

Scripture Introduction: Turn in your copies of God's word to Hosea chapters 6 and 7. If you don't have a copy of God's word, there are some free ones on the brown bookshelf in the coat room. As you turn there, let me set the stage for you. It's the eighth century before Christ, on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, in the northern kingdom of Israel. At least six times in Hosea's lifetime an Assyria army has marched into or through Israel. And there's a thirty year period where Israel had six different kings. There was murder, assassination, a puppet kingdom, another assassination, and a finally a rebellion leading to the extinction of the northern kingdom.

Then there's Hosea the prophet's marital situation. God had told him to take a whore for a wife to help Hosea understand what it was like to be God covenanted to Israel. Gomer, Hosea's wife gave birth to some children that were not Hosea's children. Then at a certain point Hosea has to cobble together the price to buy Gomer back from the unscrupulous men whom she was indebted to.

For the rest of the context I invite you to listen to the series on sermonaudio.com if you haven't heard it already.

Prayer of Illumination:

Scripture Reading: Hosea 6 & 7

Introduction: Two wounds

Imagine yourself lying down, a gaping wound across your abdomen. Looking down, what would be your response? What would be the thoughts running through your mind? Well, it depends on which kind of wound it was and who gave it. If it was given by a wild animal intent on tearing you and sadistically playing with you before eating you...you'd be terrified, utterly distressed and attempting to deliver yourself. But if you were on a delivery table being given a C-section, you'd be excited, thrilled that new life was coming out of you and into your arms. Well, to be fair, us guys would also be terrified if we were having a C-section.

But that's how our passage today begins, with the Lord tearing his people, but to what end? Is God like a sadistic wild animal, torturing us for his play? Or is he

merely a just judge, slicing us open because that's what we have done to him? Or is he the good doctor, tearing us to deliver us, cutting us to heal us, knocking us out so that he can work on us?

What's the longest you've been knocked out? put to sleep? I was put to sleep for less than an hour to have my wisdom teeth pulled, maybe an hour to have my tonsils and adenoids taken out. But what if you needed a heart transplant? What if you needed brain surgery? The more serious your condition the more time will be needed for your surgery and recovery. So the longer you're put to sleep the worse your problem was.

Israel's problem was really bad. They deserved to be torn apart. They deserved to be put to sleep. The northern kingdom of Israel was basically founded on idol worship. They set up two temples of their own design in direct opposition to the divinely sanctioned temple in Jerusalem, so as to keep commerce and travel within the northern kingdom. After that it got worse. King after king, who outwardly alleged to follow the true god, went after idols, set up altars, intermarried with foreign women, stole land from God's people and killed God's people. God sent them prophet after prophet but they would not listen, rather they would kill the true prophets and surround themselves with false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear, that their sin was not so bad that it would have catastrophic consequences. But it was. and it did.

Fallen Condition Focus: Likewise, our sin is really bad, so bad it will have catastrophic consequences. Now there's many ways in which we are in a different situation now. We are not under a king but ostensibly we are in a republic. The government of our nation is not, never has been, outwardly submitted to God and all his commands. The people of God in this nation do not struggle with idol worship in the way that Israel did. We do not have asherah poles or altars across the land. And because there is separation between church and state we do not have struggles on the same magnitude with power corrupting the church. But we do still struggle with sin in this country and in this epoch of Christianity, and in this denomination, and in this body.

But how badly do we struggle with sin? How badly do we **still** struggle with sin? To answer that question we must first admit that sin is insidious, it pretends to be good. It hides itself, even deep within our subconscious. Sometimes sin seems right. Sometimes it seems wise to go against God's commands, that God's commands are antiquated, out of date, foolish. And even when we are convinced that we do sin in disobeying God's commands, our sinful nature tempts us to diagnose the problem as far less severe than it really is. Our own analysis of our sin turns out to be a faulty gauge. We grade ourselves on a steep curve finding each offense to be slight in comparison with others. So we have to look to God's word for a more accurate assessment of our sin.

What is sin and how bad is the diagnosis? Because sin is a spiritual malady and largely immune to exact quantification it is right that the Lord, through Hosea, should paint pictures in our mind, metaphors of our spiritual state. So we will look at our sin through six pictures in order that we might see what sin is and how bad the diagnosis is. And we will see God through several verbal pictures as well.

