

The Road to Recovery

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Date: 12 March 2023

Preacher: Dr. Irwin Ince

[0 : 00] We have a great presentation and the welcome. I want to turn our attention to God's Word, found in the 14th chapter of the book of the prophet Hosea, verses 1 to 9, the chapter in its entirety.

Hosea chapter 14, verses 1 through 9. I want to speak to you this morning on this subject, the road to recovery. The road to recovery.

Hear God's Word. Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you've stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord.

Say to him, take away all iniquity, accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us.

We will not ride on horses, and we will say no more, our God, to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy. I will heal their apostasy.

[1 : 07] I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel. He shall blossom like the lily. He shall take root like the trees of Lebanon.

His shoots shall spread out. His beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow. They shall flourish like the grain.

They shall blossom like the vine. Their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you.

I am like an evergreen cypress. From me comes your fruit. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things. Whoever is discerning, let him know them.

For the ways of the Lord are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them. This is the word of the Lord. Would you pray with me?

[2 : 09] We thank you again and again and again, Lord, for your word. That is not dead, but it is alive and active and sharp. God, piercing to the division of soul and spirit of joints and marrow, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

And we are all in this place, naked and exposed to your eyes, O God. The one to whom we all give account. And I praise you because that's good news.

That means you know exactly what we stand in need of. So would you be pleased to take my efforts in your word? Lord, weak and unworthy though they may be, and use them to bless your people.

Meet us where we are and give us what we need. Faith, assurance, hope, peace, joy, correction, conviction, whatever it may be.

That we will be people who live more and more for the glory, fame, and praise of Jesus Christ. And we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen and amen. And you may take your seats.

[3 : 16] Well, I am, I confess to you, I am a bit of a technology junkie. Every year, in one technology in particular, at least one company, every year I find myself drawn to watch the Apple keynote that happens in the fall.

And I have not yet reached the level of being invited to actually see it in person. But, you know, I love Apple products and seeing all the features on display.

You know, I've got them on my, got it on my wrist. It's in my pocket. It's on the pulpit. It's on my desk at home. You know, they're the best thing since sliced bread.

They have mastered what all companies, good companies and advertisers master. The organized art of creating dissatisfaction.

The phone I got is not good enough. Because there's a new one with new features coming out that I got to have. And I look, ooh, it looks nice. I need that feature. And then there's a voice in my head.

[4 : 29] It might be the Holy Spirit that says, listen, you can't justify spending that money right now. Because the one you got is just fine. And I feel kind of like, you know, Abraham bargaining with the Lord on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah and his nephew Lot.

You know, Lord, if there's just 50, Lord, what about just \$500? You know, my motors are not as pure as Abraham, but. I say this in a tongue-in-cheek sort of way I'm about to start calling Apple the evil empire.

Because they are so good. They're so good at encouraging my consumerism and idolatry. They're so good at making addicts.

But you know, the first step on the road to recovery and addiction is admitting that you've got a problem. Yeah. It's not to make light of the reality of addiction.

But you see, there's an addiction that every human being shares. And it is an addiction to sin. It is an addiction that leads us to search and strain and strive for ultimate pleasure in everything but God.

[5 : 46] If you were to read the 13th chapter of Hosea, you would see how Israel's addiction to her sin exploded in an idolatry that led to her destruction.

And I'm grateful that Hosea's message does not end with the message of doom and gloom and destruction and devastation. Hosea ends his message by showing them and showing us the road to recovery from the addiction to sin.

Make no mistake about it. God reaches way down on the inside to heal and renew addicts. The question is, do we see our addiction?

Do we see it? This last chapter here of Hosea has a sandwich structure to it. You've got these two slices of bread. There's a call in the beginning of the chapter in verses 1 to 3 and a call at the end of the chapter in verse number 9.

And the meat in the middle is the promise of God in verses 4 through 8. We've got a call first to confession and repentance in verses 1 to 3.

[7 : 00] A promise of healing and restoration in verses 4 to 8. And a call to wisdom and discernment in verse number 9. And my prayer for us this morning is that we would both hear and respond to God's call and to his promise.

I have three points for you this morning. Three R's. The first is repentance. The second is restoration. The promise of restoration.

And the third word is recognize. The call to recognize the truth. Hosea says in verse number 1, Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled by your iniquity.

This is a call to repentance. He says, y'all, you need to understand, you need to recognize that you've stumbled. Why have you stumbled, Israel?

It says because of your iniquity. Iniquity is a word that is repeated in Hosea again and again and again. The city of Bethel, which means house of God.

