

False Converts

Hosea 5

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Hosea 5.¹

How necessary the **preaching of the prophets** for the church today! How many of their central themes, how **much of the burden of their preaching** has largely disappeared from the mind of the church in our time!

Turning Grace into License

One of those themes, one of the solemn messages the prophets were sent to deliver, was the terrible seriousness of rebellion against God; the great danger of forming by practice and repetition a **habitual unwillingness** to answer the Lord's summons to faith and to obedience, of perpetuating over time a refusal to believe what God says or to repent of one's sins before the Lord.

Hosea opens chapter 5 with the following warning: **Hosea 5** (ESV) —“1 Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you...”

He goes on to say in **verse 3**, “I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is **defiled** [UNCLEAN]. 4 Their deeds do not permit **them to return to their God**. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.” He goes on to say in **verse 6**, “With their flocks and herds **they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them...**”

We are going to cover more, but I want us to see the seriousness and the danger of this, that, according to the prophets, it is not only that someday we will have to give an account of our lives to God. There is something we ought to take very seriously.

But, **there is a present danger with sin which is immediate and which is fulfilled in this life and this world.** The same goes with truly knowing the Lord.

- If you forsake the world and walk with the Lord, he tells us that you will “receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (**Mark 10:30**). The Lord says we are to bear fruit now.
- Hosea tells us later in **Hosea 8:7** (ESV) —“For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.”

¹ Some of the material is not original, but is from Robert Reymond's treatment of this same text. 'The Point of No Return' Hosea 5:1-15, Dec 4, 1988 (Series on Hosea, No.6).

- Paul tells us in **Galatians 6:8** (ESV) — “For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.”

But tonight’s message is really for those who are not yet secure in Christ – and it is for God’s people to stir up their urgency and zeal.

We hear this twice from Paul.

- **Galatians 6:9**, “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”
- **2 Thessalonians 3:13**, “As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.”

So I will say it again. **There is a present danger with sin which is immediate and which is fulfilled in this life and this world.**

There is a terrible danger tonight. That danger is that protracted **indifference** to the Word of God; a defiance of God's invitation to repentant faith in Christ practiced over weeks and months and years can finally render a person's heart so hard, so calloused to the Word and presence of God that it becomes resistant to the influence of that blessed Word and actually beyond hope of salvation.

To put it another way--for Hosea puts it both ways in verses 4 and 6—a refusal to give answer to God when He speaks, protracted over time, can at the last cause the Lord to withdraw from a person or a community--to leave, and *never* to return.

I. **There is, in fact, a point of no return in the spiritual life** (vs. 1-7).

The great prophets of the Old Testament, together with the whole of Scripture, proclaim; and faithful ministers of God's Word have always proclaimed—how ever the idea may cut across the grain of today's comfortable and non-threatening approach to salvation--that in the spiritual life, there is in fact, **a point of no return**. Israel illustrated this in their national life. They tested God over and over. There came a point when it was too late. We need to wake up to this, for this could happen in the lives of those we love. If you don’t know Christ tonight, it could happen to you. Listen to Hosea.

Hosea 5:1–7 (ESV) —“Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. 2 And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them. 3 I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is **defiled** [UNCLEAN].

4 Their deeds do not permit **them to return to their God**. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD.

5 The **pride** of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them. 6 With their flocks and herds **they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.** 7 They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD; for they have borne alien children. Now the new moon shall devour them with their fields.”

Hosea, in fact, declares in 5:4,6 that Israel had passed the point of no return in two ways.

A. First, hardening occurs because of the constant practice of **sin** while being exposed to the light (vs. 4).

Verse 4, “Their deeds do not permit **them to return to their God.** For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD”. The problem is found in verse 5: “the pride.”

The Heart Can be Hardened Beyond Repair

The Israelites knew of the Lord, but they would not return to Him. They constantly heard the prophets, but they also went back to their sins. And now Israelites’ sin and their unbelief were such a fixed habit of mind and heart, that they were beyond repentance and faith in God.

1. **A sincere, forceful and loving warning:** As with tobacco or alcohol or other harmful habits, there is a point which is reached sooner or later when the **damage** done to the **lungs** or to the **liver** cannot be undone; though a person may live for **sometime** yet, *he or she eventually passes the point of no return, where the damage is too great to be cured.*
2. So it is the spiritual realm—persistent refusal to believe what God says and to obey his commandments finally so hardens the heart and poisons the mind as to render them unreceptive to change. **E.M. Bounds** said, “The same sun softens the wax and hardens the clay.” The same Word of God that can set you free forever, can also be your prison if you neglect it and ignore it.
3. Remember what we hear in the book of Hebrews: **Hebrews 2:3** (ESV) — “how shall we escape if we **neglect such a great salvation?**”
4. **John Owen** that such people become: “sermon proof and sickness proof.” They don’t feel the sickness of their sin as much. They can listen to sermons to no effect in their life.

