

## Hosea 10:9-15

### Time to Seek the Lord

*Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you – v. 12.*

Hosea stands out from the other prophets in an unusual way. His broken marriage serves to illustrate the message that he would proclaim. The theme of the book that bears his name is *God's Love Spurned but Constant* – according to the editors of the KJ Study Bible. I think this statement very concisely captures the theme of the book and other commentators for the most part express the same idea but not as precisely.

In the first 3 chapters of the book you find Hosea being commanded to take to himself a wife of whoredoms. Hosea obeys and takes Gomer as his wife. Unfortunately she behaves in a manner consistent with her character and she leaves Hosea and goes back to her immoral ways. But rather than put her away, Hosea, at the command of the Lord takes her back. And so the prophet's unhappy marriage life serves to illustrate the covenant faithfulness of God. Like the prophet's wife, the Israelites abandon the Lord and engage in all manner of false religion and idolatry along with the immorality that accompanied idolatry.

But still the Lord desires to keep Israel. If you could picture the prophet being heart-broken over the unfaithfulness of his wife, so is the Lord heart-broken and jealous for His people. And so He admonishes them through the prophet to repent and return to Him. And He warns them of the judgment to come should they continue in their spiritual infidelity. And in the midst of such pleadings and warnings there comes the words of our text this morning – *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*

A simple analysis of this verse reveals 3 commands that come from the Lord. There is the command to sow – *Sow to yourselves in righteousness*; there is the command to reap – *reap in mercy*; and there is the command to break up – *break up your fallow ground*. There follows a compelling reason for obeying these commands. Notice what the text goes on to say: *for it is time to seek the LORD.*

I think there's a close connection between the commands and the reason that follows. Indeed when you look at that statement *it is time to seek the LORD* you might say that this statement is a concise restatement of what has already been said. It's as if the Lord could have said *Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, break up your fallow ground for it is time to sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy, and it is time to break up your fallow ground.* But rather than restate the 3 commands the Lord instead abbreviates the matter by saying that it's time to seek the Lord.

Now if my analysis of the verse is correct then it leads to the conclusion that seeking the Lord amounts to sowing to yourselves in righteousness, reaping in mercy and breaking up your fallow ground. These 3 things become elements if you will to seeking the Lord. Now

what I would like to do this morning in preparing our hearts to remember the Lord around His table, is to call your attention to this matter of seeking the Lord. You could certainly make the same argument today that the prophet made in his day that it is time for the people of God to seek the Lord. I need not go into the analogies that could be drawn from Hosea's day to our day. Both present to us times of spiritual infidelity and compromise, apostasy and worldliness. But let's not think this morning so much on a broad scale when it comes to our text.

We can also make the application on a personal level. I don't know what you've been through this past week. I don't know what besetting sins may have overcome you; I don't know how much the world managed to dominate your affections, or how much you may have neglected time in the word or time in prayer, but whatever the case may be with you, *it is time to seek the Lord*. The very fact that we are here this morning in the Lord's house on the Lord's day, among the Lord's people about to partake of the Lord's table – All this means that *it is time to seek the Lord*.

That is my theme, then, this morning. As we are gathered for worship and gathered to remember the broken body and shed blood of Jesus it becomes very appropriate to say very simply and directly:

## It Is Time To Seek the Lord

And the question I'll answer this morning in my analysis of the text is how – how do you seek the Lord? Consider with me first of all that we seek the Lord:

### I. By Facing the Condition the Text Presents

When the Lord says *break up your fallow ground*. He's not commanding the Israelites to go till their untilled fields. Fallow ground is ground that has not been prepared for planting. It's barren ground and it's hard soil. And the Lord is drawing a spiritual analogy from hard untilled soil to describe a heart condition that was prevalent among the Israelites.

Their hearts were hard – that's the meaning of fallow ground. Their hearts had become calloused and hard especially to the things of God and to God Himself. In Isaiah 6:10, following that vision of the glory of Jehovah where the prophet beholds the very angels of heaven covering their faces and their feet as they cry out or perhaps even sing *Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory* (Isa. 6:3), Isaiah is commissioned to go to Judah.

So we read in vv. 9,10: *And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.*

Here is a good description of the spiritual meaning of fallow ground – hearts that are fat, or as another version renders it dull or insensitive. And such is their condition that though they hear they don't understand, and though they see they don't perceive. Their ears are heavy, you see, and their eyes are shut.