Proposition: What God's word will prove to us this morning is that our sin is so severe that God must take drastic measures to save us.

6:1-3 God, the good doctor. First, let us focus on a picture of the Lord as a doctor, as a healer, and by so doing, let that picture cause us to desire to return to the Lord. "He has torn us," The hebrew word here, *taraf*, is as drastic as it sounds. It's used to refer to wild animals tearing things in pieces. And God is doing it here. God's judgment on our sin is drastic. God has dealt drastically with you in your sin at times. Be assured he will deal drastically with sin. The punishment your sin deserves is tearing and worse. And if you continue in your sin, He will tear you and go away as he says in 5:14. But if you return to the Lord, he will tear you, to heal you. Just like a good doctor has to open you up in order to do surgery, so too the Lord's intention toward his people is good, purposeful, and healing. Because of your sin, the medicine, the therapy, the surgery, the anesthesia is harsh. But the Lord's intention is to heal you, fix you, reform you. Will you turn from your sin? If you're having some troubles right now the temptation can be to be mad at God. God is sovereign over you situation but your trouble, the tearing sensation

you have in your life is frequently associated with your sin, and a necessary part of God's curing you of your idolatries by ripping them out of your hands. (Now we know from the book of Job and the life of Jesus that just because you receive a harsh sentence from the Lord in the flesh does not always indicate the measure of your sin.)

"After two days he will revive us," How do we know that the Lord will revive? It's hard to submit to the need for surgery, general anesthesia, or chemotherapy. How much harder would it be if you had repeatedly and terribly wronged the doctor who was about to administer your treatment. You're sitting there on the operating table and the doc says "You remember that time when you killed my son? Yeah, now I'm going to put you to sleep and cut you up." It's hard to trust the doctor in that type of situation. But we have good reason to trust God in spite of our sin. We have living proof that he has the power to heal even the most severe disease, death. He raised his son, Jesus, from the dead. Jesus died on Friday, the Lord raised him on Sunday. It's why we're here, on this day. It's why millions of people all over the globe gather on this day, the day of resurrection, because we believe that Jesus died and was raised up and because of that we have hope that we too will be raised up on the last day.

This is the gospel, God took drastic measures to save you from your sin. He sent his son from heaven to live poor on earth and then he sent him to die a cursed, cruel, criminal's death on a cross. Then, all the powers of hell could not stop the Lord from raising his son from the grave. Jesus took upon himself all the sins of the saints; he took upon himself all the sentences for all the sin, satisfied them, and rose again. So when the Lord says he will raise us up, he will raise us up. Our sin cannot stop that if we are in Christ because in Christ all our sin has been sentenced and satisfied.

To help your imagination wrap your mind around this truth Hosea paints two pictures about the certainty of restoration.

1. **As sure as the dawn:** "His motzav is as sure as the dawn;" a better translation would be His arising, His springing up, is as sure as the dawn. Tomorrow's dawn is so certain we don't even think about it. We don't

worry about it. We assume it. His arising, our arising in Him, is the same way. It will come, as surely as tomorrow's dawn. You don't even need to question it.

2. **As inevitable as rain:** Verse 3 says "He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." This is a Hebrew parallelism and he's talking about one thing, rain. Showers are not as punctual as the dawn but they do come. For the Israelites, the spring rains do come. Sometimes you must wait, and wait, and wait. But the Lord does send rain. So it will be with his coming. It may not be as predictable as the dawn but he will come. And his coming will be as effective, as life-giving as rain-showers.

Do you believe this? Do you believe God is good? Do you believe he will return? Do you believe He will bring life? He will return. If you don't know the Lord, come to know him. If you know the Lord, press on to know the Lord more deeply.

6:4-6 Morning Cloud Listen to how God's talking "What shall I do with you O Israel? What shall I do with you O Judah?" Doesn't God sound like an exasperated parent? Before we get into what is causing this exasperation it is important to note that Israel and Judah are both doing it. Israel was founded on idol worship and didn't have a single good king but Judah had departed from the Lord too. Because they were slightly more faithful than the northern kingdom they really looked down their nose at the northern kingdom. But Hosea is alleging that both northern and southern kingdom are alike in their sin. So it begs the question, could God also say to us "What shall I do with you O Church?" Let's see.

