

Half-Hearted Repentance

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[0 : 00] as we consider these words. Let's pray. Gracious Father, we acknowledge again that you are holy, holy, holy.

That there is no stain or darkness or sin in you. And so your word is perfect and pure. Father, even when it opens us up in ways that are uncomfortable and painful.

Father, we know that you only do us good. That out of your steadfast love, O Lord, you challenge and rebuke and convict. So Lord, we pray, speak now.

And by your word, would you remind us of who you are and who we are in the light of who Christ is. For it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Well, I wonder if you have a go-to image of God, what you think God is like. The Bible gives us lots of imagery for us to understand who God is.

[1 : 05] I guess some of the more common ones. The king of the cosmos who rules over all things. Or an artisan in his workshop creating, crafting things with beauty and precision.

Or the shepherd who guards his people and guides and feeds his flock. Well, Hosea has filled out our bank of images, if you like, quite a bit, hasn't he, when it comes to God.

God is like a cheated husband, he said. He will not give up his runaway bride. God is like a prosecutor bringing charges against those who have wronged him.

Hosea has shown us God as we don't often see him. Perhaps we're hearing God speak in ways we've never heard him speak before. One of the things the prophets do for us is stop us from domesticating God, putting him in a box, bringing him down to a level that we are comfortable with. Instead, the prophets shock us into a fresh recognition of who God is in his fullness. And our passage today, which we began back at the end of chapter 5, begins with a really shocking picture of God.

[2 : 29] Last time we heard God bring his devastating case against Israel, that there was no faithfulness, no love, no knowledge of God in the land. We saw it's a charge they can't run or hide from.

So now God pictures himself, Luke, as a predator hunting down his prey. I will be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah.

I will tear them to pieces and go away. I will carry them off with no one to rescue them. Then I will return to my lair until they have borne their guilt and seek my face.

If you've seen video clips of lions hunting, you know how terrifying an image this is. The sheer power and speed of the king of the beasts hunting down the prey, throwing it to the ground, dragging it back to home isn't something that we want to be on the receiving end of.

God is not mincing his words here as he friends. He comes for our hearts like a lion on the hunt. His love is fierce. And perhaps as we hear those words this morning, we feel like Lucy in the Chronicles of Narnia when she hears that Aslan is in fact a lion and she asks, is he quite safe?

[3 : 57] Safe? Comes the reply. Of course he isn't safe. But he is good, I tell you. He is the king. The God that we meet in the book of Hosea, friends, is not safe.

But he is good. His love is not tame, but it is pure and perfect. His heart burns with holy love for his people.

That is why he came to tear them, he says, so that in their misery they will earnestly seek me. He came to bring conviction, to open up fresh wounds in their hearts so that they would see how sick their hearts were and come back to him for forgiveness.

And this morning we get to hear what Israel said to God then. And in this response, Hosea wants us to see ourselves as we rarely see ourselves.

And see God as we rarely see him. and to see in the gap the desperate sinfulness of lukewarm love and half-hearted repentance.

[5 : 11] Chapters six to eight in this book run like a conversation that God can't stop playing over in his head. Have you ever done that? You know, someone's so hurt you and can go over and over in your head what they said, what you said, what they did, what they didn't do.

And well, our first point this morning is what God thinks of what Israel said and did when he tore their hearts with conviction. And it is this, your love is like the morning mist.

Your love is like the morning mist. God says that firstly because of their empty words. I wonder, is that what you thought as we read these words together earlier?

The first three verses of chapter six, if you just glance there, often what I found on something my friend calls holy haberdashery, cushions and coasters and posters with Bible verses printed on them.

In the face of it, they sound perfect for that kind of thing, don't they? But if we look at how God responds to these words in verse four, we see it's not what God wants to hear.

[6 : 24] What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? It's as if God has run out of options. His tone is despairing, isn't it? Which should send us back to verse one, chapter six, to listen again.

Just look with me at those verses. And what do you not hear? Okay, Israel says, come let us return to the Lord. He's torn us to pieces, but he will heal us.

