

SEARCH AND RESCUE

HOSEA 5:13-15 JULY 7, 2019

Please join me in turning to Hosea chapter 5 this morning. Hosea is one of the later in the Old Testament, just past the book of Daniel.

Have you had this experience: You wake up, start getting ready for your day and then you notice that something's not quite right. You discover some ache or pain, maybe a splotch or a rash that *definitely* wasn't there before. You think maybe you should get it looked at, but in the *mean* time, you do what all good, modern folk do: You head to Google. "Maybe Google can tell me what this is!" If you're the kind of person that likes scary movies or a good, spooky story, I've got one for you. Go to Google and just type in "Why is my..." and then see what the *suggested* searches are in the drop down. Those are searches that are so popular, Google assumes you are *also* wondering the answer and they offer to auto-complete it for you. Some of the things people are searching will stick with you for the rest of the day.

The reason we search these things is because, when things go wrong, we want to set them right. It's part of the special nature God gave human beings. We want to *fix* and repair things when they're broken. And that doesn't just apply to aches and pains, or rashes and splotches. It's at every level. In the heart, in our homes, in our hamlets, in our nation.

If polls are to be believed (of course we need to take them with a grain of salt) but *every* poll out there says that a majority of Americans feel that our nation is *not* headed in the right direction. I couldn't find a single one that found even 51% of people who feel we're doing ok.¹ Another quick Google search, this time using the phrase, "How to fix America" yields *many* articles, suggestions and philosophies from outlets like Forbes, Politico, New Statesman, The Atlantic and the Washing Post. One gives "8 simple steps." Another has 38 ideas. Another still says it will take 52 adjustments.

We're in the middle of campaign season where candidates are making lots of wild promises, guaranteeing *they* know how to steer us all to a better future. In our pundit-saturated culture there's a constant flow of ideas and philosophies, and, frankly, it's hard not to get swept away in them.

But we've got to remind ourselves of what God has said plain and clear: The troubles in our nation are bigger what's being argued in debates and the things that are broken within human hearts are way beyond what Google's algorithm can diagnose. Our culture is terribly confused right now, with new and worsening problems at almost every level. No matter the persuasion, just about everyone agrees right now that we, as a people, find ourselves in *trouble*. That we are *deteriorating* as a nation, not improving. Sadly, many of these assessments extend not only into capital buildings, but into church buildings too. When we look around at the state of Christianity, we often find a *weakness* and an apathy, a sort of spiritual delirium. Not *everywhere*, not exclusively, but *convincingly* in many places. God's people, who are meant to live in power and victory are often overrun with the same confusion, apathy and instability that characterizes the unredeemed culture.

Did you know that this is all very similar to the state of circumstances in the nation of Israel during the 8th century BC? In many ways it was very similar to what we see around us today. On the one hand, there was prosperity and a measure of security. The nation had won some helpful victories and expanded their territory here and there. But, at the same time, there was an undercurrent of

¹ https://www.realclearpolitics.com/epolls/other/direction_of_country-902.html

instability. There was widespread spiritual disorder and the deterioration of true devotion. It was a time of deep division. In fact, God's people had been *divided* into two nations: Israel and Judah. Their division was so sharp that violent clashes would often break out between these countrymen.

In the wallet, God's special people were doing alright. But a wider view showed that they were far, far off course. They were at a huge distance from where the Lord wanted them to be. We can read the history of their deterioration in the books of Kings and Chronicles. When problems would arise domestically or with their enemies, they tried to patch or solve them *themselves*, with the kind of human reasoning we hear championed on every news station 24 hours a day. Their prosperity had made them self-oriented and made them self-sufficient. And, for quite some time, they didn't realize just how wrong things had gone and really how sick they were as a people.

More importantly, they didn't know that judgment was at the door, about to crush them. Not because they hadn't been *warned*, but because they weren't willing to *believe* the warnings and take an honest look at themselves. During this period God sent many prophets to plead with His people and try to rescue them. There were 4 of them whose work survives on the pages of Scripture: Isaiah, Micah, Amos and Hosea.

As Israel continued her self-destructive behavior, God sent an impassioned and heartbreaking letter through the words and life of Hosea. It's a letter that explains what was wrong with the nation and with individuals and how they could pull back from the brink of destruction by embracing the God who offers the *only* hope and the *only* help that could fix what was wrong in their hearts, their homes and their nation.