What's causing the exasperation? Morning cloud like love. Is our love like a morning cloud? What's a morning cloud? Sometimes when I come to church early in the morning there is a cloud covering the reservoir, sometimes it even surrounds the bridges. But then the sun rises and it burns the clouds all away. Is our love for God like that? Here one moment and gone the next. Ah, I must answer yes. In the morning I rise, intent on submitting all my ways to Him but by the hour of nine I have trusted in my own strength and knowledge a hundred different ways.

So what does the Lord do? What solution does he apply? His word. He sends prophets to speak his word and bring conviction, verse 5. He is right, and like the light he reveals what lies in darkness through the power of his word.

So what is the opposite of "morning cloud love?" Steadfast love. *Hesed*. Faithful lovingkindness. And Hosea contrasts that with sacrifice, burnt offerings. What's so bad about sacrifice? I thought burnt offerings were an appropriate show of faith, thanksgiving, and repentance. Why does the Lord contrast these two things? What the Lord hates is showy religion. He hates it when people think they can buy his favor. If people are giving money instead of their heart, that's offensive to Him and that's what sacrifice had become, a show of righteousness, and an excuse for sin.

6:7-10 **Armed robbery**: Israel's actual sin seemed to be actual armed robbery. But many more could be accused of being like armed robbers in their approach to money and the church. It seems that the priests had either conspired with robbers to forcibly relieve people of their goods on their way to sacrifice or the priests were just robbing people themselves. So it seems that the priests knew when, where, and maybe even who was traveling along what roads to bring sacrifices or money for sacrifices and they would use that knowledge for evil, murderous evil to take money meant for God and spend it on themselves.

Sin this bad doesn't happen overnight. When the priests whose existence and office was meant to call people to holiness were instead using their office to murder people, the situation has evolved to catastrophic levels. But before sin boils over in this way it usually is present below the surface in a number of ways that we still struggle with. Firstly, there are religious leaders who use their office to feed off of the sheep. They begin to use guilt, information, and privilege to suck more money out of their flock for their own personal use. Sometimes there is cutting of corners with the books, with the taxes, that leaves congregations vulnerable. Or sometimes leaders are tempted not to speak a hard truth to someone for fear they might leave and take their tithe with them. This is the beginning of terrible sin.

What if you're merely a member of a church in postmodern America, is robbery an accurate picture of our sin? I'm afraid so. National numbers on tithing, giving to the church, would only confirm what our hearts and our checkbooks reveal. Listen to God's rebuke of the people in Malachi 3.

Malachi 3:8-12 8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. 11 I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. 12 Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

So Israel's sin and ours is like a morning cloud. Israel's sin and ours is like robbery. As we bring our lives under the microscope of God's scrutiny our sin looks more and more despicable.

6:11-7:3 Evil deeds: Regardless of how despicable we find our sin, if something is working for us we tend to still use it. So Hosea writes a few words about how sin accomplishes all sorts of things you wouldn't want it to. Before I get to that, it would be prudent to note, as Hosea does in verse 11, that there is a harvest appointed when God brings restoration. What's a harvest? Isn't it a good thing? What's to fear? Well, harvest is a cutting down. You may pass some fields in this season being harvested. Corn cut down. The corn will be used, everything else will be thrown away. A cutting down is coming. Will you be found useful or tossed aside?

1. **prevent restoration:** Scary, gutwrenching, convicting and gracious is 7:1. When I would heal Israel... It is a when, not an if. Hallelujah. In spite of all their sin. God would restore. Unbelievable unmerited grace but "when he would heal, more sin is revealed." Yikes. That's the worst. Someone moves toward you in grace and forgiveness and comes to find out your sin was so much worse than previously understood. Our sin doesn't absolutely

prevent restoration but in a temporal way it can. As we cling to our sin, restoration is kept away. Let it not be so with us.