[8 : 08] Hosea renames in his book Beth-Aven, which is translated house of iniquity. He said to them back in chapter 5 and verse number 5, The pride of Israel testifies to his face.

Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity. And at the end of chapter 6 and the beginning of chapter 7, the Lord says through the prophet, When I restore the fortunes of my people, when I heal Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim will be exposed and the wickedness of Samaria, for they practice falsehood.

While the thief breaks in, gangs attack in the streets. Before restoration would come, the Lord says he would expose and shine a light on the ugliness of their iniquity.

They wouldn't be able to find healing until they were confronted with how desperately sick they were. And Hosea has been specific about their sin. He has not been generic at all.

He said they practice falsehood, that they are thieves, that they love gang violence, that they have no conscience, that they rejoice over evil, that they rejoice over lying, that they commit adultery, that they are alcoholics, that they are mockers, that they are treacherous, that they are out of control, that they are ignorant, that they refuse to repent, that they lack sense, that they are traitors, and they are full of idolatry.

[9 : 33] And that's all chapter 7. Over the course of his ministry, Hosea has been calling the people to repent, to recognize their sin, and to turn to the Lord.

Come, he said in chapter 6 and verse 1, let us return to the Lord, for he has tore us, that he might heal us. He has struck us down, and he will bind us up.

But the people's response throughout has been, no, we refuse to repent. So his last word is to issue and reissue the call, to expose to them the fact that they've stumbled.

And here in verse 1 of chapter 14, he calls the people to a complete repentance, not giving God lip service. And he does it a little differently than the way he does it in other parts of the book.

I love how he does it. What he does is he leads the people in a corporate confession of sin and repentance. He says to them in verse number 2, take with you words.

[10:45] Take with you words. That is, in your return to your God, take these words with you. This is what you are to say to the Lord. And here's my translation of verse number 2.

Here's, Hosea says, here's what you are to say to the Lord. Say to him, you take away every iniquity and receive what is good. So we vow our lips as bulls. Assyria will not save us. We will not ride on horses. And we will not say again, our God, to the work of our hands. With you, the orphan finds mercy.

He dictates to them what they are to say. He puts the words of confession in their mouths. This is what you are to say. But wait, wait, wait a minute, pastor. Isn't that cheating a bit? Like, ah, doesn't their confession have to be from the heart?

Don't they have to come up with their kind of own words for it to be genuine? Well, of course, right? Repentance has to be from the heart. And it cannot be just mere words that we say.

[11:46] But notice this with me. This is a call to corporate confession. This is a call for them to be a confessing people.

I may privately and ought to privately and individually confess my sins to the Lord, but the Lord is interested in creating a community of confessors.

Hosea has shown them that they have to become a people, that he has shown them that they have become a people who are defined by their idolatry and their adultery.

He's now calling them to become a people who are defined by confession and repentance. And that's still the call. That's still the call. What Jesus Christ creates in his church are communities that are defined by confession and repentance.

So you will normally find plural pronouns in the Bible when it comes to this. In this confession, Hosea tells Israel to say, we vow our lips.

[12:52] Assyria will not save us. We will not ride on horses. We will not say to our God, we will not say our God to the work of our hands.

And then centuries later, here comes the apostle John on the scene saying to the church in 1 John chapter 1 verses 8 and 9, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every unrighteousness. The one who cleanses, the one who forgives is singular.

That's the Lord. Those who confess and receive forgiveness are plural, the people of God. What did Israel put their stock in?

They put their stock in the fact that they'd been chosen by God. They were the elect. They operated with a pride and an arrogance in their election instead of a humility.

[13:59] And Christians, we can do the same thing. Jesus says to his disciples in John 15 and 16, you didn't choose me, but I chose you. Like if we really realized how jacked up we are, being chosen by God in Christ should result in a deep, deep sense of humility and gratitude that overflows into an ongoing life of confession and repentance willingly.

That's why you'll find very often in the church that you'll have corporate confession of sin. And when it's done, the desire is that they're not simply words that we might repeat to get on with our service, but the Spirit of God in our prayer that the Spirit of God through the proclamation of the Word of God has shown a light and exposed our sin and idolatry of our hearts and we come to God corporately knowing that he hears and he loves to forgive.

That's precisely the content of Hosea's prayer. He begins with confessing that the Lord is forgiving. You take away all iniquity.

Let the Lord know that you know that he accepts what is good. That is, he accepts confession from the heart. So let him know that we offer, we vow, we sacrifice, the sacrifice of our lips as if they're bulls and if so doing, we turn away from seeking salvation and security in anyone else but you say, Assyria will not save us.

