

Soften Your Heart

Hosea 10:12-15

Relentless (Book of Hosea)

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

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Introduction: Open your Bible to Hosea 10. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "Soften Your Heart."

Listen to the words of Andrew Murray:

“There is need of a great revival of spiritual life, of truly fervent devotion to our Lord Jesus, of entire consecration to His service. It is only in a church in which this spirit of revival has at least begun, that there is any hope of radical change...”

- **Andrew Murray**¹

God tells His people who were dry and hard spiritually in **Hosea 10:12**, “Sow for yourselves **righteousness**; reap **steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

The people of Israel were a nation of farmers. Hosea therefore addresses God’s people as a nation of backsliders, with words that farmers and shepherds are familiar with. The problem was not what was growing in the ground, but what was growing in their hearts. Instead of love, faith and obedience, there was worldliness and idolatrous habits that enslaved their hearts. So Hosea tells them, as the unfaithful spouse of God: soften your heart!

Revival is a Revolution

We need what God’s people of old needed: revival. It’s radical! It’s a plowing up of our hearts and lives! I love how Andrew Murray describes revival: “A true revival means nothing less than a revolution, casting out the spirit of worldliness and selfishness, and making God and His love triumph in the heart and life.”²

God desires to “rain righteousness” upon you. He wants you to harvest His unfailing, relentless love. But our sin is like an umbrella. God is ready to pour the blessing of His peace and joy upon you. But our umbrella of sin keeps the ground of our hearts cracked and dry.

Break Up the Hardened Ground

Fallow ground is ground which has once been tilled, but has gotten hard and now lies waste. It needs to be broken up and made soft again, before it is ready to receive seed. If you desire to break up the fallow ground of your heart, you must begin by looking at your heart – examine carefully the state of your mind and see where you are.

¹ Andrew Murray. *The Key to the Missionary Problem: A Passionate Call to Obedience in Action* (Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2012).

² Andrew Murray. Sermon “A Plea for God’s Intervention” (Isa. 64:1-9).

Many people never even seem to think about doing this. They pay no attention to their own hearts, and never know whether they are doing well in their walk with the Lord or not – whether they are bearing fruit or are totally barren. Now you must draw off your attention from all other things and look into this right now!

Self-examination consists of looking at your life, considering your motives and actions. . . calling up your past and seeing its true character. Look back over your past history. Take up your individual sins one by one, and look at them.³ This is the business of softening your heart.

A Fresh Page with God

We all need a fresh page with God. There are some areas of sin and spiritual neglect in our lives that go unaddressed for years. I've found this to be true in my own life and in the lives of those in the Body of Christ. We come to a place where God reveals an ongoing sin in our lives that we've either grown accustomed to or simply were blind to, and we find out that God can remove that sinful habit or way of thinking. It's been my privilege to see God do this over the years. We are all in need of growing and changing no matter how far along we are in the Christian life.

There are areas of hardness in our lives. Tonight we need to be reminded of God's command in Hosea to soften our hearts in Hosea 10:12. He says we need to "break up your fallow ground."

Regeneration in the Old Testament

Hosea 10 is a passage addressed to God's people. When we speak of His people we are talking about people with regenerate hearts. As Paul said in the NT, not everyone born is Israel is a true Jew. There is a circumcision of heart that needs to take place in the hearts of people in the Old Testament. The saints of the Old Testament enjoyed the spiritual blessings of the new covenant. What changed in the New Covenant is the scope and depth of the blessing. God's Spirit in a mysteriously much greater and deeper way will be poured not just on Israel and those who join Israel, but upon "all flesh."

Yet and still it is my belief that the Old Covenant people experienced the blessings of the Spirit of God. YHWH wanted His people to experience the joy of His "rain" upon them. He calls them to a radical revolution! They are called to break the habits of the old life. He says: "break up your fallow ground" (Hosea 10:12).

Don't you know you have this problem of the hardness of hypocrisy. We think we are so far along in so many areas, but we need to again become like children and be humble. Let God teach us what the true problem is. And Hosea 10:1-8 tells us the true problem.

I. The Diagnosis of Hypocrisy, vs.1-8

The Problem Begins in the Heart

The diagnosis of hypocrisy begins in the heart. "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked. Who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

God has given Israel all the rich soil of His Word and prophets and the Temple worship to grow in. They are a fruitful vine. But they have a problem with the heart.

³ Charles Finney. Sermon, "Break Up the Fallow Ground."

We read in **Hosea 10:1-2**, “Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit. The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built; as his country improved, he improved his pillars. ²**Their heart is false.**”

Last week we saw that the real problem is not other people. It’s our heart!! We’ve been given so many blessings by God. We feel entitled to His blessing! I can tell you what we deserve: the entitlement of hell. But praise our merciful and loving God for not giving us what we deserve.

II. The **Remedy** for Hypocrisy, vs.9-12

God’s People Must Live Differently

God says something else too: His people must and will live differently. One good statement of the principle is in Paul’s second letter to Timothy: “But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: “The Lord knows those who are his,” and, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” (2 Tim. 2:19).

