

March 6, 2005  
Lent 4

*"Sick with Sin But Cured by Jesus"*

### **HOSEA 5:13-6:3**

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**W**hen Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores, then Ephraim turned to Assyria, and sent to the great king for help. But he is not able to cure you, not able to heal your sores. <sup>14</sup> For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away; I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. <sup>15</sup> 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." <sup>6:1</sup> "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. <sup>2</sup> After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. <sup>3</sup> Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

As some of you know, I have a daughter who is in graduate studies at the University of Arizona. She has been doing research on breast and colon cancer with a focus on the elements in our diet and environment that can lead to such cancer. One of her grandmothers, Susan's mom, died from colon cancer over 20 years ago. Her other grandmother, my mother, survived breast cancer that was detected about 12 years ago. What a blessing it would be if research leads us to find a cure for cancer!

The words we just read to you from the prophet Hosea speak to you about a disease far worse than cancer, or heart disease or diabetes. The Lord our God speaks to us through this ancient prophet and tells us that our greatest problem in life is and always will be the problem of sin.

We see the ravages of sin all around us. A boy only thirteen in San Luis Obispo brutally takes the life of an eighty nine year old veteran of WW2. Bombs explode in Baghdad killing scores of people. The news is bad enough, but then there is the added problem of seeing sin wreak no end of havoc and destruction in our personal lives. Is it any wonder that the Apostle Paul cried out in anguish, "Who will deliver me from this body of death?"

The prophet Hosea has a message for people in every generation in every part of the world. He invites us to come to the Lord our God to be given the cure for the problem of sin. "Come, let us return to the Lord, He has torn us to pieces, but he will heal us." Today is a day to say good-bye to the sin that has troubled us this past week and to find again the perfect cure for sin in Jesus. What a blessing it is to gather as we are doing and confessing this important truth: "I know that I am sick with sin, but I also know that I am cured by Jesus."

#### **1) The awfulness of sin**

There are times when we see sin get a hold of people and we cannot believe that it could

lead them to do the things they do. The prophet Hosea was chosen by God to paint powerful word pictures about the problem of sin. One of those pictures used by Hosea and other prophets was the picture of sin as terrible sickness.

Listen to the prophet speak. "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his sores then Ephraim turned to Assyria and sent to the great king for help." God told his people in Deuteronomy 7:15, "The Lord will keep you free from every disease. He will not inflict on you the horrible diseases you knew in Egypt." This was all conditional upon keeping the covenant they made with their God to be his special people. He also told them if they broke the covenant he would open up the floodgates and pour out on them sickness, and crop failure and defeat from their enemies. God allowed his Old Testament people to experience afflictions and diseases so they would open their eyes to see how far they had fallen from his love and turn back to him for help. Instead of turning back to him, they turned to other gods and powerful kings such as the king of Assyria.

Don't you see something similar happening today? God is not allowing sickness to come to people because of their sin, but he does allow them to dig deep holes for themselves and allows them to see the consequences of their sin. If I take a hammer and pound my finger with it several times, you know what the consequences will be. I will need to go to urgent care or even the hospital to have it put back into place or removed. Sin makes people miserable and it destroys their lives. What a man sows he also reaps. If he sows to destruction he will reap destruction. The other day one of the students in my youth confirmation class said there were 7 teaspoons of sugar in one can of Dr. Pepper. Drink 12 cans of that a day and watch what happens to your body. Take in sin and the consequences are worse. People run to self-help programs, listen to Dr. Laura or watch Dr. Phil with the hope they can find some cure for their personal problems, but the last place they go to is God. The times simply do not change.

Notice what the Lord said he was going to do with these "sicko" people who were worshipping God in the morning and Baal in the evening. "For I will be like a lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces and go away. I will carry them off, with no one to rescue them. Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt." The land of Israel seemed to have more than its share of lions that threatened the people as they traveled down the paths. The Lord pictures himself as a lion, tearing his people to pieces, hauling them away, and then going back to his place, leaving them alone in their pain and suffering. God's whole purpose for afflicting his people was to lead them to admit their guilt and shame and come back to him. Sin is so bad and so deeply entrenched in the lives of people the Lord needs to use draconian measures, even ripping them apart like a lion to lead them to see their need of help and forgiveness.