2. **God remembers them:** Stealing in secret and stealing out in the open wouldn't be such a temptation if you knew it would certainly go on your record and you'd be brought into court. But that's exactly what happens according to the Lord. Sinful gain promises impunity, immunity, invisibility but it doesn't deliver. It cannot. This is a moral universe created by a holy God. He will have justice. Your sins are not secret. God remembers them. Your slate is not clean. He remembers all the evil...of his own people. Yikes.
3. **They surround you:** Sometimes we think we can sin and move on. One would think that our own deeds are not our worst enemies. But look how Hosea describes Israel's deeds in verse 2. They surround them. That sounds sinister even dangerous. It is. Because, our sins are not safe.
4. **They make wicked rulers glad:** Who here likes wicked rulers? Who wants to make wicked rulers happy? Then keep on sinning. When you sin you play right into a wicked ruler's hands. Addicted to sin of one kind or another? A wicked ruler can use that. You're easier to buy off, blackmail, entertain, distract, denigrate, or despise. As you remain entangled in sin, you are not very much of a threat to them. But as you cast off sin, as you pursue righteousness and holiness, as you take a principled stand against ungodliness in your own life evil rulers won't be so glad.

7:4-7:7 Overheated Oven Have you ever left a fire going? How long did it take to go out by itself? What if it was ceramically insulated, like a kiln, or brick oven? The heat stays even after the flame is gone. And even when the flame is gone from a fire, it can come back. Israel is being described as a brick or terracotta oven with a fire started but untended. The heat generated from such an oven is able to cook things, stew things, and able to kindle a fire again, given fresh fuel. Hosea uses this image to describe how the hearts of the people of Israel simmer hot with sin and merely wait for an opportunity to express. Sin may express itself in adultery, idolatry, mockery, revelry, and revenge when we leave untended the fire of sin in our souls.

Hosea is making an astute and scathing political commentary on the rulers of the northern kingdom. "All of them are hot as an oven, and they devour their rulers. All their kings have fallen, and none of them calls upon me." Israel's problem wasn't one bad ruler. Israel's problem wasn't even a list of bad rulers. Israel's problem was Israel. So too, our problem isn't a bad leader, or a list of bad leaders. Our problem is us. Your problem is you. Regime change didn't help Israel, it reflected Israel's ruination. Warring kings, coups, and assassinations were symptoms of Israel's sinfulness not the source. So be on guard. Watch yourself. Don't think mere regime change will save you or your nation.

7:8-10 Burnt Cake : Think about how you make a pancake. First you have to mix the batter: free range eggs, milk, whole wheat flour, oats, brown sugar, salt, baking powder, baking soda, lemon juice. Then you have to butter the griddle and pour the batter on. Then you have to wait and flip it. Then you take it off, sprinkle some powdered sugar on it, maybe some maple syrup, then you devour it.

Hosea is using this image to describe Israel, but without all the positive connotations. Israel is mixed but that's not a good thing. They were explicitly told not to intermarry with pagans because their hearts would be turned away from God, but they did. Israel is like a cake unturned, but again that is not a good thing, it's like a pancake unturned. Burnt on one side and undone on the other. It is indeed sprinkled but not with sugar with gray hair. Israel's sin is getting old and he's getting old in his sin. Finally, Israel is devoured by strangers, by foreign countries. Why? Because he will not turn to the Lord. He is unturned because he will not turn. He will not return to the Lord. Therefore he is devoured. But the worst part is he knows it not. It's one thing to be an old burnt half eaten cake. It's another thing to be an old burnt half eaten cake and think you're fine.

7:11-13 Dumb Bird : Hosea continues his rebuke of Israel's foreign policy. Israel would turn to Egypt to escape Assyrian oppression. Then Israel would turn to Assyria to escape Egyptian oppression. You can see how this policy would be damaging to Israel. This policy was also damning to Israel for all the while they're shrewdly playing Assyria off of Egypt and Egypt off of Assyria never are they

turning to the Lord. Assyria and Egypt are not the only one's capable of protecting Israel.

Israel is like a dumb dove. How stupid would it be for a dove to say "The hawk is threatening so I will get the eagle to protect me." The eagle is dangerous too, eagles are carnivorous predators you silly bird.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, have we not be caught in the same foul logic. We turn to one distraction to help us escape another distraction. We run from one bad relationship into the arms of another bad relationship. We stop abusing one substance by abusing another substance. All the while we forget the Lord who is mighty to save. Just because you can't see him doesn't mean he isn't there. But why do we do that? Why do we prefer another abuse another predator to the Lord? Because we believe falsehood about him. We believe the lie of the devil that he is not there, that he cannot save, that he isn't enough, that he doesn't love us, that he hasn't really told us, that he hasn't really freed us.

