

April 3, 2011  
Lent 4

*Hosea 5:15-6:3*

---

**"COME LET US RETURN TO THE LORD"**

---

*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."

Let me take you back to a time when you were a little child and you had a sliver in your finger. What did your mother do to get the sliver out of your finger? She took a needle and tweezers and sterilized them. First she tried to get the sliver out with the tweezers. When that didn't work she took the needle and began digging into the skin. It hurt. You started to cry. She was able to get a little piece out at first, but then had to dig even deeper and you cried more. Finally she said joyfully, "I got the sliver out" and maybe she even showed you the sliver much to your great relief. Then there was the healing cream and a little Band Aid, and you felt so much better.

These words from the prophet Hosea tell us how much the Lord wants to get sin out of the lives of people so he can love them and accept them. First the Lord afflicts them with words about terrible judgments to come. He digs into their lives and shows them their sins, just as your mother had to dig into your skin to expose the sliver. When they cried out to him for help, he was there to offer healing and forgiveness.

How important is it for us to tell people the truth about what will happen to them if they die without Jesus? This past week I was talking to a person on the phone who has an elderly Jewish friend in the Bay Area. This elderly lady is contemplating taking her own life to avoid the pain and suffering that she anticipates with being in a nursing home. The Christian woman warned her about taking her life and spending an eternity in hell. She told her about God's love for her, and the gift of his Son Jesus through whom this woman could have eternal life with God.

Why does the Lord leave dear Christians live on this earth? Why has the Lord brought you to this time and place in history? The prophet Hosea has the answer. The Lord leaves us here to help people come back to the him. Let's join Hosea as he calls out to people "Come, let us return to the Lord."

**The Lord reveals his anger**

Old Testament prophets had the tough job of telling people about the Lord's anger against their. Here is what the Lord says through his prophet. "Then I will go back to my place until they admit their guilt. Then they will seek my face: in their misery they will earnestly seek me." In the verse previous to this the Lord compares himself to a lion who tears into

his people. "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." I am amazed at how often the word lion is used in the Old Testament. Remember how Samson was attacked by a lion and the Holy Spirit gave him the power to kill the lion with his bare hands. The Lord was about to allow the Assyrian army to come like a lion against the northern tribes of Israel. Picture in your mind a lion attacking a wildebeest on the plains of Africa. The Lord allowed Assyria to attack the northern tribes again and again, and eventually lead the people away into slavery.

Was the Lord being too harsh against these people? No, they had rebelled against the Lord and committed spiritual adultery by worshipping Baal and other gods instead of the Lord. If you have ever read the Old Testament prophet Hosea, you may have been shocked by the first chapters where the Lord tells Hosea to marry a woman who would be unfaithful to him. He was to marry her and love her even though she did not deserve his love. Does anyone remember the name of this woman that Hosea married? It was Gomer. That's a nice name for a woman isn't it? And they had three children. I don't expect you to remember their names. They were Jezreel, and then Lo-Ruhammah which means "not loved." Can you imagine naming your child "not loved?" And then a third child "Lo-Ammi" which means "not my people." Can you hear Gomer calling her children, "Come here "not loved?" Come here "not my people."

Through the names of these children God revealed his anger against his people for their sins. Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea. She became a woman of the street. The Lord told Hosea to buy her from her boss. He brought her with 15 shekels of silver and loved her with an unconditional love. She was faithful to him for the rest of her life. God's people were like unfaithful Gomer. God had to show them their sins so they would repent and come back to him.

The Lord has a variety of ways to let people know about his anger against sin and the judgment that is coming. He allows our world to experience the frustration that comes from Adam's fall into sin. I read recently that over 100 million people died from the flu that struck the world in 1918. He allows earthquakes and tsunamis. He allows nations to rise up against nation and terrorist bombs to destroy people and buildings. He uses a great recession to lead people to wonder if there is more to life than money and what it can buy. It is during the difficult times that people start thinking about God, and thinking about death, and facing God in the final judgment. Acts 17 says of people, "God determines the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him."

The Lord also plants Christians all over the world to warn people about the judgment to come and the need to repent just as he used the prophet Hosea. A recent article in the news asked the question whether or not there will be another person like Billy Graham who will warn people about the judgment to come and call on them to repent of their sin before it is too late. When Billy Graham was asked about this he said that in the early centuries Christianity spread not by a few but by many. Who will be the next Billy Graham? It is ordinary, garden variety, Christians like you and me who are willing to speak the truth in love and warn people that without Christ they will perish forever. In John 3 Jesus told Nicodemus, "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."

Before the sliver can be removed, it must be exposed. Before sin can be forgiven, it must be exposed for what it is. People desperately need to know what will happen to them without forgiveness.

### **The Lord reveals his forgiveness**

Oh, what a privilege it is to lead people to repentance and trust in their Savior for forgiveness. Hosea calls for the people to come back to the Lord with these stirring words, "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." We are reminded of the words in Isaiah 1:18 where the Lord says to his people. "Come, let us reason together. Though your sins are like scarlet they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be like wool."

The Lord our God wants people all over the world to return to him. That's the message that comes across in the prophets of the Old Testament. The prophet Joel said, "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity." Jesus told the account of the lost or prodigal son. He left home, messed up his life, but then returned to the love of his father he once despised. The father welcomed him with open arms, kissed him, put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet, gave him his best robe and made the feast of all feasts to welcome him home. Jesus spent his time calling on people to repent as he talked to them about the kingdom of God.

Later in this chapter the Lord says, "Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets. I kill you with the words of my mouth; my judgments flashed out like lightning upon you. For I desire mercy not sacrifice." What does the Lord want for us? He wants to expose the sin, and then remove it the way a mother removes the sliver from her child. He cuts with prophets. He cuts deeply with his word. "There is none who does good, no not one." Then he offers us mercy. He offers his love and forgiveness for us. He takes us to the cross and shows us what Jesus did to make the perfect sacrifice for us. Psalm 103 says, "He removes our sin from as far as the east is from the west."

And with forgiveness comes the healing and help for a whole new life lived for the Lord and for his glory. "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. 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 the earth." Look at the hills. They are so green. The recent rains have caused the grass to grow and flowers to burst forth. I saw a strawberry field a few days ago that was white with blossoms. They predict a great year for the wild flowers. I hope I can get to Figueroa Mountain this year.

With forgiveness comes a whole new life lived to God's glory and God's honor. As Paul said in Philippians, "For me to live is Christ" and in Romans, "Whether we live we live unto the Lord, and whether we die we die unto the Lord, whether we live therefore or die we are the Lord's." We are branches connected to Christ the vine. We bear fruit out of love for the forgiveness we have found beneath the cross. "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control." These fruits are being produced in Christians all over the world because of what they have in

Jesus. These fruits are being produced in your life as well. Jesus said, "I have come that they might have life and have it to the full." It's time to go back to the Lord. Listen again to the words of Hosea the prophet, "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us." Amen.