

We pick up our study now of Hosea. We're in the middle of the fourth chapter. In my Bible, beginning at verse 11, there is a topic heading that says, "The Idolatry of Israel."

We've been looking at the sacrificial system that God ordained and that God provided for His people, going back to the beginning of human history, formalized in a rather extensive way in the Law of Moses. And what is it for? We know that it foreshadows and exemplifies and, in many ways, details out for us the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in solving the sin problem. But here's the thing.

This is the big idea for this morning. The sacrificial system foreshadows the work of Christ. What is the work of Christ? The work of Christ is the solution to a problem.

What is the problem? Sin. What are the wages of sin? Death. What is the consequence of sin? Separation from God.

Separation from the Creator. Separation from the source of life and light. So even in the Old Testament age, bringing a sacrifice was a recognition of the need and the desire to approach God in spite of sin.

Right? I am sinful. I am corrupt. I am fallen.

I am mortal. I am limited. I am defiled.

But I have a desire for relationship, for fellowship, for the presence and power and purpose of God in my life. And God provides a way. Isn't that ultimately what Christ in the sacrifices is? John 14:6. "I am the way.

I am the truth. I am the life. You can't come to the Father but through the Lord Jesus."

He is the means of access. He is the new and living way through the veil. That's what it's all about.

Here's the problem. When you look at Hosea, what do you see? People don't have an interest in approaching God. The solution does you no good if you don't recognize the problem. If you don't acknowledge the problem. If you don't have a problem with the problem.

I like the problem. I'm feeling good. And this problem doesn't impinge on my sense of well-being.

My self-centered goal of self-gratification is being satisfied very well. You can't commit to a solution if you don't adequately recognize the problem. I saw a guy, I forget in what context, he was saying a goal.

Oh, I know. This was a guy talking about now that we're a few weeks into the year and you made your New Year's resolution. Do you find everybody is falling away from their New Year's resolution? And he said, "Here's a way to revive and restore and get back on track with whatever New Year's resolutions you made."

And one of the points he made I thought was really good. He said, "These goals that you have set for yourself—I'm going to get into a size X by summer. I'm going to look good in a bathing suit by summer, or whatever—" he said, "a goal without a plan is just a wish. A goal without a plan is just a wish."

There is a goal. There needs to be a plan. And many times that plan involves, instead of saying, "Well, by summer I am going to do X," his advice was, and this is just common sense, break it down into smaller chunks.

If I want to save, I want to boost my savings by \$1,000, I could say, "Well, by July, I want to have \$1,000 in the bank." Or I could say, "Every week between now and July, I'm going to put X amount in the bank so that by July, I will have \$1,000." That's a plan.

And it's a doable plan. It's an incremental plan. It's a plan that makes sense.

Well, we need to use this kind of thinking, which is biblical in its principle, that if you are committed to something, you have to be consistent. God has the plan. God has made the way.

And if we enter into it, we do it by faith. We do it by believing that this way that God has provided is valid. It is true.

And it will accomplish God's purpose. But a goal of being a better person, of being a better Christian, of drawing closer to God and closer to fellow believers, of producing more righteousness by faith, is just a wish if you do not implement the plan. So the problem here, as you see it in the days of Hosea, in the days of Uzziah, and in the days extending down through the days of Hezekiah, in the southern kingdom, what's the problem? There's no real interest in the plan, i.e., valid worship, valid expressions of faith through worship, because there's no commitment to the goal.

I really don't care about drawing close to God. I'm really more interested in these fun little worship activities they have for Baal. Going down there and slaughtering an animal at the temple, well, that's no fun.

What's fun is going to these Ashtoreth parties and these Baal orgies. Man, that is fun. That is stimulating.

Everybody has a good time. Every hail fellow well met, and everybody seems to like them, and everybody likes me when I show up, and I'm one of the gang, and that's very rewarding to me. Why would that be rewarding? Because my goal, my goal is being met, and my goal doesn't really have anything to do with pleasing the Lord God of creation and of covenant.

So as we think about this, as we think about Christ in the sacrifices, the Lord Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of that concept is the solution to a problem. But it is only going to be meaningful if we care about the problem and we want a solution. So the first step in this is get some quiet space and analyze who you are and why you're here.