In Hosea the theme comes through as an appeal to God’s people. To those whose hearts were divided—who spoke of love when they were actually unfaithful, who pretended to be truthful while practicing falsehood, who posed as righteous while indulging in sin—God appeals for love, righteousness, and truth.⁴

1. Acknowledge Your Helplessness

Yahweh reveals that Israel has nothing to look forward to but a complete military collapse. **Hosea 10:9-10**, “From the days of Gibeah, you have sinned, O Israel; there they have continued. Shall not the war against the unjust overtake them in Gibeah? ¹⁰When I please, I will discipline them, and nations shall be gathered against them when they are bound up for their double iniquity.”

The Double-Minded King Saul of Gibeah

The text again returns to Gibeah. Obviously Gibeah is remembered as the place of depravity and civil war in its early years according to Judges 19-20. But this is also the fortress city of Saul, the epitome of Israel depending on a human king.

Gibeah is best known as the hometown of King Saul. Saul is the compromised king. He is double-hearted and double-tongued. **Saul’s Gibeah was a fortress-palace.** The fortress had a wall some 4 foot thick, and a tower. The fortress fell into decay after the reign of David, and it does not seem to have had great military significance during Hosea’s lifetime. Nevertheless, Gibeah’s role as a type for dependence on military might is vital for the message of this passage.⁵

Saul is an example of false repentance. We need to put away false repentance and self-righteousness, and compromise.

In referring to Gibeah here, God is showing both the **decadence** of Israel and its **dependence** on military strength. **Zech. 4:6** says it best: “Not by [military] might, nor by [the] strength [of man’s wisdom], but by my Spirit, says the Lord.”

The association of Gibeah with Saul, a king who relied heavily on force of arms but lacked David’s devotion to Yahweh, reinforces this association.

⁴ Ibid, 83.

⁵ Garrett, 214-216.

We Cannot Save Ourselves

The people of Israel will collapse. Assyria and Egypt we know overtook northern Israel. The Northern Kingdom of Israel was conquered by the Neo-Assyrian monarchs, Tiglath-Pileser III (Pul) and Shalmaneser V. The later Assyrian rulers Sargon II and his son and successor, Sennacherib, were responsible for finishing the twenty-year demise of Israel's northern ten-tribe kingdom, although they did not overtake the Southern Kingdom. Jerusalem was besieged, but not taken.

What we have naturally –in our own power – will always fail us. We cannot save ourselves. We need to see our own need of the Savior.

2. Consider How Far You Have Fallen.

These verses return to the metaphor of Israel as a farm. **Hosea 10:11**, “Ephraim was a trained calf that loved to thresh, and I spared her fair neck; but I will put Ephraim to the yoke; Judah must plow; Jacob must harrow [make plow rows] for himself.”

Trained Ox/Wiled Ox – At one time northern Israel was like a beloved and well trained farm animal – an ox that would faithfully do the master’s bidding. Threshing is a figurative picture of pleasant, productive, profitable labor. Israel had accustomed herself to this, from the fact that YHWH had bestowed His blessing upon her (Hos. 13:6).⁶ But now that sweet obedient threshing will now be done forcefully. Putting “Ephraim to the yoke,” etc., is a picture of the captivity Israel is about to endure. That trained ox became a wild ox that must be forced into the plow.

3. Repent of Your Sin – Break up the Hardened Ground of Your Heart!

Hosea 10:12, “Sow for yourselves righteousness; reap steadfast love; **break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord,** that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

This is very similar to **Hosea 6:3**, “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.”

From J I Packer: “No upsurge of religious interest or excitement merits the name of revival if there is no profound sense of sin at its heart. God's coming, and the consequent impact of His Word, makes Christians much more sensitive to sin than they previously were: consciences become tender and a profound humbling takes place. The perverseness, ugliness, uncleanness, and guilt of sin are seen and felt with new vividness.”

4. Start Sowing Godly Habits

Stop Planting Bad Seed – **Hosea 10:12**, “Sow for yourselves **righteousness; reap steadfast love; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord,** that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

The implication is that Israel wants only to plant bad seed in the land she has prepared. Yahweh exhorts Israel the strong heifer to produce fruit worthy of the people of God. The

⁶ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 10, p. 87). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

promise that God would come and rain down righteousness on the nation is an oracle of salvation.⁷

Sow for Yourselves Righteousness – We read, “Sow FOR yourselves...” In other words, no one can do it for you! The pastor can’t do it for you. Your spouse cannot do it for you. Parents can train and instruct, but they cannot do it for their children. We must sow for ourselves righteousness.

The heart of repentance is a change of mind that results in new habits. Stop planting sin – instead start planting what is right, and you will reap HESED: God’s relentless love.

The Apostle John’s Instructions – Righteousness and love are the two marks that John in 1 John speaks of as marks of true Christians. Some time before John’s writing, some of the more intellectual members of the Christian community had withdrawn from the believers’ fellowship to found a “church” of their own (cf. 1 John 2:19).⁸ The false teachers were very self focused and gloried in and emphasized intellectual knowledge to a fault. They said more important than anything is that you have the secret knowledge, that’s why they were called Gnostics (Greek for “knowledge”).

