

HOSEA 10:1-15

(Reading: Luke 23:26-43)

The People Are Taught The Lesson

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ...

This chapter can seem a bit like a smorgasbord.

You know, one of those meals you have in that bistro-type restaurant where you can wander around a variety of different dishes choosing whichever one grabs your fancy.

For what we find in these verses is a number of different subjects.

As we read through it didn't we notice that?

I mean, there was reference to earlier history.

And then there was some more recent history too.

Didn't we also find some vivid metaphors here?

And there are several definitely foreboding prophecies.

It's got some practical aspects while giving also deeper insight into what's behind this situation.

Right throughout this chapter there is one thing that keeps coming up, however.

Because right through it we couldn't get away from the theme of warning, could we?

Now, while a warning may be scary, it is only put that way so that it can help us.

It is not there to stun us, and so throw us.

Rather, it's here to guide us in the right way.

This is very much how we will deal with the text this afternoon.

You see, there are five clear lessons to be learned as the prophet concludes his case against Israel.

Because that's what Hosea has been describing in this book since chapter 4.

As we see in a court of law, the charges have been laid, the evidence presented, the judgment made, and the sentence given out.

And now Hosea draws out the lessons from this whole sordid affair.

Because there are lessons in it.

Lessons for the hearer or reader in Hosea's time, and for us reading and hearing it now.

Yes – for us now!

As the apostle Paul said in 1st Corinthians 10 verse 6, “these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they [the Israelites] did.”

And Paul goes on in verse 12 there, “So, if you think are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall!

“No temptation has seized you except what is common to man.”

While the fulfilment of the ages has come to us in Jesus Christ, that doesn’t make us somehow resistant to sin.

We need to keep looking to the Lord right throughout all our days upon this earth.

And it’s exactly through His Word that His Spirit enables us to be able to keep looking to Him.

So let’s learn this again this afternoon, congregation.

And let’s learn first of all, **DON’T YOU EVER DESPISE GOD.**

The Lord has been very good for Israel.

Not only does He give her a place of her own, He also gave her everything she needed in that place.

The imagery shown in the opening line of “a spreading vine” is a fertile one.

Some translations use the word “luxuriant” instead of “spreading”.

Whichever word is used, though, the meaning is clear.

Israel had it all – **from the Lord!**

Jesus even highlights Himself as this source with the immortal words in John 15 verse 1, “I am the true vine.”

For it was He, the covenant God, who had planted Israel in such a pleasant place, the land flowing with milk and honey.

Further, it was the Lord who continued blessing His people this way, even though they turned to another way, the way of worshipping the Canaanite gods.

In fact, Israel went right against the way of the Lord.

Because the Law of Moses spells out that they were not to go this pagan way.

As Deuteronomy 16 verse 22 declares, “do not erect a sacred stone, for these the LORD your God hates.”

Verse 2 confirms where this is coming from in Israel.

It says this is because “their heart is deceitful.”

They haven’t given the Lord their unwavering loyalty and faithfulness.

They’re playing games with God.

While they’re nominally dedicated to the Lord as their God yet what they really love is the worship of the Canaanites.

They can’t wait to get into those pagan practices!

So they bite the hand that feeds them.

And, as we know, such a continual reaction from an animal, especially after many attempts at disciplining it, will result in the most severe punishment.

It may even have to be put down!

For verse 2 to declare, “they must bear their guilt,” means there will be no more mercy.

Then the LORD demolishing their altars and destroying their sacred stones is wiping the floor with them most of all!

Following through from the opening word picture, this means the vine’s branches will be cut down.

The fruit being produced is of the most repulsive kind to the farmer!

But let’s also apply this today.

Could it be that the more God does for us the more structures we set up and the more we merge with our environment?

For how much hasn’t the church become so much like the world?

It’s involved in all the things the world does.

And, yet, at heart hasn’t God’s Word got left right out?

Don’t we worship at the altars of fashion and fame?

Hasn’t the cult of celebrity touched us too?

Congregation, what would the Lord find if at any time He popped in on us?

What would we be reading or watching?

Friend, don’t be caught scorning God.

This is the first lesson.

The second lesson warns us: **DON’T YOU TRY TO DISPLACE GOD.**

Here we consider the verses 3 till 6.

And what we note first of all here is the complete disrespect for the king.

The verses 3 and 4 put him in quite a negative light.

Now, we can see why because we have seen how bad those kings were.

But notice how verse 3 begins this section on their leaders.

It actually has the people saying, “We have no king because we did not revere the LORD.”

Certainly we could affirm the truth of this because the king they did have was not the Davidic king.

Instead, all they got was a series of usurpers who mostly murdered their way to the throne.

So there wasn’t a drop of royal blood in any of them – much as they spilled enough of other people’s blood to pretend they were royalty!

And then we see how those kings reign because there is no fear of God in them.