This is evidence, right, by they're not no longer sending envoys out to Assyria to pay them tribute, to make treaties and literally become the subjects of Assyria.

[15:55] They're saying, when we reject our idolatry, we will not call the work of our hands our God. We will not give divine status to anything that has been created.

And he ends the prayer with words that imply we will not even boast in our status as the people of God. We are orphans and not worthy to be called children but we rejoice that in you, Lord, the orphan finds compassion.

We don't see an amen at the end of Hosea's prayer of confession in verse number three but we might be tempted to say amen and go home rejoicing but not yet because it gets even better. There's a word of assurance that comes after this confession. There is a word of promise that follows and it comes directly from God himself.

There is a promise of our second word, our restoration that comes from God himself. There's a shift in who's speaking from verse three to verse number four.

[17 : 13] Verse number four is the Lord who says, I will heal their apostasy. I'm going to heal their backsliding. I'm going to heal their waywardness. I'm going to heal their rebelliousness.

Here's the meat of the chapter, God's promise of restoration. The Lord stated the problem back in Hosea chapter five in verse 13. He stated the problem when he said this, when Ephraim sees his sickness and Judah his wounds, Ephraim goes to Assyria and he appeals to the great king, but he is not able to heal you, nor is he able to cure you of your wound.

They thought they could find healing in Assyria. Hosea directs them to confess, Assyria will not save us, and the Lord responds and says, I know, but I can.

I'm the Lord, your healer. I will heal you. You're sick. You have a sickness that nobody can heal but me. That's part of what makes the promise so phenomenal and glorious.

There's a call to return, but listen, they cannot return unless the Lord acts. The Lord says, I will love them freely for my anger has turned away from them.

[18 : 36] Listen, you know, I was born in 68, so I'm on the tail end of this, right? But you know, like, you know, real free love, y'all, ain't got nothing to do with the hippie movement of the 60s and 70s.

Real free love is God's gracious love that he freely lavishes on undeserving sick people like you and me.

This book is being wrapped up with a reminder of God's promise that he made back in chapter 2 and verse 14 back when Hosea and his marriage to his wife Gomer was still front and center in the book serving as a metaphor for God's relationship with Israel and the Lord promises back in chapter 2 verse 14, he says, I myself am going to allure her.

I will lead her in the wilderness and I will speak to her heart. You understand that if you have come to God through faith in Jesus Christ it's because that promise has been applied to you.

He has wooed you. He has allured you. He has spoken to your heart. He has poured out the lavishness of his free love upon you to bind you to himself.

[20 : 08] This love has got to be free because we can't earn it. It's got to be free because there's nothing in me that makes me deserving of it.

Listen, if we do not grasp our sickness, the Lord talking about loving people freely won't make any sense. that is the problem that the Lord Jesus is dealing with in places like the Gospel of Matthew chapter 9.

He calls Levi the tax collector, a man of ill repute to follow him and Levi becomes a disciple and has Jesus over to his house where other people whose reputations are just as bad as Levi's were invited and Jesus is chilling with them.

He's reclining at tables sharing a meal together and the Pharisees who do not understand God's free love say to Jesus' disciples, why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?

And Jesus hears their complaint and he says in verses 12 and 13 of Matthew 9, those who are well have no need of a physician but those who are sick go and learn what this means.

[21 : 30] I desire mercy and not sacrifice for I came not to call the righteous but sinners. He responds to them by quoting from Hosea 6.6 I desire mercy and not sacrifice.

I'm not here Jesus said to call the righteous. I'm here to call sinners to repentance and of course the Pharisee had missed the words of Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 where the psalmist says no one does good not even one.

They had missed their own sickness. Jesus Jesus comes and confirms the promise of restoration and healing and love that we find in Hosea chapter 14 and we ought not miss the fact that listen this promise is nothing short of the promise of the fullness of the kingdom of God.