That's what we saw in chapter 3. The children of Israel at the end of the chapter will abide many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, without ephod or teraphim. Afterward, the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God. Some time for reflection, some objective analysis is required, and caught up in the inebriation and the celebration and the stimulation of this idolatrous worship of the Canaanites, of the Amorites isn't the way to get there.

Remember our memory verse this morning: "Evening and morning and at noon I will pray." If you're serious about your spiritual life, you will be serious about the plan that makes it possible to achieve it. Otherwise, it's just a wish.

Do you really want God to have to impose silence and impose quarantine and impose separation and removal of blessing, removal of opportunity, to create that quiet time, or are we big enough and strong enough and smart enough to do it ourselves? To go to the inner chamber, to allocate some time. Best way to check your priorities: where do you spend your time? Not, how am I going to spend my time? How did I spend my time? Look over the last couple of days, look over the last week. How much time did I spend on any given thing? Sort on time spent. That's your actual priority list.

Most of us would then have a pretty high priority on sleep, nearly a third of the day in sleep. You need it, you have to have it. If you don't get it, your brain deteriorates and you become ineffective and cranky, right? Sleep's a priority, need to get it.

Good health, proper nutrition. If it's a priority, you will spend time in the acquisition, preparation, and consumption of quality food. Good stewardship, that's in the priority list.

But as you look at where time is spent, for those of us that earn a paycheck and contribute to the financial well-being of our household, our family, or whatever, there's an amount of time spent in that. Is it well spent? Is it dedicated to God? Do I look at that remuneration as God's reward for my faithful work, or am I involved in the cultivation of human approbation and human connection? Because I think that these people are the key to my sustenance and to my well-being. Priorities, where do you spend your time? That's where they are.

God says the children of Israel are going to have to abide many days in isolation and in separation so that they can get this straight in their head. And once they do, they're going to return because they are in fact believers. And free of the distractions and free of the stimulations and free of the deceptions, they're going to come to their senses.

We need to free ourselves of these things so that God doesn't have to impose it on us. This is the difference between maturity and immaturity, between self-discipline and external discipline, the difference between an adult and a child, that we be no longer children tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine, of tradition, of statement, of propaganda. Be no longer children.

So again, in the middle of chapter 4 now, "The Idolatry of Israel," picking up at verse 11: "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart." What's common to those three things? It is pleasurable in the moment, stimulating, and distracting from what is really important: harlotry, wine, and new wine. It enslaves the heart, takes captive your reasoning and your seat of priority and purpose and goal and analysis of what is valuable and what is not.

"My people ask counsel from their wood, and their staff informs them," which is stupid. This is the old man walking along, or the young man with his staff of authority. It's like somebody picking up their cane and saying, "Well, cane, where do we want to go today? I'm walking out the door here, I've got my cane, where do we want to go?" It's ridiculous.

It is supposed to assist me. It is not supposed to be my guide and my direction determination. I use the staff to accomplish my purposes. I don't let the staff tell me what to do. This wooden staff.

Why does this happen? Why are they asking advice from a stupid piece of wood? For example, substitute television for staff. Substitute internet browser for piece of wood. I use that thing to get information.

I want to fix something. I need to update the video driver on a machine, like I did yesterday, so that it can function properly. I go to the internet and I say, "Internet, where is the latest version of this driver that is compatible with this version of Windows? I need it and I need it now."

It tells me it doesn't want to install. Well, here's somebody that has solved that problem. I go and I use that to accomplish a purpose that I have assigned weight and value to that is consistent with my responsibilities, and it serves me, it supports me, it helps me do what I have decided I need to do before the Lord.

That's the staff. I don't go to it and say, "What should I do? I don't know. I mean, what should I do today? Somebody, who should I vote for? Who should I listen to for advice? How should I guide my life and set my priorities and my goals and my values?" I already have those set by the Lord God, and in the implementation of those, I will find help where I need it, but that's my staff.

That's my stick. I don't set it up on the mantelpiece here and worship it and bow down to it and ask it what I should do. I dominate it.

It does not dominate me. That's the principle here, and it is one we need to remember because we are in a culture and a society that is full of staffs and sticks that allege to have better advice than anything you can come up with on your own, and certainly better than anything biblical. Oh, we're far more wise.