Because that means there’s no biblical standards here.

As verse 4 goes on to tell us.

For exactly where justice should be – in the king – there’s only a terrible injustice!

As verse 4 says of them, “They make promises, take false oaths; and make agreements; therefore lawsuits spring up like poisonous weeds in a ploughed field.”

Since there is no respect for God every man is out for himself!

And if everyone is only looking out for themselves then any sense of working for the common good becomes thrown out the window!

No wonder that prophets like Amos pleaded for the rights of the powerless in society – the widows and the orphans.

Like weeds can choke out the good wheat if given enough opportunity, so these politicians choke the true values out of society.

You need look no further than the general quality of representatives we have today to see this in practice.

Whether they are beholden to the party line or sectional interests or simply in some powerful man’s pocket, the end result is only what we see increasingly happening.

Because the ordinary man doesn’t get a look in.

And any positive initiative becomes crushed by the huge roll of red tape and added taxation.

And what is it they believe in?

Thankfully a few are professing Christians, but look at how they are despised for being such!

The leaders then in Israel aren’t on top of the most respected list.

So what is?

You see, this will really bring out the second lesson of our text.

For Israel was displacing God with this very thing.

This was the one they loved and so much looked up to!

This was the ‘golden calf’!

Congregation, when Hosea again substitutes the name ‘Bethel’, which means ‘House of God’, with the name ‘Beth Aven’ which means ‘house of wickedness’, it’s clear who he’s speaking of.

The very object Jeroboam I had instituted as the alternative object of worship is what was displacing God in the people’s hearts and lives.

That was what they worshipped with so much zealousness.

But oh how they will mourn over it now!

And how the idolatrous priests will be so much lost without their precious god!

The term ‘idolatrous priests’ puts the right perspective on this idolatry.

For it is a foreign word used in the Hebrew to emphasise the alien nature of this idolatry.

How ironic Hosea’s language is as he prophesies of what’s about to happen!

The golden calf was their pride and joy.

And while things were going well for them it was so full of splendour for them.
But there's nothing like deportation to take all that glory away!

In fact, the golden calf will just become another foreign god in the collection of the Assyrian king.

Yet that is exactly where it belongs.

For all that they had thought so much of it, there wasn't actually anything there that helped them.

It was as useless as all those other pagan gods!

This is all a little reminiscent of Psalm 115.

There we read in the verses 4 till 8, "But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

"They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but they cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats.

"Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them."

Congregation, the lesson is clear: **DON'T YOU TRY TO DISPLACE GOD.**

But then the third lesson turns to the positive.

For in regards to the verses 7 till 10 we see, **DO BE SURE YOU'RE AFRAID OF GOD.**

At first this might not seem to be so positive.

Isn't it actually using fear tactics to somehow force them back?

In one way we cannot deny this.

The verses 7 till 10 have the strong theme of a coming fierce judgment.

But, then, to not declare this would only be preaching half a gospel.

Just like today you will rarely hear a 'hell-fire and damnation' sermon in a church.

But don't Christians miss something by this not been proclaimed?

I mean, it is in the Bible.

In fact, it's quite a bit of the Bible.

Our Lord Jesus taught about it quite definitely and in some detail.

Congregation, this has to be said because God is an awesome God.

And I don't mean "awesome" the way its been dumbed down in popular language today.

This God is not someone cool.

And He's certainly not someone who only wants us to have encouraging and affirming up-beat messages.

The Lord is the One we have to tremble before.

When we truly see Him as He is we are totally exposed for what we are – sinners in the most desperate need because we're facing judgment.

And the only way out of that damnation is to be right with God!
God, the almighty and all-holy One!

The Lord is the One who stripped away any kind of goodness we think we've got in ourselves.

There's not a shred of anything worthwhile in us.
The only righteousness is in Him!

The pagan religions in Hosea's time are not much different than what passes for much of religion today.

It is all about doing what feels good for you right now and right here!

To this the Lord answers through complete humiliation and annihilation.

For verse 7 pictures Samaria and its king as just a twig floating on the water.
That means they're nothing in the big scheme of things.

And all those monumental edifices they had set up to themselves are completely decimated.

All that had so much filled up their lives will be covered over by thorns and thistles.

That certainly puts your life in perspective, doesn't it?

Everything that was your life is suddenly and completely taken away!
Wouldn't you be afraid of God then?

The cry that goes out in verse 8, from those experiencing the catastrophe, is the cry the Lord quotes in Luke 23.

There He puts it in the lips of those Jews then who had ignored God's constant warnings, also in the gospel He has been declaring to them.

And we find these words again in Revelation 6.

There it's clearly about the final judgment.

As the verses 15 till 17 say there, "Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains.

"They called to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!

"'For the day their wrath has come, and who can stand?'"

Friend, DO BE SURE YOU'RE AFRAID OF GOD.