He has injured us, but he will bind up our wounds. After two days, he will revive us. On the third day, he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. Let us acknowledge the Lord.

Let us press on to acknowledge him, and surely as the sun rises, he will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

Sounds great, doesn't it? But what are they not saying? What did you not hear? Okay, let me put it like this. Imagine a wife who's left her husband and gone to live with another man.

[7 : 27] One desperate afternoon, when it's all gone wrong, she thinks back to her husband, and she says to herself, come on, I'll go back to him, and everything will be just like it was before.

He's angry now, but give him two days, maybe three, at a push, and he'll get over it. Surely as the sun rose this morning, he'll be waiting for me at the door when I come back.

He will do me good. He will heal my broken heart. He will make me alive again. What did you not hear? What's missing?

Surely any recognition that she has wronged him, that she has forfeited any claim on his love.

Surely anything that sounds like the word, sorry.

Isn't that what's missing here in Israel's response? This isn't an apology. There's nothing here about her wrongdoing, her sin, her need to change. Instead, it is all presumption.

[8 : 32] What she expects God to do for her. See all those he wills, he will, heal, bind up, revive, restore, come to us.

See, here's the danger for us, brothers and sisters. See, this is where we end up when we grasp God's sovereignty with one hand and do not grasp our responsibility before him with the other.

Strangely, though we would think that this would exalt God and honor God, the irony is that the result is we stop taking God seriously. God will be waiting where I left him for when I'm ready to come back to him.

It might take a day or two for it to feel normal again, but he's not going to ask any hard questions. It doesn't matter what I've done, only what he will do.

Friends, is that how we turn from our sin to God? Is that wholehearted repentance? Calvin is really helpful on this.

[9 : 42] He points out that in the Bible, real repentance, turning from our sin to God, has two parts, which he calls mortification and vivification for the 21st century, putting to death and bringing to life.

Real repentance, he says, is embracing our union with Christ in his death and resurrection.

resurrection. He's dying with Christ in his death, rising with him in his resurrection, dying to sin, living to God.

But Israel only thinks that one half of that response is needed, the bringing to life bit. He will revive, he will restore, but they've ignored their need to own their sin and to die to their sin.

The tearing, the convictions that have become only a formality. You never mind. They say, it's not that bad. We have to lick our wounds for a couple of days, but God will come back, he'll bind us up,

he'll heal us again.

We don't have to really open up those wounds and look in and see the infection in our hearts or painfully dig out the diseased tissue.

[11:01] Surely we don't have to die, they say, for us to live with God. But friends, God says we do.

What does God say, verse 4? What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? Your love is like a morning mist, like the early G that disappears. Therefore, verse 5, because of that, I cut you in pieces with my prophets.

I killed ye with the words of my mouth. Like warm breath on a cold day, he says. That is like your love for me.

Your words are like a mist that are burned off in the morning sun. See, friends, God has to come after us like a lion, so that we will see that our love for him is sometimes like wet grass.

that is why I had to tear your hearts open, he says, because you have to die before I give you life again. I killed you with the words of my mouth.

[12:11] See, this book, the Bible, has teeth. Did you know that? God uses his words to rip us open at times, to cut our hearts, not only to hurt us, but to kill us.

And in dying to ourselves, to our sin, our unfaithfulness, our promiscuity, our idolatry, rise again with Christ in newness of life.

Remember what Christ himself said, if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up the cross and follow me.

die with me, he says, so that you would live with me. We're still not sure Jesus would agree with Hosea this morning. Just have a wee look at verse 6.

Where have we heard these words before? For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, acknowledgement of God rather than burnt offerings. If we know those words, it's probably because Jesus quotes them in the Gospels.

[13:23] When does he quote Hosea 6 verse 6? Well, in Matthew chapter 9, it is when he's surrounded by tax collectors and sinners, prostitutes, drunks, and the religious rulers come to him and ask, why do you eat and drink with these people?

Jesus said, it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. Go and learn what this means. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.