If you continue in this foolish policy, as Israel did, who will you get to help you escape the wrath of God? What power can you run to escape Him? Where can you go to flee from His Spirit? Noone. Nowhere. It is a fool's errand. Stop flitting about from worldly pleasure to worldly pleasure, from worldly power to worldly power. They cannot save. And when all are brought low, who will save you from the God you purposely ignored? Stray no longer. Rebel no longer. Speak lies no longer. Return to Him.

7:14-16 Treacherous Bow Hosea likens Israel to a bow that endangers its wielder. How can a bow endanger its wielder? By being inaccurate. You can also ram an arrow through your hand or your foot if the bow is tricky and you're not careful. That's the kind of danger Israel is to the Lord, they pierce him. They shoot themselves in the foot. They cut themselves as they go after idols. They endanger themselves as they take up swords against foreigners. It was the Lord who gave them arms in the first place, figuratively and literally. Yet they were intent on not honoring him with the use of arms. The Israelites were pursuing military might? What did the Lord warn them about in Deuteronomy? What did Jesus warn his disciples about in the garden? All who take the sword will perish by the sword.

And in Deuteronomy 17:16 "Only he must not acquire many horses for himself...that his heart might not be lifted up above his brothers." Trust in military strength is a distrust of the Lord. When you become a weapon, you become a target. And when you amass military might you're tempted to think yourself better than others, above the law, and you become the oppressor. May it not be so among us Christians. Rather let us trust in the Lord. Long has it been said "Peace through strength." Ronald Reagan said it. Bernard Baruch said it. Emperor Hadrian said it. But I ask you Peace through whose strength? Behold the Lord says "I trained and strengthened their arms." Yet did Israel trust in their God's strength? Do we? It is to our downfall if we don't. Trust in the Lord Christian. He is our rock, our hiding place, our strength, our stronghold, our fortress. He alone.

Conclusion: 2 Reactions: As you are hearing Hosea make his case against Israel there are two ways to react. You could be saying "I'm just like Israel. I see my own sin pictured in front of me." Or you could be saying "That's not me. I don't struggle with the same things in the same ways as Israel did."

Let me speak first to those who feel that these pictures of sin mirror their own experience. If you could say that your love for the Lord was like a morning cloud, your attitude toward wealth like a robber, your heart like an oven for sin, your reputation like an old burnt cake, your strategy for dealing with life like that of a dumb bird, and your usefulness to the Lord like that of a treacherous bow. If that's you. There's hope. The Lord eventually restored Israel when they returned to Him. He himself returned to Israel in Jesus. Your sin was so bad he took drastic measures to save you, namely sending his only beloved son to suffer and die for your sins. It shows how awful your sins were when we look at what it took to free you. And now God calls sinners everywhere to repentance. Return to him and you will be saved. He will raise us up that we may live before him.

If you hear these accusations and you say, that's not me. That could be for two reasons. If you are still trusting in your own strength thinking you're fine, a sinner so blinded as to not even see your own sin. Woe to you, for you have strayed. Destruction to you for you have rebelled against your maker. Judgment is coming.

But if you are in Christ, he does powerfully free you from the power of sin. And it could be that these pictures don't describe you because of the amazing work that God has already wrought in your life through the power of the Holy Spirit. It could be that you are both convicted and amazed at how far God has brought you. You may already follow in his ways, trusting in him instead of your own strength, submitting yourself to be a useful tool in the hands of the almighty through obedience and faith. You may already give of the firstfruits of your labor to the Lord faithfully because you know all that you have is from him. You may already carefully steward God's resources given into your care because you know there will be a final accounting. You may already douse the fires of sin in your heart with the wonderful promises of God, the disarming power of grace, and the life giving balm of the Spirit. You may already guard your reputation, doing all work as unto the Lord, not mixing with the world in foolish ways. You may already know how foolish it is to turn to one idolatry to avoid another and therefore you trust in the Lord to save you. If this is you Hallelujah. The Lord has done a marvelous work in you already. Thanks be to God. he has accomplished it all by the righteousness of his son that he has freely given you in grace.