Explanation: And so the Israelites had become. In spite of the convicting preaching of Hosea and Amos, and in spite of the fact that they saw the judgment of God already beginning to occur, yet they were passed being effected by the Word of God. They could not repent. They could not leave their sins, nor did they want to. As Hosea said in **verse 4**, “Their deeds do not permit **them to return to their God.** For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD”.

The Lord Called, but They Did Not Come

B. Second, hardening occurs because their many **refusals** to heed God's warnings and accept his offers of mercy (vs. 4; Amos 8:12).

Verse 4, “Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD”.

The Lord called to them, but they did not come. And so the Lord had departed from them and was now unwilling to hear their prayers. When the troubles began to overtake them, they did cry out to the Lord, but it was too late; He would not longer hear their prayers.

No wonder the Lord cried out over the city of Jerusalem in **Matthew 23:37** “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not!”

In the end it is not the Lord who condemns man—we condemn ourselves. **John 3:18** (ESV) puts it this way — “Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Overexposure

Sinners who are in trouble will sometimes call out to the Lord, but for those who have been exposed to the light over and over can come to a point of no return.

Matthew 7:13-14, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many.¹⁴ For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.”

The Wide Road

The Wide road was the one full of religious people. He says to them in Matt.7:23, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”

Amos speaks of those days as days when Israel will stagger this way and that searching for deliverance and for the Word of the Lord, **but they will not find it**. **Amos 8:12** (ESV) — “They shall wander from sea to sea, and from north to east; they shall run to and fro, to seek the word of the LORD, but they shall not find it.”

Isaiah cried out— “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” (**Isaiah 55:6**, ESV)

The Israelites of Hosea's day had not done that, and now, when they finally saw their need of Him, they could not find Him.

C. This **principle** is often enough illustrated in the Scripture.

1. **Kadesh Barnea** – wilderness (Num. 13-14; Heb. 4).

Israel refused God one too many times at Kadesh Barnea when she refused to trust and obey the Lord and refused to enter the promised land for fear of the people who lived there (Num. 13-14; Heb. 4). God visited judgment upon

her for that sin immediately, and ten of the twelve spies God put to death. The only remaining (and the only ones that matter eternally are Joshua and Caleb).

Tried to Enter in but Could Not

The next day the people, recognizing their error, did what they should have done the day before, organized as an army and entered the land. But it was too late; God was not with them and they were soundly defeated. They had *passed the point of no return* and were held at arm's length by the Lord until that whole generation had perished in the wilderness.

God actually reminds us of this example in Hebrews 4, and says,

“1 Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it. 2 For good news came to us just as to them, but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened.”

“6 Since therefore it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly received the good news failed to enter because of disobedience, 7 again he appoints a certain day, “Today,” saying through David so long afterward, in the words already quoted, “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.” 8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on.”

At Kadesh-Barnea, the children of Israel refused to enter into the Rest of God's Promised Land, and God gave them what they wanted, even when later they tried to enter in, but could not.

2. **King Saul** (1 Sam. 15).

King Saul disobeyed the Lord once too often when he took it upon himself to offer sacrifices which only Samuel should have offered. Because he had sinned in such great light, even though after he confessed his sin and pleaded for another chance, the Lord would not hear him **and withdrew his presence** from him (1 Samuel 15). Samuel then turned fully away from the Lord and **sought mediums and necromancers** since he no longer heard the voice of the Lord.

3. **The Jews of Jesus' Day** (Mk. 15; Jn. 23).

The Jews in Jesus' day were so habituated in their unbelief, in their rebellion against the Gospel of salvation from sin through Christ, that **even though great miracles were performed before their eyes, even though a man rose from the dead, they would not believe**. Instead they crucified the Lord of glory and many who saw the miracles were never saved, but persecuted the Christians.

4. **Mankind at the End** (Rev. 9:20-21).

The Apostle John, in **Revelation 9:20–21** (ESV) — tells us of man's impenitent heart even at the end of the world when great judgments will come. Mankind at the end of the age will still be hardened: “The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their

hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, 21 nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.”

5. **Medieval Europe, USA since 9-11, etc.**

Black Plague: And so it was in medieval Europe during the days of the black death, the terrible plague which took perhaps as many as one-third of the lives of those living in Europe in the mid-14th century. But did that irreligious, superstitious people repent and turn to God, as you might expect when God's hand of judgment was so heavily upon them?