What do I mean? What does the Lord mean when he says in verses 5 to 7 of our passage he says I will be like the dew to Israel he shall blossom like the lily he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon

his shoots shall spread out his beauty shall be like the olive and his fragrance like Lebanon they shall return and dwell beneath my shadow they shall flourish like the grain they shall blossom like the vine their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon this is language in a picture of abundant provision abundant joy and feasting and glory and protection in Israel without dew the agricultural season would be cut short and even though the dew burns away at the heat of the sun the daily morning mist over the ground was necessary for their agriculture throughout most of the year and this promise is a picture of beauty and abundance and protection the sickly rebellious people will be healed and they'll blossom like the lily they'll be smelling good they won't need no perfume or no cologne they're gonna dwell under his shadow

God promises that I will make my people beautiful I'm gonna provide I'm gonna protect this is the outworking this restoration is the outworking of his free love towards his people it is the kind of love y'all that beautifies from the inside out it's the kind of love that that Jesus Christ has for his church it's that same love the apostle Paul talks about in Ephesians chapter 5 when he says in verses 25 to 27 husbands love your wives the way Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her that he might sanctify her having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word so that he might present to himself a church in splendor without spot or wrinkle or blemish she might be holy [25 : 09] Hosea is saying that's what it looks like in the kingdom of God that God is at work inside and among his people beautifying them because he's committed to presenting notice presenting his people to himself in splendor do you understand that if you are in Jesus Christ and a part of his people you can do nothing to stop the beautification process because it ain't dependent on you it is it is happening by the declaration and the promise of God he's more committed to it than we are do you understand how much praise and joy should overflow from his people when we see our sickness and know that God is not thrown off but he he takes us and changes us from the inside out and he commits to making us more and more beautiful because he's going to present to himself a church in splendor

Hosea is saying this is what it looks like in the kingdom of God the promise of healing and restoration is a promise to clean us up to bind us to himself forever Hosea in chapter 14 the Lord is using the richest of agricultural terminology and metaphors to describe it and then he wraps up this promise with one more word of assurance in verse number 8 he says to them oh Ephraim oh Ephraim what have I to do with idols it is I who answer and look after you I'm like an evergreen cypress from me comes your fruit this is a rhetorical question it's a rhetorical question he's saying listen Israel look back over your whole history go back to your father Abraham and ask this question what have I ever had to do with idols and the answer is nothing what have I ever had to do with idols nothing did you understand your fruit your provision has always come from me anything you've had has come from me it did and it still does apostle Paul does a similar thing and I love how he does it to the

Corinthians in first Corinthians chapter 4 and verse 7 where he asks them similar rhetorical questions he says to them what do you have that you did not receive if then you received it why do you act like you didn't receive it what do you have that you did not get from the hand of God and the answer is nothing he says so why are you acting like you got it from your own hands why are you acting like it was your own efforts that got you this blessing whatever it is what this should have done for Israel and what it should do for us is keep us assured of the reality of God's promise anytime we have any fruit that is worthy of the kingdom we have to say hallelujah God because that fruit came from you see remember or note note the context here this promise is being made in the middle of a desperate and dire situation for the nation their nation is going to be overrun by the Assyrians their once prosperous economy is in shambles everything is falling apart people are going to die in warfare God said as much in verse 16 of chapter 13 when he said Samaria shall bear her guilt because she's rebelled against her God they shall fall by the sword their little ones shall be dashed in pieces and their pregnant women ripped open and here comes this promise of love and do and beauty and flourishing and protection and abundance while everything around them is saying the exact opposite how do you believe the promise when life around you says it's not the case how do you hold on to the promise of God's restoration and renewal and beautification when everything around you is ugly and destructive listen the Lord is saying look I never had anything to do with idols

I still have nothing to do with idols he said to his people then you let your material prosperity drive you into false worship but the promise is sure the promise is sure so do not let the loss of prosperity

he said drive you into idolatry you let your prosperity drive you into idolatry don't let the loss of your prosperity drive you into idolatry understand he's saying understand my promise to love those who have repented and turned to me that this promise is so sure that it does not matter what the circumstances are first slice of bread in this road to recovery sandwich was a call to repentance the meat in the middle is God's assurance and promise of restoration for those who repent and the final slice of bread from Hosea is a call to recognize the truth of what he's saying in verse number nine he says who is wise let him understand these things whoever is discerning let him know them for the ways of the Lord are right and the righteous live by them but the rebellious stumble by them he wraps up the entire book with a proverb with a wisdom saying if you will in verse 13 of chapter 13 [32 : 03] Hosea said Ephraim was an unwise son and why was Ephraim an unwise son because he didn't recognize his opportunity to repent and be born into a new life with God they were saying no thanks we're not interested in repentance and restoration on God's terms and God and Hosea's last call or God's last call through Hosea is don't be no fool don't be unwise children I'm calling for you all to have wisdom and discernment in response to the things that I've written and when he says let the wise understand these things let the discerning know them that these things is the entirety of Hosea's message everything from his jacked up marriage to Gomer all the pain that there was in dealing with an unfaithful wife addicted to a life of prostitution how he redeemed her when and paid money to a pimp to buy his own wife back and instead of treating her like a worthless slave recommitted himself to her