The religious rulers had come to him fresh from their sacrificial offerings, but Jesus says it was the sinners who came rightly to God that day, because they came to Jesus not with a quick confession, or an easy offering, or a prayer on a Sunday, but with mercy, literally steadfast love.

Jesus says this is the love that God looks for, not a religious formality and hot breath, but a wholehearted, steadfast love that flows out of the heart cut open by his word, confessing our unworthiness to be loved by him, and then turning to him for new life and healing.

I wonder, friends, which image would God use this morning to describe our own repentance? A mourning mist, or a broken heart?

[15:02] It is those who die to sin that God raises to new life, and so we must repent, not once, but as Martin Luther reminded us so long ago, all of life should be repentance, we are responsible for our response to God, friends, in that, and God is sovereign.

He is the one who tears and heals, he convicts and comforts, he puts to death, and he brings to life. He is not safe, but he is always good.

And out of that love, he also points out their half-hearted repentance in the double lives that they're living. double lives. Now we see this all throughout these chapters, but Hosea again gives us images, pictures in chapter 7 to help us get the picture.

These people call to me with their lips, says God, but verse 6, chapter 7, their hearts are like an overheating oven. He's saying they burn continuously with sin, they don't need stoking.

without invitation, they delight the king with wickedness and lies, they get drunk, they party with mockers. They're also like a half-baked loaf.

[16:25] Verse 8, nice and crispy on the top, but soft, underneath, undercooked, double, mixed with the nations, gods, kings.

They're like an old man who thinks he's still in his 20s. Know anyone like that? Verse 9, his hair is sprinkled with grey, but he does not notice. His life is being drained away by those nations, those gods and kings that he trusts, but he can't see it.

They are like a senseless dove, verse 11, now going to Egypt, now going to Assyria. Doves famously have a homing instinct. If you let one loose far away from home, it will fly straight back to the home.

Think of Noah, the ark. Noah sends out the dove, and it comes back home to the ark. Well, Israel is like a dove that doesn't know where home is.

He was at south to Egypt, he was at north to Assyria. Both kingdoms that Israel put her trust in, he would destroy them in time, but she would never return home to God.

[17 : 36] They are like a broken bow, verse 16. The first line in that verse could be translated, they shoot, but not upwards.

Like a bow that shoots arrows that don't hit the mark, says God, they don't return to the most high. And now we could go on, chapters 7 and 8 are a catalogue of sins that Israel was committing, but those illustrations paint the picture for us, don't they?

Of a nation, a people that was not doing what they were created to do. On the outside, yes, they're going through the motions, but inside their hearts, in their lives, it's clear that they are spiritually malfunctioning.

The oven doesn't ever turn off. The bread isn't ever fully baked. The dove doesn't fly home. The bow doesn't shoot straight. There's a doubleness to all of these images.

Things are not what they seem. It's the same problem that James warns us of when he warns us that the double-minded person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

[18 : 51] And he's warning us when the life we're living doesn't match the prayers that we're praying or the faith that we're professing. That is a big problem.

half-hearted words, double-minded living. What about us, brothers and sisters? Has this stopped being a problem for us? Do we see ourselves perhaps in this rogues gallery of images that Hosea gives us this morning?

At our worst, it is outright hypocrisy coming to church on a Sunday but living completely without God in view the rest of the week. You're confessing our sins in the opening prayer and not confessing our sins to God again until next Sunday.

I hope I don't need to convince any of you this morning that that is not knowing and loving God. To paraphrase Jesus, God desires that we love him with our whole heart and mind and soul and strength and not simply give him religious formalities.

But short of that, are we perhaps in various degrees guilty of living doubly, if I can put it like that? Have we not prayed for forgiveness only to go on and sin in the same way again?

[20 : 19] Have we never relied on what the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls cheap grace? That is relying on God's grace without being transformed by his spirit.

Coming to Jesus for forgiveness, but without denying ourselves and taking up the cross. Brothers and sisters, Hosea wants us to know how God sees that kind of cheap, half-hearted repentance. It is like a morning mist, he says. It is hot air. He wants us, body and soul, friends, not only our words, he wants us to die to sin under the powerful teeth of his word, for only then can we truly live in the shadow of his love.