This is not a hard condition to recognize in our own day or in our own hearts. Basically this is a heart condition that hears the gospel but is not impacted by the gospel. This is a condition that sees Christ as He's presented in the gospel but is not affected by Christ, not even by Christ crucified. His broken body and shed blood don't mean much to you. You can actually gaze on Him dying in your place and yawn at what the scene of Calvary means.

Fallow ground is a condition to be dreaded. It's a condition to be feared. When you consider that verse in Isaiah 6 and then you find that verse fulfilled during the time of Christ you learn that such a heart condition becomes a matter of judgment. If the soil is not plowed, you see, there comes a time when God leaves a man to his heart condition. The man at best was a stony ground hearer or a wayside ground hearer. The word may have had an impact on such a man at one time but given enough time other things rule his heart, whether those things be the deceitfulness of riches or the cares of the world.

And would you notice from the text how personal the Lord makes the application when he says *break up your fallow ground*. He does not call on us to look around at others. He does not call on us to make broad applications to the spiritual state of the nation. He calls on us to search our own hearts. One of the biggest challenges we face as Christians, you see, is the challenge of seeing the beam in our own eyes before we try to remove the mote from the eye of our brothers or sisters in Christ.

And if you're honest this morning, then don't you have to acknowledge that you're familiar with the spiritual condition that is described in the text. You don't have to scratch your head and wonder what the preacher is talking about when he describes fallow ground. You know this condition. You've experienced this condition. You may have come to the Lord's house this morning in this condition. Wouldn't you agree that as you find yourself in this condition that it's time to seek the Lord which would include breaking up your fallow ground.

You won't begin to take the right steps toward overcoming that condition until you acknowledge that condition and one of the things we're to do around the Lord's table is to search our hearts and to search them for such a condition as is symbolized by fallow ground. *For if we would judge ourselves*, Paul writes in 1Cor. 11:31 *we should not be judged*. There's a sense in which the Israelites were being given the opportunity to do the very thing that Paul calls on the saints at Corinth to do – judge yourselves. Invite the Lord to search your heart and bring to your awareness your heart condition and then deal with it by confessing it to God and pleading the blood of Christ over it and begging God to give you the victory over it.

And if you find yourself having to admit that the text is describing your heart this morning then you should beg God not to leave you in such a condition. *Oh Lord leave not to the kind of heart condition that sees and hears and yet is not effected by the glorious truths of the gospel.*

So this is the heart condition that must be faced, the condition that is pictured by soil that is unplowed and has become hard. Now there's a sense in which the first two commands in the verse show us the means to overcoming this heart condition. In other words the way to heed the 3<sup>rd</sup> command of the verse is to apply yourself to the first 2 commands of the verse. Simply put – if you would break up your fallow ground then you must sow to yourselves in righteousness and reap and then reap in mercy.

And this leads to our next consideration from the text. If you would seek the Lord, and now I would add – If you would break up your fallow ground while in the process of seeking the Lord, you must do so:

## II. By Submitting to the Scrutiny of God's Law

God's law, you see, is where righteousness is to be found. So Paul describes it in Ro 7:12 where he writes: *Wherefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.* The word *just* in this verse means literally *righteous*. The law is holy and righteous and good.

And yet in that same chapter, Rom. 7, Paul describes what we might call a spiritual law. This law is found not in a commandment or statute or precept but it's a spiritual law of reality. You might liken it to the law of gravity. The law of gravity is in effect at all times and so is this spiritual that Paul gives us in Rom. 7:21 *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*

This is why we could never be justified by the law of God. Our best efforts are tainted by sin. So how do we sow to ourselves in righteousness? We do so by scrutinizing ourselves by that law that is holy and just and good. Take the 10 commandments for example, for there you have the best summary statement of the moral law of God.

Have you truly had no other god but the true and living God as the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment calls for you to do? Have you been free from idolatry which is the sin of exalting anything above God – including things like wealth or health or entertainment. These are things that can have their rightful place in the Christian's life. I'm not about to suggest that there's no place for recreation or entertainment or that we should be careless with regard to our health or the money we make. It's only when these things rule our hearts that we become guilty of idolatry. And perhaps the surest way to test yourself as to how much the world rules your heart is to ask yourself – how does my pursuit of the things of this world compare to the way I seek the Lord? Do you pray? Do you spend time in God's word? Does God have your heart or do other things have your heart? Oh believer, sow to yourself in righteousness and seek the Lord for the grace and wisdom that's needed to be honest with yourself before God.