Of course, the book of Hosea is not *just* a love letter written to 8th Century Israel. It's written to *anyone* who will listen. One of its crescendos comes in chapter 5, starting in verse 13.

Hosea 5:13-15 - ¹³“When Israel and Judah saw how sick they were, Israel turned to Assyria— to the great king there— but he could neither help nor cure them. ¹⁴I will be like a lion to Israel, like a strong young lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces! I will carry them off, and no one will be left to rescue them. ¹⁵Then I will return to my place until they admit their guilt and turn to me. For as soon as trouble comes, they will earnestly search for me.”

In this whole discussion, there are really 2 levels to consider. It reminds me of that picture that looks like both a duck and a rabbit. Same picture, but depending on who's looking at it, there are 2 angles. Because, if you're a Christian here today, Hosea speaks to us about our walk with the Lord. It addresses whether we're following hard after Him and the complexities of living life within an earthly society while staying devoted to our heavenly King and *His* desires.

If you're *not* a Christian, there's really nothing complex about it. There's just 1 simple issue for you found on these pages: You're going to die and enter a Christless eternity. For you, it's like you're in a natural disaster and need *immediate* rescue. When the floods come, the people trapped on their roof don't have time to worry about the complexities of life. “How am I going to make my busy schedule work this week...” No, for anyone who isn't a Christian this is a life and death message. A day of judgment is coming. The Bible says that when you die, you will face judgment. You may live through today, you may live through tomorrow, but you may *not*. Hosea explains that there is only one hope, only one Savior, and that is Jesus Christ, who shed His blood on the cross, paying the penalty for your sins so that you could be forgiven if you are willing to believe and be born again.

If you're a Christian, though, there's more complexity here. The book, as a whole, is written to God's people primarily. People who were still bringing sacrifices from time to time and still performing some rituals and yet, they were about to be judged nationally and individually because their lips said one thing while their lives said another. And, consequently, they had no real relationship with the Lord. They had no spiritual power. They made no progress. And they were breaking God's heart.

Not everyone, of course. There *were* those who were faithful to God through it all. And those individuals were used in significant and lasting ways. People like Hosea.

When Hosea started his ministry, in many ways things were *good* in Israel. Sure, their leaders weren't Godly and they weren't honoring the Lord. They weren't really serving their purpose as a light to the Gentile world. But, the economy was up. The barns were full. The swords were sharp and the people could go and worship in whatever fashion they wanted. And yet, despite the prosperity, they were crumbling as a nation.

In our text, Hosea records a moment when, like the prodigal son, they awake from their stupor and take a look around and realize *just how bad* things had gotten.

Verse 13 opens with that realization, saying:

Hosea 5:13a - ¹³“When Israel and Judah saw how sick they were...

How sick were they? Well, throughout the book, the Great Physician had been very detailed in His diagnosis.

Of course, we remember their *idolatry*, turning to the Baals and other foreign gods. But there was more than that. They were no longer in love with the Lord. What they *did* do in His name was simply going through the motions (Hos 10:11). They were no longer *relying* on God, but instead on political alliances (Hos 7:11). They were setting up leaders without consulting the Lord and without His consent (Hos 8:4). They acted as if the law (the word of God) didn't apply to them (Hos 8:12). They resisted the prophets who tried to warn them (Hos 9:8). They were dishonest in their business dealings (Hos 12:8). And, while they were building themselves great palaces and cities, they had forgotten their Maker (Hos 8:14). In general, the Lord characterized them by saying, “You don't *know* Me anymore.” And it was true. Sure, they had a traditional affiliation with this God, but they didn't walk with Him. They didn't rely on Him. They didn't obey Him. They didn't give themselves to Him.

All of this was a big deal to the Lord. Though He was full of love and grace and long-suffering toward them, He could not let the poison of sin continue to spread. A poison that they were willingly drinking, by the way. The antidote wasn't going to be found in some candidate or some program or some strategic partnership. Only God's *righteousness* could counteract what was killing them.

The problem was, in this case, Israel turned to...*alternative* medicine instead of the Lord.