Two ways our love can be like a morning mist then, in our words, in our lives. But coming to our second main point, Hosea shows us three things we need to know about God this morning. Summed up there in 7 verse 13, I long to redeem them. I long to redeem them. What do we need to know about God out of these verses?

[21 : 36] Firstly, we need to know that God sees. God sees. Okay, we can try really hard to pretend to live the Christian life. We can fool everyone we know, but we cannot fool God.

Just glance down at 7 verse 1, God says to Israel, whenever I restore the fortunes of my people, whenever I heal Israel, the sins of Ephraim are exposed, the crimes of Samaria revealed.

Okay, it's as if God is a landlord. He's renting out his flat to bad tenants. Okay, the rent never comes in on time. He has waited ever so patiently.

Then they call in for an urgent repair, and God goes personally, okay, to put the repair right to heal them. But he opens the door to find the flat has been ruined.

There are smashed windows they've tried to cover over with curtains. There are blankets thrown over, ripped and torn sofas. God has gone out of his way to heal and to repair his broken people, but he opens the door only to find their crimes and sins before him.

[22 : 50] They've tried to disguise their rebellion with a threadbare religiosity, but he sees straight through it. They practice deceit.

Thieves break into houses. Bandits rob in the street, but they do not realize that I remember all their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them. They are always before me.

always before him. Friends, we have a God who searches the depths of our hearts, who knows the secrets of our minds. He sees our sin, and we are deluded if we think that we can hide our sin from God behind prayers and going to church.

One way that we can do this is compartmentalizing. If we've never done this, I've got my work and study box over here. My relationship and family box here.

I've got my interests and hobbies box here. I've got my me-time box. And my Christianity box is over here.

[24 : 02] And if God just stays in his box, we say, then what goes on in the other boxes isn't really a problem. Brothers and sisters, that is not who God is.

We cannot do that to God. And yet we still so often do it, don't we? God says he sees what goes on in every box. Despite our best efforts to keep him out of those areas of our lives, we'd prefer him not to see.

He sees. And so if we know that about God, well, why would we ever want to try to hide our sin from him? Surely the safest thing to do with our sin is the thing we are most reluctant to do.

And that is to show it to him. Not because he doesn't already know about it, not because he doesn't see it, but because we want him to forgive us for it, to take it out of our hands, to take it away from us.

What is the point of us pretending God doesn't know? Israel cries out, our God, we acknowledge you, but Israel has rejected what is good. Do you see how ridiculous that is?

[25 : 11] It's like celebrating communion with stolen wine, or doing what the Israelites were doing in 7 verse 14, harming their bodies in the hope that God would hear them.

Telling God that they know him just isn't convincing when they're in open rebellion against him. Did Jesus say anything like that?

Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, he says, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Our words, our gifts, our worship cannot disguise our sins from Christ.

He sees. The second thing we need to know about God is he loves. He sees and he loves. It's incredible, isn't it, to see God's long-suffering love in the book of Hosea.

And we see it again in his response to Israel's hypocrisy. What can I do with you, Ephraim? What can I do with you, Judah? These are not the interrogating questions of a prosecutor anymore, are they?

[26 : 21] They are the despairing questions of a parent. I've tried everything to win you back, he says, and it's not working. I've shown you my love in every way that I know how, and it's not changing.

This is love beyond the point of no return. The heart-rending love of a parent who despairs over the child's decisions. If we're still not convinced of God's heart for his people here, just would you have a glance at 7 verse 13?

What does he say? Woe to them because they've strayed from me. Destruction to them because they've rebelled against me. I long to redeem them. I long to redeem them, but they speak about me falsely.

I long to redeem them, says God. That's what it's all been for, the tearing, even the tough love, because he yearns for them with a burning heart to save his people from their sins.

Here again, are we hearing, are we not hearing the voice of the Lord Jesus through the prophet Hosea today? Remember his words as he wept over Jerusalem. Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets, stone those sent to you, how often have I longed to gather you?

