

Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Heavenly Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We will be looking at the Old Testament lesson from Hosea this morning and I will read it as we go.

As I look out on you, I see each of you as blameless. I suppose you could say it's in my job description: the One True and Good Shepherd sees you that way, therefore as His servant I do too. You see, you who have been through the waters of baptism are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Sin and death have no hold on you.

So you may be thinking: then why do I spend so much time talking about sin?

It is because our Lord God does.

Remember how we said that sin has no hold on you?

It is not for want of trying. God told Cain (if you will permit my paraphrase) sin is crouching at the door waiting to have you for breakfast. Peter put it this way, ***“Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”***

I don't want you to worry though, because that roaring lion is toothless. Jesus has taken care of that problem. But I don't want you to be deceived either. The devil does not just threaten; he also deceives.

Frightened or complacent—either way will serve his purpose and turn our hearts from our Father. Either way can tempt us to sin, sin that disrupts and destroys, sin that makes lives miserable, sin that leads to death.

That brings us to today's text. Hosea lived and prophesied at a pivotal time in the history of Israel. Under King David and his son Solomon, Israel had reached the peak of its power and influence. After Solomon the kingdom split into two kingdoms—Israel in the north and Judah in the south. Hosea prophesied to an Israel that was up to its neck in idolatry. God's warnings went unheeded and it fell to the Assyrian empire.

That's the context of this text. There is a detail here that we need to consider: the text has three sections. In the first, God declares that He is turning His back on this rebellious people. In the second, the people of Israel try to convince themselves that everything is going to be just fine. In the third, God speaks to them and tells them things are not just fine, that judgment is coming.

It starts with God saying, ***“I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.”***

The worst place, the scariest place to be in this universe is where God is not.

That—the absence of God—is something we can and should fear, because the short definition of what awaits outside God’s presence is death. But God’s turning away is not the only thing going on here. He leaves the door open to repentant hearts, to those who long to be with Him, to those who understand their own guilt and distress and repent.

Israel did not do that.

The next section is, not a reply to God, but something else altogether, the people said:

“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”

They knew the drill, up to a point, at least. They knew that God had saved His people time and time again after they had chased after other gods. There was an expectation that He would do it again—so there was no need to repent, there was no need to change their ways, there was no need to seek God’s face. They thought that God is too nice to do anything but rescue them again.

What they say next surprises me. It would make a nice refrigerator magnet. But given God's response, I think we have to take that idea with a grain of salt. This rebellious people said, ***“Let us know; let us press on to know the Lord; his going out is sure as the dawn. he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.”***

Sounds great doesn't it?

As if sounding great was all that is required.

Some things never change. There are groups—groups that call themselves Christian—that think they can do whatever they want, whatever feels good, because God will forgive them—that it is God's business to make them happy.

But the bad news—for them—is that God is a just God. Does He want to make us happy? Not as much as He wants to make us whole. He sees how weak we are. He knows what sin does to us.

He knew all this about the people He had rescued from slavery in Egypt. They had gone too far—too often. This is what God declared:

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Justice was coming. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom and ten tribes of Israel basically disappeared. It was not long after that Judea was taken captive, the temple destroyed, and many were exiled to Babylon.

That is what happened to the people God described this way ***“Your love is ... like the dew that goes early away.”***—people He had called His own who had turn away from the God who loved them.

Are we better than they were? I mean they were the obvious heirs to God’s promise to Abraham. Not just that. They were the custodians of God’s Law for a time—the keepers of the temple. And in that role, what was their self-righteous proclamation in the text, was also prophecy.

“Come, let us return to the Lord; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.”

Do you see the cross here?

You should. Israel couldn't pull it off. They could not love deeply enough, they could not be obedient enough to return to the Lord. They could not endure the tearing. They could not survive being struck down.

Only Jesus could.

Only Jesus would go into the arms of death and win. Only Jesus would be raised up on the third day to live before the Father. And we have this promise that ***if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*** What the Law could not do, what the Temple could not contain, Jesus in His obedience accomplished.

Remember what we started with—you are blameless before the Father. Not because He is willing to ignore sin, not because sin has disappeared from creation, not because we are strong enough to overcome it.

No, we are blameless before God because Jesus was ***torn*** in our place, because Jesus was ***struck down*** in our stead. We are healed, we are bound up, because Jesus carried our sin to the cross.

We are blameless because the blame fell on the ***Word made flesh***. We stand before God now and forever because Jesus suffered in our place and our life is now hidden in Him.

Amen

Now may the Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus in to life everlasting.

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