Hosea 5:13 - When Israel and Judah saw how sick they were, Israel turned to Assyria— to the great king there— but he could neither help nor cure them.

Back in the 70s, there was a campaign to teach people that *sugar* would help you lose weight. One ad read: “Diet hint: Have a soft drink before your main meal. Sugar just might be the willpower you

need to curb your appetite.”² In the 1940s, some dentists recommended you smoke cigarettes to strengthen your teeth.³ And then of course there’s *mercury*. Once “the most popular medicinal metal,” mercury was once touted as the cure “for syphilis, indigestion, old age and almost everything else.”⁴ While people from Chinese emperors to U.S. Presidents took it for healing, it was actually leading to things like paralysis, insanity, loss of motor control, neurological damage, and death.

Turning to Assyria for help was just as bad an idea as taking a mercury pill. The “great” king there was only *great* at killing, double-crossing, torture and all sorts of horrors. He was no friend to God’s people. No, he was like the abusive ex-boyfriend who promised never to hurt them again, as long as they did what he said. In the mean time, Hosea shows God as He truly is: The wonderful husband who doesn’t stop loving His dear Israel, even when she’s unfaithful to Him time and time again. That’s our God. A God whose love, according to chapter 14, has no bounds.

Yet, they turned to Assyria. “After all, they’ve got chariots and horses, spears and shields.” They looked for a temporal answer to an eternal problem. Human effort *can not* solve spiritual problems. The people had realized something was desperately wrong in their hearts and in their nation, but they looked for a fix in all the wrong places. Maybe *Assyria* can help. Maybe *Egypt* can help. Maybe if we pile up more wealth or build ourselves better palaces. Maybe if we experiment with some other religions. All the while, God, who loved them, was *pleading* with them to recognize their spiritual sickness before it got to such an advanced stage. And He tried to explain to them that He had a plan and a power to solve everything that was broken in their nation.

His plan was to restore them to right standing with Him. To firmly establish them, individually, so that they could progress and produce spiritual fruit. His plan was to make right what they had done wrong. This is the plan He’s *still* working out today, by the way, for this who will walk with Him.

To accomplish this plan, the Lord would show great power on their behalf. He promised to unite the split nation. To deliver them from their enemies. To heal their wounds and cover their sin. The outpouring of His power would be so great, even the animals would be held back from hurting them. It should be noted that Israel constantly *rejected* the Lord’s offer, and so we still look forward to the fulfillment of these promises in His earthly, thousand year Kingdom.

But, if they wanted to be part of God’s plan and receive the power He was talking about, they would have a part to play. They would have to cooperate in a very simple way. Sadly, Israel still wouldn’t go God’s way. So, in verse 14 we read:

Hosea 5:14 - ¹⁴I will be like a lion to Israel, like a strong young lion to Judah. I will tear them to pieces! I will carry them off, and no one will be left to rescue them.

In the Bible, God depicts His character and His work in many different ways. One of the images He uses many times is that of a lion. Jesus Christ, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. God as a lion in all His strength and dominion and matchless fierceness.

He wanted to be their King - a lion to them like Mufasa is depicted in the classic Disney cartoon. A King that all the subjects recognize as good, a King they love, a King who serves, a King who can be trusted. He said in Hosea 11 that one day He would roar like a great lion and gather up His people.

² <http://www.medicalbillingschool.org/blog/crazy-examples-of-bogus-medical-advice-from-the-past/>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ <https://listverse.com/2013/06/03/10-medicines-that-made-things-worse/>

But now they were *rejecting* Him as King, and so, He was still a lion, but now a lion that would fight against them. A lion they could not withstand or escape.

At this point let me address any unbeliever here. You may like to think of God as some force, or as an old man with a beard in the sky. You may like to not think of Him at all. But He is a *Lion*. He is the King of all kings. And if you will not bow to Him at the cross, you will bow to Him at His great white throne. And there, after you acknowledge that Jesus Christ is, in fact, Lord, all that you've ever done will be judged. Every one of your deeds, every one of your secrets, every empty word you've spoken. And you will be exposed to the penalty of that sin. And you will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire to suffer for all eternity. Not because God *wants* that to happen but because you *refused* to be rescued by Him. He does want to save. Look at verse 15.