And how about your use of the Lord's name? I hope you don't take the name of the Lord in vain. I hope that you are jealous for the honor of that name. The name of Christ, after all is a name that is exalted above every name and every knee will bow to that name and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

And how about the Lord's day? Do you make the best use of that day? I remember reading many years ago the biography of General Douglas MacArthur. He's the famous general of World War II that pledged that he would return to the Philippines when he was forced to evacuate from it. That same book tells of how when General MacArthur was the President of West Point where soldiers are trained to be officers that he observed how bored all the cadets were on Sundays. Seems like they had no clue how to sanctify the Lord's Day and so rather than seek the counsel of godly men or godly chaplains who might have given suggestions on how to honor the Lord's day, MacArthur instead simply nullified the commandment altogether. That's a shame but if you don't know how to sanctify the day then it would seem reasonable that you simply dismiss the commandment altogether.

Oh that we might learn to be better observers of the Lord's day. It's not enough, you know, to simply take the day off from work. That's certainly a part of it. Indeed, God Himself set the example of resting after He had finished the 6 days of creation. And it wasn't because He needed rest. No, He knew that we needed rest. He knew how He created man. And I should say here that keeping one day in seven for the Lord is not so much a Mosaic commandment as it is a creation commandment and one that was put in place before man even fell into sin.

Now I've just covered the first table of the law. Sowing to yourself in righteousness means applying that table to your life. You'd do well to focus on our shorter catechism questions and answers that pertain to the 10 commandments. That section of the catechism gives you a very good analysis of what to do and what to avoid. And don't forget the second table of the law.

Have you killed this week? Have you killed anyone through unjust anger which is the sin of the heart behind the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment? Have you been faithful in all your relations? Have you stolen? Have you slandered? Have you coveted another man's goods? So to yourselves in righteousness. And I dare say that where you truly sow to yourself in righteousness you will come to experience conviction of sin.

I'm reminded of that scene in the book of Nehemiah, chp. 8 where all the people were gathered together for the reading of the law. And the law was read in their presence from morning till noon. Listen to the impact that reading had on the people. This is given to us in Neh. 8:8,9: *So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law.*

What a vivid picture of sowing to themselves in righteousness. They heard the law and the law brought to their hearts conviction of sin, conviction that caused them to weep. This is what you and I must do. This contributes to breaking up our fallow ground. This is a part of seeking the Lord. And this is the process whereby we may overcome or prevent hard heartedness.

How, then, do we seek the Lord? We do so by facing the condition the text presents, which is the condition of fallow ground or hard heartedness. And then we sow to ourselves in righteousness by applying the law of God to our lives. And then finally we seek the Lord:

### III. By Applying the Gospel to Ourselves

*Sow to yourselves in righteousness* our text says, *reap in mercy*. This is what really brings us to the table of the Lord. Where are you going to find mercy after you've sown to yourself in righteousness? You're going to find it in the broken body and shed blood of Jesus Christ.

You're going to find mercy in Christ's atoning death. You're going to find it in the salvation that only Christ could provide. And you'll find that mercy of the gospel in the knowledge that Christ didn't set aside righteousness in order to deal with you in mercy, no, rather, He fulfilled righteousness. *Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets*, He says in Mt. 5:17 *I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil*.

And it is His fulfilling of all righteousness that opens the flood gate for mercy. So we read in Rom. 5:19 *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous*. And the obedience in this verse makes reference to the obedience of Christ's life and Christ's death. So we read in Phil. 2:8 *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross*.

This is why we remember through the bread of communion that He was found in fashion as a man. And this is why we remember in the cup of communion that His obedience took Him all the way to Calvary's cross where He shed His blood for our sins. Do you begin to see, then, how we break up our fallow ground when it comes to seeking the Lord? We sow to ourselves in righteousness by opening our hearts to the Holy Spirit's application of the law to our lives. We invite Him to convict us of our sins and we do so knowing what the Psalmist says in Ps. 130:3,4 *If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared*.

And so these two things work together to break up our fallow ground. The law convicts us of our sins but the gospel convinces us of Christ's love. I return to that scene I described earlier from Neh. 8 where the law was read and the people wept. Before that day was over, they were admonished not to weep but to send presents to each other and to rejoice. Listen to the words of Neh. 8:10:

*Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength.*

Do you see how this completes the picture of sowing in righteousness, reaping in mercy, and breaking up fallow ground? They heard, they believed, they understood not only the moral law but the ceremonial law of sacrifice that pointed them to the coming Messiah. It needs to work the same way for you and me.

Oh may we indeed, then, around this communion table sow to ourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy and break up our fallow ground and so seek the Lord and may we do so as the text says *till he come and rain righteousness upon you.*