No! In fact they became more wicked than they had been before and indulged in all kinds of coarse and impure revelry, practicing with abandon the ancient adage: 'eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die!' They had become by a long practice of **unbelief and defiance of God's law** and word, like their ancient brethren before them in Hosea's day, **sermon proof and sickness proof.**

It was the same when we saw our nation attacked on 9-11. We saw no repentance, even though we all considered the fragility and brevity of life. No great revivals broke out. We all own Bibles, but as a nation we are ignoring God.

D. But isn't God's **mercy** new every morning? Yes! Isn't there always time to repent? Yes! and No!

BUT, YOU MAY SAY, does not the Scripture say that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved, and does that not mean that it is never too late; that one can always be saved, even to the last moment he lives in this world?

Yes! and No!

1. It is always a theoretical possibility that one might believe and repent on one's deathbed and be saved. But, in fact, **this almost never happens.** It is very rare that older people are won to Christ under any circumstances, much less in the pain and confusion and self-preoccupation of one's deathbed. It is true that Christ will save the thief on the Cross and many who are in his circumstance, but death is usually so sudden and the heart so hard, that it is very rare.
2. **Augustine** said that there is one case of deathbed repentance recorded in Scripture—the **thief on the cross** in Luke—that no one may despair it is never too late—but only one that no one should presume.

And it is worth pointing out that we do not know the spiritual background of that thief; whether he was a man who all his life had known the Word of God and had often been summoned to believe in God and keep his commandments. Perhaps, he knew the Word.

But I suspect it is more likely, that he was an irreligious man who knew very little of God and of God's salvation until he saw it in Jesus' face and heard it in his words as our Savior hung on the cross.

3. The Puritan **Thomas Brooks** put it this way: “Though true repentance be never too late; late repentance is seldom true.”
4. The fact is, however possible in theory it may be for practiced unbelievers to repent late in their lives, repentance is God's gift and God, ordinarily, does not give it to those who have spent their lives *spurning* his offers of mercy and especially not to those who have lived in the church but time after time have *not believed in Christ or repented of sin* when summoned and invited to do so.

Is this not precisely the warning Hosea gives us in the text we have read? Who can help those calling for salvation now that the judgment has begun to fall? Only the Lord God can help; but there is the horror of all horrors; there comes a time when He will not help those who call upon Him. There was a time when He would but they would not; now they would, but He will not.

Now, I want simply to apply this solemn fact. *Knowing there is a point of no return, we ought to fear the Lord, and heed His voice all the more.*

II. This should make us **awaken** to the Lord all the more

(vs. 8-12).

- A. First, in view of God's final judgment, surely it is a grave error not to fear sin and its grip upon our lives.

Hosea 5:8-12 (ESV) —“Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin! 9 Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure. 10 The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water. 11 Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was **determined to go after filth.** 12 But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like **dry rot** to the house of Judah.”

Northern Israel never comes back to the land. They become the Samaritans. Yet there is still mercy here. Jesus goes through Samaria in His earthly ministry and saves a woman at the well, who evangelizes her whole town. Yet Hosea's generation never recovered. They were hardened. They were sermon proof and sickness proof.

God's Warnings are Always Merciful

If God gives us over to our own passions, we will destroy ourselves. Israel was about to receive great judgment. Assyria was about to fall upon Israel and destroy them. They could see the armies gathering. They heard the prophets describe the impending doom.

Yet they refused to turn from their idols. So when judgment came, God refused to turn to them. He gave them over to their idols which could not help them.

Don't Play with Sin

Never turn the grace of God into lasciviousness. It is precisely because of sin's capacity to gain absolute mastery over a life that Scripture says such things as:

1. Paul says in **2 Timothy 2:22** “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.”
2. Solomon says in **Proverbs 6:5**, “save yourself [from sin] like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the hand of the fowler.”
3. Peter says in **1 Peter 2:11**, “Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.”

Homer's The Odyssey - the Trojan Horse

Not long ago I finished reading Homer's The Odyssey. What a great story, and what a valuable story. After a fruitless 10-year siege, the Greeks constructed a huge **wooden horse**, and hid a select force of men inside. The **Greeks pretended to sail away**, and the Trojans pulled the horse into their city as a victory trophy. That night the Greek force crept out of the horse and opened the gates for the rest of the Greek army, which had sailed back under cover of night. The Greeks entered and destroyed the city of Troy, decisively ending the war.

The Truly Wise Flee Sin and Temptation

And so wise and godly people will not play with sin, or temptation, or the world, or unbelief. For there are those who think they are safe and saved in Christ, but they are not. For Matthew 7 tells us many will come to Christ on the Day of Judgment who had a full assurance of salvation, but were in their hearts sinful and lawless people. They served in with the people of God, but they were lawless in their personal lives and did not walk with the Lord.

