

Hosea 6-7: "Sorry Seems to be the Hardest Word" (21-Jun-2017).

Opening Question:

*Why is it hard to say sorry?
or
Road to Perdition clip*

Background:

In the first study, God told Hosea, his prophet, to marry an unfaithful woman, Gomer. Gomer bore Hosea a son, and then another daughter and son who it seems may have been fathered by someone else. Gomer's behaviour led to sorrow for Hosea, and punishment for Gomer, but despite the way that Gomer behaved, God told Hosea to restore his relationship with Gomer, and Hosea paid a ransom to bring Gomer back.

This story of Hosea's marriage/separation/reuniting with Gomer is an allegory to explain how Israel has rebelled and God will bring severe consequences, but God's love and mercy are more powerful than Israel's sin. The rest of the book has Hosea exploring these themes in more depth.

Chapters 4-10 look at the causes and effects of Israel's unfaithfulness.

Last time we read a passage which was full of accusations against the people who had drifted away from God, The lack of knowledge of God led to bad effects for society (lying, stealing, adultery, violence) and also for the land ("The land dries up...beasts..birds..fish...are swept away") And in particular, the leaders who were charged with making sure that knowledge of God was maintained came in for special criticism - for example the leaders appear to have been continuing the ceremonial rituals, without staying true to what those rituals were supposed to be about.

So last time we thought of some characteristics that we'd hope to find in Christian leaders:

- Faithful to god. Know god
- Truthful true to god
- Trustworthy
- Caring
- Patient
- Compassionate
- Bible based
- Maturity through suffering - helps empathy

*nb: Hosea youtube video thing: <https://goo.gl/fbwLRE>
Road to Perdition scene: <https://youtu.be/Vky41kHOt78>*

*Ephraim/Jacob==Northern Kingdom, where Hosea lived
Judah == Southern Kingdom*

So this evening's section follows on from last week, where various things had gone wrong as a result of Israel's moving away from God.

Someone Read Hosea 6:1-3:

Israel Unrepentant

1 "Come, let us return to the Lord.
He has torn us to pieces
but he will heal us;
he has injured us
but he will bind up our wounds.
2 After two days he will revive us;
on the third day he will restore us,
that we may live in his presence.
3 Let us acknowledge the Lord;
let us press on to acknowledge him.
As 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."

Q: There are speech marks around v1-3. Who is speaking?

A: *God's people speak to one another.*

Q: What are the people deciding to do?

A: *Return to the Lord*

Q: What is good about what they say?

On the face of it this seems to be a good thing - they resolve to return to the Lord - they recognise he has brought judgment and that he can make things right

Q: *Sounds good "let us return to the Lord". But what's missing here is sense of repentance; they are presuming that God will have them back*

Someone Read Hosea 6:4-10:

4 "What can I do with you, Ephraim?
What can I do with you, Judah?
Your love is like the morning mist,
like the early dew that disappears.
5 Therefore I cut you in pieces with my prophets,
I killed you with the words of my mouth—
then my judgments go forth like the sun.
6 For I desire mercy, not sacrifice,
and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.
7 As at Adam, they have broken the covenant;
they were unfaithful to me there.
8 Gilead is a city of evildoers,
stained with footprints of blood.
9 As marauders lie in ambush for a victim,
so do bands of priests;
they murder on the road to Shechem,
carrying out their wicked schemes.
10 I have seen a horrible thing in Israel:
There Ephraim is given to prostitution,
Israel is defiled.

Q: In vv1-3, Israel said they would return to God. What is shocking about v4? What is God saying about Israel's "return"?

A: *Their commitment is like "morning mist" - here one minute and gone the next. This is not genuine repentance: while they may be outwardly religious, and going through the motions, their hearts are still turned away from God and his commands*

Q: What is missing from Israel's "return" in vv1-4?

A: *They don't actually say sorry to God. They don't seem to acknowledge their sin and idolatry, and presume on God's mercy and grace rather than asking for it. Their repentance has many of the right words, but is not accompanied by a change of attitude.*

Q: What do you think is their motivation for wanting to return to God?