Hosea's call is letting us know that you need the wisdom and the discernment that comes from God in order to make the connection that it's about you and not about them it's a picture of our rebellion and the lengths to which God has gone to buy us back to redeem us we need the wisdom that comes from God to see clearly that this is a message about the cross of Jesus Christ that this is a message about the one who was hung high and stretched wide who was pierced in his hands and his feet who had a crown of thorns on his head for you and for me let the wise understand Hosea says this is about do you understand that this is about

God's dissatisfaction to leave you in your rebellion his dissatisfaction to leave you and me in our rebellious state it's about the lengths to which he'd go the price that he's willing to pay the death of the son of God so that you and I could receive the promise of beauty instead of ashes the oil of joy instead of mourning and sorrow and I love this last word recognize that the ways of the Lord are right that is the ways of the Lord are straight they are smooth the righteous walk by them live by them the rebellious stumble by them who are the righteous the righteous are those who have responded to the call to repent the rebellious are those who reject the call to confess your sin and repent the rebellious are those who think that Jesus wasn't talking about them when he said I came to call sinners to repentance the rebellious are those who think Jesus was talking about other people those who want to remain in their addiction to sin Hosea started the chapter by saying to Israel your iniquity has caused you to stumble and he ends the chapter by saying if you want to continue to rebel and refuse to repent then you'll keep on stumbling the implication of verse number 9 is that this confession and repentance y'all is not just about making a one time decision to follow Jesus I'm good because I confessed my sin and I repented and put my faith and trust in Jesus as Savior and Lord yes and amen but this call is not about getting your ticket punched to heaven it is about a life and a lifestyle of confession and repentance a life and lifestyle of corporate confession and repentance the ways of the Lord are right they are straight and the righteous do what they live by them they live by them day in and day out daily living by the ways of the Lord a daily following him in his ways and can I tell you you can't do that unless you're willing to be a confessing and repenting people because you know the ways of the Lord are right you know your ways ain't and he always shines a light on that so that we might live into the joy of the forgiveness that comes through our repentance Hosea ends his message with a snapshot picture of two kinds of people he has delivered to them the word of the Lord his message has been hard to hear and at several points it's been hard to understand but he's had a lot to say about the ways of the Lord in terms of what he's condemned in the lifestyles of the people he's shown them the perils of their prosperity condemning their consumerism and their materialism that dominated their minds their adultery and prostitution that they're satisfied to keep practicing the injustice and the lack of their care for the poor their clamoring for political position and power by deceit and treachery their self indulgent desire to pursue the good life by any means necessary

[38 : 11] Hosea has said to them that judgment is coming because of all of that he said you all embrace what the Lord hates and refuse to do what the Lord loves which is to repent so that you can do justice and love mercy and walk humbly with your God just like Jesus does when he speaks in parables and he says he who has an ear to hear let him hear Hosea is asking you and I to do the same thing have the wisdom that comes from God to hear and understand these words because what the word does the same word causes some to respond with confession repentance and submission to the Lord receiving restoration reconciliation and life in his ways while it causes others to keep on stumbling tripped up because they're angered and offended over the ways of the Lord they want their ways to be the Lord's ways instead of the other way around one commentator asks a simple question how do you read the words of this book are they life to you or death are these words to you a promise of healing and restoration that you joyfully embrace because you recognize that they're true and so as your sin is exposed you respond to your stumbling with confession and repentance are these words to you simply that words on a page that have no application to you and don't make any diagnosis about you because you don't think you got a problem listen just like I said ain't none of us in here who can say

I am not an addict we all have a through line of a similar similar problem and that is sin but God heals renews restores reconciles addicts to himself and to one another for the glory and praise of his name and so may we be may we be pleased to always know that the ways of the Lord is right and to always with joy be willing to have him shine the light into the recesses of our heart exposing to the way to us the ways in which we are not following after him that we might confess and repent and receive the joy of his forgiveness so walking in the new life that he promised to give all of his people to the glory and praise of his name amen let's pray thank you
Lord that you are the Lord our healer that you're a God who is dissatisfied to leave people in their rebellious situation we pray Lord that your spirit would continue to work in the hearts and minds of your people making us a people whose lives are marked by confession and repentance knowing that we have a God who loves to forgive and cleanse and move us out with joy as witnesses to your love do this for us and for your own glory in Jesus name amen