This morning I ask you, what is the Lord's way of ripping into people and helping them see the need to come back to him. For the Old Testament people it was affliction. The Lord can use disasters to help people see their need for him. What he uses most often to afflict people is the conscience and the words of the Bible that put fear into the hearts of people and lead them to cry out for help. Perhaps you can recall hearing a Billy Graham sermon where he points a finger in the air and proclaims, "Your sin will find you out." Or maybe it is the words of our Lord Jesus where he speaks of a place of outer darkness with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Or it could be words from a portion of the Bible such as Romans that says God's wrath will be revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of

people. It may be some words that share with a friend to show their need for Christ.

Remember going to the dentist when you were a little kid. You opened your mouth, he took x-rays and he showed you where the holes were in your teeth that needed to be fixed or your teeth would totally decay and rot. You were not happy when the dentist started drilling away at your teeth, especially when he had to go deeper than expected to drill out the decayed part. Yet it was for your good. Only by drilling into your teeth, could he prepare you for the material needed to fill the holes. This morning we see our God wanting to bring people into his chair, point out their the rot and destructive nature of sin, so he can lead people to see the cure that he has provided for them in Jesus.

## **2) The cure from the Lord**

God wanted his Old Testament people to keep their eyes fixed on the cure that he had for their sin. That is why he told them to take huge chunks of time out of each year to worship in Jerusalem and gather around the sacrifice of animals in the temple. The sacrifices pictured Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Hosea the prophet calls to the people to come back to the Lord. "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds." "Doctor, I have a bad pain in my heart, I think I may be having some serious problems." "Why don't you come in right away, and we will run some tests." The tests reveal major blockage in the arteries that need to be repaired. Why did the doctor run the tests? The doctor cares about the patient under his care, he wants to find out what is wrong, and he wants to offer a cure. It may even be necessary to open the chest, perform surgery and put in new veins to the heart muscle.

The prophet Hosea calls on the people of Israel and Judah to go back to the Lord for healing and help. "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us." The doctor performing open-heart surgery tears people, he cuts them, he spreads the ribs, but the purpose is to get at the problem and give a person new arteries that can supply blood to the heart. God's whole purpose for opening up wounds in your life and mine, tearing into us and showing us our faults is to provide a way to bring healing to us. The faith he gives you is like an artery that supplies the blood. The blood that you are connected to is the blood of Jesus that cleanses you from all sin. The Apostle Paul was not exaggerating when he wrote, "We have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins." The hymn writer was not telling lies when he wrote, "There is fountain filled with blood, Drawn from Immanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that blood. Lose all their guilty stains."

The blood of Jesus poured out for us not only washes us clean, it also allows us to enjoy new life in the presence of our God. "After two days he will revive us and on the third day he will restore us that we may live in his presence." How healthy are you? I don't think there is one of us here this morning who would say, "I am in perfect health, there is nothing wrong with me." Look at the pills some of you are taking. Look at how many visits you make each year to different doctors. And yet through Jesus you are in perfect health when it comes to your problem of sin. "On the third day he will restore that we may live in his presence." God's plan is to have you live in his presence as his dear children in

this life and for all eternity.

Remember the song from the musical *Annie*. The eternal optimist sings this song, "The sun will come out tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow." The sun will come out tomorrow. God's favor rests on you as the prophet tells us, "As surely as the sun rises, he will appear he will come to us as the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth." Cured of our sin we now enjoy the ultimate love and favor of our God that is pictured as the winter rains and the spring rains and the sun that shines to make things grow. Cured of sin we can remind ourselves every day of love that will never fail us that has been earned by the cure for sin we have in Jesus. This perfect cure for sin gives perfect peace with God that allows us to say, "Nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord." Amen.