John wrote about eleven evidences of true believers to combat the Gnostic “antinomians.” Antinomian means “anti-law” and implies that you can call yourself a believer and have no rule for living or holiness of life.

The Practice of a Godly Life – Planting Righteousness – According to the apostle John, one of the marks of a true Christian is **the presence of practical righteousness in the believer’s life.**

1 John 3:4-8, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. ⁶No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. ⁷Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. ⁸Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning.”

This does not mean that a Christian must be without sin. In fact, John says that a person who claims to be without sin deceives himself and makes God out to be a liar, for God says that all sin (1:8, 10). It means that the one professing to know God must be progressing in righteousness so that his profession is increasingly matched by his conduct.⁹ A true Christian will always be “growing and changing in Christ.”

5. Reap God’s Steadfast Love

Hosea 10:12, “Sow for yourselves **righteousness**; reap **steadfast love**; break up your fallow ground, for it is the time to seek the Lord, that he may come and rain righteousness upon you.”

⁷ Garrett, *ibid.*

⁸ Boice, 83.

⁹ *Ibid.*

חֶסֶד [HESED] according to **Philip Schaff** is understood of the merciful covenant faithfulness of God. The harvest will, if they sow thus, be determined by the mercy of God and shall be bountiful and of good quality; this mercy itself shall be the harvest.¹⁰

Keil & Delitzsch say, “The fruit of sowing righteousness will be *chesed*, condescending love towards the poor and wretched... they are to give up all their previous course of conduct, and create for themselves a new sphere for their activity, i.e., commence a new course of life...”¹¹

God is saying: Make a complete surrender of your lives (*sow*) to live in harmony with your God and all its implications (*righteousness*) and the result (*reap*) will be a corresponding measure of his *unrelenting, faithful* (covenant) *love*.¹² We must note (as several commentators have) that this verse parallels Christ’s NT admonition of **Matthew 6:33**, “Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you.”

III. The **Result** of Hypocrisy, vs.13-15

If you decide you don’t want to soften your heart, then what are the consequences?

1. Self-Indulgence

Hosea 10:13a, “You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice...” The people of Israel thought they planted seeds of prosperity with the fertility cult. But it was nothing more than lawlessness. Iniquity is “lawlessness.” They’ve done what they felt like. Their feelings, not God’s law, has been their rule. It felt good.

And what do they reap? Injustice. The idea is crime or vandalism of themselves. They were planting the seeds of their own destruction.

Proverbs 14:12, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.

2. Self-Deception

What is the fruit they eat? The false fruit of lies... **Hosea 10:13-15**, “You have plowed iniquity; you have reaped injustice; you have eaten the fruit of lies [FALSE FRUIT].”

The fruit Israel grows and eats is “false fruit.”¹³ It will not satisfy. The fruit is deceiving. It looks satisfying, but actually is poisonous and inflicts disease.

3. Self-Rule

Hosea 10:13b, “Because you have trusted in your own way [SYSTEM] and in the multitude of your warriors,” Every person “did that which was right in their own eyes” (Judges 17:6).

The phrase “your system” (NIV: “your own strength”) implies everything that Israel had built itself upon, including the fertility cult, political alliances, military fortifications, and raw violence. Above all, it was the pride and glory of an ancient state, their army.¹⁴

4. Self Destruction

¹⁰ Lange, J. P., Schaff, P., Schmoller, O., & McCurdy, J. F. (2008). *A commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hosea* (p. 82). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

¹¹ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, 88.

¹² Hubbard, D. A. (1989). *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 24, p. 192). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

¹³ Garrett, 217

¹⁴ Ibid.

Hosea 10:14, “therefore the **tumult of war** shall arise among your people, and all your fortresses shall be destroyed, as **Shalman** destroyed Beth-arbel on the day of battle; mothers were dashed in pieces with their children.”

Some have said that “**Shalman**” is the Assyrian monarch **Shalmaneser**. Beth-arbel is a town in Galilee where it is likely that the Assyrian king decimated the population as a warning sign. **Beth-arbel** means “the house of God’s court.”

God sent a warning to Israel. Since they did not listen, then what happens? **Hosea 10:15**, “Thus it shall be done to you, O **Bethel**, because of your great evil. At dawn the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off.”

Has God sent you any warning signs? Have things gone wrong in your life? Do you get angry at those around you, or do you get humble before God? Break up your hardened heart. Soften your heart! You are not able autonomously to do so, but God can do it through His Word, through fellowship, through prayer, and all the means of grace.

Conclusion

What’s the conclusion? God wants to rain His righteousness on us. Christ has paid it all. He wants us legally righteous, but also to have a transformed heart that pants after righteousness. This is true repentance!

Do you have an umbrella of sin over you that needs to go? Repentance precedes revival! Do you want revival? At what price? Are you willing to have clean hands and a pure heart? That’s the price of entrance into God’s holy hill!