A: *They want the goodness of God (all the nice things: healing, harvests etc.) without changing their own behaviour/attitudes*

Q: Given the words in vv1-3, what is so horrible about the description of Israel in vv7-10?

A: *Israel's words and actions fail to match up: they are saying the right thing, but their deeds demonstrate something else. vv7-10 highlight how Israel is living - breaking the covenant and being unfaithful to God. Their towns, like Gilead, are stained with the blood of their crimes. Their actions show that their hearts are far from God*

Q: What does God desire people to display?

A: *mercy, not sacrifice; reflecting God and his character in their actions, wanting his mercy and demonstrating his mercy to others. God's people have been doing the opposite: concerning themselves with outward religious actions without a change of heart*

Q: How does this help us understand the kind of religion that God wants us to demonstrate?

A: *One that is less concerned with outward ritual and ceremony and more with pleasing God.*

Q: How might we, as church members today, be like Israel in Hosea's day?

A: *Easy to put on outward religious veneer while our hearts are far from God (as per Clive's sermon last Sunday). We can say the right thing, go to church, participate in house group and appear devout before other people, but God is more interested in our attitude and the state of our hearts than of our outward appearance to others.*

Someone read Matthew 9:9-13:

9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus quotes the words of Hosea here "I desire mercy not sacrifice"

Q: Why don't the pharisees like what Jesus is doing?

A: *They saw Jesus as a rabbi and teacher, yet he was spending time with "undesirable" people, "tax collectors and sinners", who were the very people that the Pharisees tried to distinguish themselves from. A goal of the Pharisees was to appear to be holy by not associating with "sinners", but Jesus makes it his aim to be with these kinds of people*

Q: What are the attitudes of the different people around Jesus?

A: *Pharisees see themselves as holy and righteous, and are angry at Jesus for acting in a different way to what they expect. They don't think they need any help from Jesus. The tax collectors and "sinners" know they have a problem, recognise that they're separated from God and look to Jesus for mercy and forgiveness.*

Q: Why do the Pharisees need to learn the lesson of Hosea 6:6 (Jesus quotes this in v13)?

A: *They are concentrating on outward appearance, like Israel in Hosea's time, rather than looking to show God's mercy. When Jesus quotes Hosea 6:6, he is telling the Pharisees that if they really knew God, they would approve of Jesus reaching out to sinners, rather than being concerned solely about appearances. More, they would see that they too need mercy and forgiveness.*

Q: What can we learn from Hosea 6:1-6 and Matthew 9:9-13 about truly turning back to God?

A: It means recognising we need God's mercy, through Jesus' sacrifice; seeking God's desires, such as showing God's mercy through sharing the gospel, rather than being more concerned about outward appearances and superficial behaviour; turning around with our hearts and actions, not just our words

Q: Why, as a follower of Jesus, will we show mercy to others?

A: If we understand that we need, and have been given, God's mercy - that we don't deserve anything from him, and must rely on his goodness in forgiving us - then our view of those around us will radically change. Instead of thinking that they should get what they deserve (if they have wronged us, or our friends, or society) we will see them as people who we can show mercy to, as God has to us: not because they deserve it but because we know what it is to receive and be transformed by mercy.

Q: How can we encourage true repentance in other people?

A: We too need to turn back to God and ask forgiveness for the ways we have failed to trust and honour him. We need the encouragement and help of our Christian friends to help us to do that - helping us to see the idols that take our worship away from God, and how we cover this up with outward religious behaviour. This means being open and honest with each other about our need to repent; asking each other for prayer when we need it, and being willing to challenge one another.

Q: Is there a risk that we find ourselves asking for God's blessings, telling him we want him to be our God, without being truly repentant?

A: ??

Q: What things might we sometimes say that actually obstruct repentance?

A:

- suggest God's word isn't clear when it is (Ephesians 5:18 "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery" means it's OK to drink beer)
- suggest that sin doesn't matter ("it's only a little thing")
- suggest that we can make up for our failures ("on the plus side, I did say sorry afterwards")
- ...

Takeaway

- Returning to God and his blessings means saying, and *meaning*, sorry.
- God can see through fake repentance