Matthew 7:21–23 (ESV) — “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

We must awaken to God and fear sin and its grip. This is the first, all-important step toward avoiding the danger of passing the point of no return in the journey to hell.

Don't Go Near Temptation

Every Christian in this room knows exactly of what Robert Murray McCheyne was speaking when he wrote:

“Satan often tempts me to go as near to temptations as possible without committing the sin. This is fearful—tempting God and grieving the Holy Spirit. It is a deep-laid plot of Satan.”

God Moves Among those who Avoid Every Appearance of Sin

This was the way of revival in Welsh revival of 1904 with Evan Roberts. As a child Evan Roberts would often pray for great periods in the night seasons. When he entered seminary in 1903, the Lord again began to wake him at 1AM for divine fellowship, when he would pray for four hours, returning to bed at 5AM for another four hours sleep.

He visited a preaching meeting where Evangelist Seth Joshua was preaching and heard the evangelist pray “Lord, bend us”. It was as if the Holy Spirit said to Evan, “That’s what you need”. At the following meeting Evan experienced a powerful filling with the Holy Spirit.

“I felt a living power pervading my bosom. It took my breath away and my legs trembled exceedingly. This living power became stronger and stronger as each one prayed, until I felt it would tear me apart. My whole bosom was a turmoil and if I had not prayed it would have burst.... I fell on my knees with my arms over the seat in front of me. My face was bathed in perspiration, and the tears flowed in streams. I cried out “Bend me, bend me!!”

It was God’s commending love which bent me... what a wave of peace flooded my bosom.... I was filled with compassion for those who must bend at the judgment, and I wept. Following that, the salvation of the human soul was solemnly impressed on me. I felt ablaze with the desire to go through the length and breadth of Wales to tell of the Savior”. And that he did. God converted approximately 150,000 people, and there were long lasting effects of yielding to the Spirit.

Do You Want to See God Work?

We will be more anxious and determined to keep sin out, to give it no entrance--as we feel toward any other life threatening virus. We would never toy with AIDS, we would never grant it the opportunity of entering our body, because we are well aware that once it has come it will never leave until we are dead! Well, so it is with the cancer the Bible calls *sin*.

And it was for this reason that John Owen laid it down as a cardinal principle of Christian living that, in our battle with sin and temptation in our lives day by day we should 'venture all on the first attempt.' He meant we should throw everything we have against sin when we see it coming or when its suggestion rises in our minds and hearts; beat it down when we still have our wits about us and are still in command of our spiritual powers, before it has infected our heart and mind.

III. We ought to constantly and earnestly seek the Lord (vs. 13-15).

Hosea 5:13-15 (ESV) —“13 When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound. 14 For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue. 15 I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.”

The world cannot help you. You must seek the Lord. Isaiah cried out— “Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near” (**Isaiah 55:6**, ESV)

This fact, that it is possible in the spiritual world to pass the point of no return, ought to keep us from ever taking our salvation for granted (Heb. 2:3; 6:4-8).

The fact that it is possible to slip away never to return to faith and repentance; that it is possible to put off seeking God only to discover too late that when you finally realize you must seek him he cannot be found--ought to make every believer scrupulous about his own salvation and keeping it in sound, ready, and clean condition.

The writer to the Hebrews asks: **Hebrews 2:3**, “how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” What’s the answer? We won’t escape if we neglect this salvation.

Some of you have attended this church for sometime but still delay to answer the Lord, still delay to come, though He has in this room said many times to you now, “Come unto me, and I will give you rest”. “Learn of Me” He says. “Look unto me and be ye saved all the ends of the earth” He says.

Yet you continue to delay to accept the mercy and the salvation which he has so often offered you here.

But hear me, listen to **Hosea 5:15**, “I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.”

You may think you have time, but God may return to His place and decide not to hear you again.

Robert Murray McCheyne

As Robert Murray McCheyne once put it: 'God has last knocks.' Oh, how do you know, my friend, that this is not his very last knock on the door of your heart and that failing to get you to open the door today, he may never come to knock again?!

Conclusion: This is a solemn message. Turn to the Lord today, or it may be too late. There is a point of no return; and you will never know that you have passed it until it is long since too late.

So now, this very moment, if there is any question in your heart as to whether or not you know Him, call upon the Lord and offer him your complete repentance, faith, and love and then pledge with all of us who are children of God in this room, to take the utmost care of God's salvation, protecting it from even the sin. Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice and they follow me”.

Or as the Holy Spirit himself puts it:

Heb. 3: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts...But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.”