Because you have yet that opportunity to have the right fear of God.

The fear of God that bows in humbleness before Him.

Sadly that was not the fear of Israel Hosea prophecies of in verse 8.

For that is the fear which is very, very scary.

Because then it is too late.

The way verse 10 ends tells of this fear.

For while many have debated what “their double sin” could mean, it is most likely the confirmation of the path they have taken against the covenant God.

Simply mentioning that terrible name of Gibeah it’s clear nothing has changed in them.

They are going to get what’s coming to them!

And this brings us to the next lesson.

For despite the plainly wrong choice Israel has made the prophet yet lays before his readers the right way.

In the words of the fourth lesson, DO HUMBLE YOURSELF UNDER GOD.

This is what we are taught in the verses 11 and 12.

And it’s put in a deeply sympathetic way.

“Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh,” is the encouraging way it begins. And Ephraim had been that way.

She was once like a well-trained heifer always ready to thresh grain.

That was easy work with a lot of freedom to eat and play.

Deuteronomy 25 verse 4 speaks of not muzzling an ox while it is treading out the grain.

And Jeremiah 50 verse 11 describes the joy a heifer has as shown by its frolicking while threshing the grain.

It was such an animal that worked well with heavier jobs like pulling wagons and ploughs.

So as the animal matured and developed the work became more demanding and more involved.

That was what the Lord looked to from His people.

But instead the yoke He had to use on them was the harsh and heavy yoke of slavery and not the fitted one of faithful service.

And yet the harvest is still in the Lord’s mind.

Verse 12 brings out the sowing and reaping.

A sowing and reaping of what is much more important than physical grain.

For “it is time to seek the LORD” Hosea declares.

And the way this will come about is by the sowing of righteousness and then “the fruit of unfailing love” will be produced.

The breaking up of unploughed ground tells us that this wouldn’t be the easiest work.

For a long time this soil has been covered by thorns and thistles and so had developed a hard crust.

But seeking the Lord will break through that.

Now, this might seem a bit out of place knowing how bad and unredeemable Israel was.

But, remember, this is a lesson.

And it is also, like much of Hosea, also looking forward to a future time, when the Lord would indeed have such a harvest.

And then it would be clear it was a true turning to the Lord because of what is in His Word in passages such as this.

Then righteousness would be showered upon God's people.

Because then they would be doing the very things Israel then had failed to do.

And while this might only be a glimmer now, in the last four chapters of Hosea this light will strongly shine!

But back to the lesson!

And the fifth lesson chapter 10 brings to us is this: **DON'T THINK YOU CAN FIGHT GOD.**

The last three verses of this chapter brings out clearly the end result for those going against God.

"You reap what you sow," the saying goes and it's devastatingly shown here.

You see, Israel's true purpose and service in this land was to worship and serve the Lord their God.

They had been called, led, and blessed to do only that!

But what do we see them doing?

And here a farming analogy is used again.

For they have planted alright, and they have reaped alright, and they have eaten alright, but what?

Ah, it's the seed of wickedness, and the harvest of evil, and the fruit of deception.

Because they had sown to the flesh in breaking God's covenant.

They turned to the words of the false religions and not to the God of truth and dependability.

And they reaped what they sowed.

For what could come out of this except the breakdown of relationships and the corrupting of all values?

This is further brought out with how Israel had depended on its own strength.

But those who live by the sword also die by the sword!

Now the sound of battle would be what is heard rising against them!

The name Shalman here is most likely a shortened version of Shalmaneser, the king of Assyria.

There were two with that name in their recent history.

And both were well known for their highly destructive military campaigns in this area.

Obviously Beth Arbel is the sight of one of these horrific slaughters.

These names say it all!

And don't the names Hitler and Auschwitz do something similar to us?

There he murdered the most helpless so barbarically.

There mothers too were terribly tortured and massacred and their children horrifically murdered!

This is harsh language.

Language like that of Psalm 137 verse 9.

But like that psalm it is the language of judgment.

You see, it's this coming day which will spell the end forever of the Israelite throne.

Then they will realise the lesson.

And yet then they'll learn that they didn't learn the lesson!

Dear friend, learn these lessons today.

Turn to the Lord while it is still today.

Worship and serve according to His Word.

Because this Word is all about the Living Word, Jesus Christ.

He is the rightful King who has come and claimed His own, though His birth, suffering, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension.

Right now He is in heaven itself directing all things according to His Will.

Please, meet Him now as your Saviour – not later as the Judge.

Seek the Lord and He will shower righteousness upon you.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's pray...

O Just Judge & yet most loving Saviour, we humble ourselves before You now.

By Your Spirit please guide us to be faithful servants, not as Israel of old, but as truly the Israel of the new.

So work in us and through us that more and more the glory and the honour will be Yours – and Yours alone.

In Your Name we pray, the name of our only Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ,
Amen.