[27 : 42] As a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing. Such a tender image, isn't it? Jesus gathering his children under the shadow of his love into the shade of the cross like a hen gathering chicks under her wings.

I long to redeem you, he says, but they would have none of it. Friends, do you know that about God? That as he sees your sin, you and I, here today as we are, that he looks at us with love, that he longs to save us from our sins.

He despairs over our sin, our unfaithfulness, because he could not have done more to love us and save us. He came to take our sin away as far as the east is from the west.

What he did on the cross is monumental. He bled and died that he would take away our sin from us. We cannot trust him today. We cannot bring our sin to him.

who can we trust? Only Christ can redeem and he longs to redeem. As we close, the very final thing, Hosea says, we need to know about God here.

[29 : 00] He sees, he loves, but he cannot ignore. He cannot ignore. Chapter 8 is really God saying, enough is enough.

You have set up kings without my consent. They worshiped a metal cow as if it were God. Were I to write for them my laws by the ten thousands, he says, they'd be regarded as a strange thing.

It doesn't matter what I say anymore, he says. They will not change. And we need to know that God doesn't let that go on forever. He is incredibly patient and long suffering with our sin.

But we know the saying, don't we? beware the fury of a patient man. Beware the fury of a patient man. You know, the more patient the person is, the harder their displeasure is to bear.

When your teacher got cross with you, that wasn't very nice. When your mom said she was disappointed in you, that was worse. Well, friends, when God says that he is angry with our sin, that is catastrophic.

[30 : 13] God does not fly off the handle with us. But that will make his wrath even worse, purer, stronger on the last day than any kind of here and now telling off.

You perhaps be wondering, why, if God is so concerned about sin, why doesn't he punish us now? Well, we need to know today that his patience is not a sign of his disinterest, but his willingness to bear our sin.

Count the patience of the Lord as salvation, says Peter, not as disinterest, neutrality. Were he to give us over to this, our sin, the consequence, we would have no hope whatsoever of being saved. And it is what we deserve, isn't it? He says, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. Have we not thrown sin and idolatry to the wind? Well, it should all come crashing back down upon us, says the Lord.

Next time, Hosea will tell us more about God's judgment. But for now, we need to simply see that Hosea does not let us pit God against himself. In his own words, he is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, showing love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

[31 : 38] Yet, yet he will not let the guilty go unpunished. He cannot, he will not ignore our sin if we hide it and keep it and indulge it and ignore it.

So friends, today, repent. Repent. Not only in words, but with our lives. Let us die to our sin. Let us live to God with steadfast love, a full heart.

Let us not count his grace cheap, but seeing what it cost him, the life of his son. Let us turn to him. Let us deny ourselves.

Let us take up the cross daily and let us follow him with a whole heart. Let's pray together. Let us pray together. Gracious God, we confess together once again that we do not deserve the least of your love, your kindness, your mercy or patience.

Father, your grace is wholly undeserved. And so we thank you for the whole heart that overflows with gratitude to you today that we can come to you and call you our Father and lay hold of Christ and know your spirit at work in us, giving us a new heart purely because you are good, because you are forgiving, because you are full of love.

[33 : 16] Father, we thank you that even when you bring conviction that you do it in love. Lord, that you long to redeem us today. Father, how we pray those of us who know you that you would day by day take away our sin, that you would redeem us, Lord, as we walk through this life bearing the cross following Christ.

Father, help us, we pray, to have soft hearts that are ready to repent, that are quick to confess, that are quick to turn. Lord, guard us from a hard heart, we pray.

Guard us against our words, Lord, through the light. Lord, guard us against our words and our lives not matching up. Lord, we long to live a wholehearted life before you.

And Father, for those who don't as yet know you, Lord, how we pray that you would give a new heart, a heart that is ready and willing to turn to you, to hold out sin to you, ready to be forgiven, ready to be taken away.

Father, we thank you for Christ that he longs to redeem. And so we pray, Lord, that he would today.
We ask in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.