last forever and in his love he would restore some back into that land as he had promised. But now through Hosea the message is that the judgement of a holy God is awaiting his people.

So what does God expect of us as we read this ancient prophecy?

Well he expects us to hear the trumpet and wake up.

We had double glazing fitted last year and so I have been deprived, if that is how it should be described, of the wake up call of the dawn chorus over these last few months.

God is shouting at us through Hosea to take a good look at our hearts and see who or what rules there. If there are things there that are wrong, ingrained, habitual sin then we need to recognise that. If we do then there is hope as we see in the final verse of the chapter, "Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. And they will seek my face; in their misery they will earnestly seek me." (Hosea 5:15)

In that verse God gives us some very clear pointers. The first is that he is there waiting for us, who are like the prodigal son, to come to our senses. He is at home as it were waiting for us. The second is we need to admit our guilt. We need to see where we have gone wrong, where we are acting in rebellion against God and therefore in a sinful way and thirdly we need to seek God's face, as Hosea puts it in misery and earnestly, that is we need to come in sorrowful repentance to God and ask his forgiveness.

Then there is forgiveness. Then he will pardon not because we deserve it but because Jesus in his death on the cross has taken the punishment we deserve for our sin.

As the old song has it, "There's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin. There's a door that is open and you may go in. At Calvary's cross is where you begin when you come as a sinner to Jesus."

These words of God through Hosea show us that God is a Holy God, totally and implacably opposed to sin. We must not think that it does not matter how we live our lives. It does.

But even though we do sin and will sin we can find forgiveness through the death of Jesus. However, we must act to ensure that sin does not become ingrained and habitual in us taking our heart away from God.

The Psalmist in Psalm 95 said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts "(Ps 95:7-8). May that be so for us. Hearing God's voice and allowing his Spirit to highlight our need, may we recognise our guilt, may we seek God's face and come to him with sorrowful repentance, knowing that if we do then he will restore us as his children holy and precious to him.