Hosea 5:15 - ¹⁵Then I will return to my place until they admit their guilt and turn to me. For as soon as trouble comes, they will earnestly search for me.

God has a plan for nations and for individuals. He has all the power necessary to accomplish it. But He waits for us to play our part. H.A. Ironside wrote:

“Observe, God would not forget them, nor should they be finally cast out of His presence; but He would withdraw Himself from them, leaving them to their spiritual famine and desolation till they realized their true condition and owned it before Him.”

If these people wanted to have what was broken repaired, if they wanted to have a meaningful, satisfied life and if they wanted to save their nation, they had a part to play. It was very simple: Confess and turn to the Lord.

God was *always* in a place where He could be found. Just one prayer away. Just one repentance away. That wasn't only true for Israel, it's true today for all of us.

1 John 1:9 - ⁹If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God is still in His place. Because He took His place on the cross, He is now in His place of highest glory at the right hand of the Father. He still has a plan. He still has all the power. He still loves the people of the earth and is determined to save them. Individuals, families and nations. Hosea calls Him the *one* Savior. The *only* Helper. The God who answers prayers and cares for you (Hos 14:8).

When trouble comes to a life or a home or a nation, He *alone* can cure what's really wrong. We do not need another candidate or human philosophy or some stockpile. We need the power of Jesus Christ working in us. What our nation needs is more Christians who really live the Christian life in the power of the Holy Spirit. What our state needs is more Christians bearing fruit.

The Lord said that when He would one day win back the hearts of these people, He would “transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope.” And, *someday*, Israel will do the right thing.

Hosea 6:1-3 - ¹“Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. ²In just a short time he will restore us, so that we may live in his presence. ³Oh, that we might know the Lord! Let us press on to know

him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.”

We live in the interval between Hosea 5 and 6. But we can have a Hosea 6 attitude right now. It means confessing those things that have gone wrong. It means repenting of any Assyria we're turning to instead of the Lord and embracing *Him*, our Beloved Savior, trusting Him to lead and empower. To believe He has the diagnosis and the treatment for what needs to be made right.

Psalm 20:7 - ⁷Some *trust* in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God.

In 1973, Jim Croce, the singer-songwriter who gave us *Bad, Bad Leroy Brown* and *Time In A Bottle*, died in a tragic plane crash at just 30 years of age. A few days after the funeral, his wife Ingrid received a heartbreaking letter of love that Jim had mailed just before his death. In the letter he made promises to be done traveling and staying away from the family. He was going to live a life with her and their son. He wrote: “When I get back everything will be different. We're gonna have a life together, Ing, I promise.”⁵ But for Ingrid, the letter came too late. There was nothing that could be done.

Hosea may have been written more than 2,500 years ago, but God's love for you is still the same. And He is still alive. It's not too late for anyone here to really know Him again or for the first time. It's not too late for us to live in His presence and press into Him.

Ours is a sick and dying nation. Some here are, perhaps, sick and dying, about to step into the afterlife without a Savior. Maybe you're here and you're a Christian, but your marriage is sick and dying, or you find yourself in some other valley of trouble. Our God is a *Rescuer*. He does not fail. What we need is not some human effort or material provision. We need God's plan being worked out with His power in our lives. There is no hope for salvation or satisfaction apart from Jesus Christ. But He is readily available to us, right there, in His place, waiting for people to press on to *know* Him.

Of course, maybe you're like Hosea himself: Someone who *is* following hard after the Lord, honoring Him despite what's going on in the world around us. Even in the darkness of Israel during this period of time there were faithful servants who were used in significant ways. People like Oded the prophet, whose one, courageous statement to the people of Israel led to the freeing of 200,000 women and children who had been taken captive as slaves from Judah. If you know the Lord in this sense, don't grow weary in doing good, but press on as God continues to lead and empower you.

Hosea closes with this verse, which puts it all into summary for us, whether we're speaking to an individual, a family or a nation:

Hosea 14:9 - ⁹Let those who are wise understand these things. Let those with discernment listen carefully. The paths of the Lord are true and right, and righteous people live by walking in them. But in those paths sinners stumble and fall.

⁵ <https://www.scpr.org/programs/take-two/2012/10/08/28748/new-book-looks-at-singer-songwriter-jim-croces-too/>