We've emerged from the days of mystical dependence upon the ravings of goat herds and the wandering imaginations of sheep followers and ancient dusty old saints and martyrs and prophets, and oh no, we've come into the age of enlightenment. Look, we built the airplane and now we're going to tell you everything. It's nonsense.

It couldn't be more ignorant. It couldn't be more misguided. It could not be more misled.

It could not be more deceived because there are timeless truths that transcend where you live or what you do for a living or what year it is since the time of creation. The human soul has not changed. What is valuable and what contributes to and leads to eternal life has not changed.

Right and wrong have not changed. The meaning and purpose and value of spending time on this earth looking ahead to time beyond this earth has not changed. And we don't need fresh revelation.

We have plenty of revelation that defines and describes and details that. And to say, "Well, it ain't no good because it's old," is extremely short-sighted and shallow thinking. "Harlotry, wine, and new wine enslave the heart.

My people ask counsel from their pieces of wood, and their staff informs them, for the spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray.” Notice. It is an attitude.

It's not harlotry led them astray. It's not harlots led them astray. It is the spirit that says, “I think this harlotry thing is a fun occupation.” Spirit of harlotry has caused them to stray.

They have played the harlot against their God. The fundamental problem goes back to attitude, lack of response, lack of faith, lack of appreciation, lack of commitment, lack of love, lack of knowledge. My people die for lack of knowledge.

There is no mercy and there is no righteousness. These are intangibles. Ask a scientist to cook you up a test tube of mercy.

Ask a university physics lab to give you several grams worth of justice. Have them distill for you and chemically produce some righteousness. It's out of the bounds and out of the reach.

I love science as much as the next guy, but it is a tool, and you don't drive Phillips head screws with a saw and you don't hammer nails with a plumb line. They are tools that accomplish specific goals and functions, and nothing in the material sciences can approach righteousness and mercy and truth. It just can't.

They are observational. At best, they can see what God has done in setting up the universe. It is a spirit of harlotry, and it is the decision to play the harlot, to break covenant, to violate relationship that has caused this problem.

“They offer sacrifices on the mountaintops and burn incenses on the hills under oaks, poplars, and terebinths.” Look at this. Why? Shade's good.

Feels good. Man, get up there in the mountains, cool breeze. If you've been in the Mediterranean latitudes in the summertime, kind of hot, kind of humid, kind of uncomfortable.

Get up there on the mountains, get under the shade of these trees. Feels good. Feels good.

How many rock songs have that title, have that line in them somewhere? “Feels good.” I remember Jerry Lee Lewis has that in one of his piano renditions. The shade is good.

“Therefore, your daughters commit harlotry, and your brides commit adultery.” Now, watch closely. Who is responsible for leadership in Israel? Children or parents? And among the parents, is it the wives or is it the husbands? Who has been assigned the leadership responsibility in Israel? Is it a matriarchal society? Like the Cherokees? Women run the thing? It's patriarchal, right?

So notice, because my people ask counsel from pieces of wood and their staff—who carries the staff? Women aren't notable for stumping around with the staff, are they? That's a man's symbol of authority.

That is a man's tool. That's a man's support. And when the men go astray, when the men fail in leadership and go to false sources of guidance, therefore, your daughters commit harlotry.

You wonder why the next generation is running amok? It's because the men in the preceding generation have failed, have allowed themselves to be seduced, have allowed themselves to be distracted and deflected and deceived. That's why the children are running amok. They were poorly trained, given poor examples by the men in the preceding generation, their parents.

That's why your daughters commit harlotry. That's why your brides commit adultery. You're not a husband worth keeping because you're a failure.

You're insipid and you're anemic and you're distracted and you're dumb. That's why your wives stray and that's why your daughters become harlots. Notice what God says in verse 14.

“I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry. I will not punish your brides when they commit adultery.” It's the men who have already set the precedent.

It's the men who failed first. They are the ones who offer sacrifices with a ritual harlot. Therefore, people who do not understand will be trampled.

When the judgment comes, God's not judging the women, God's judging the men, and everybody is going to get trampled as a result. But where is the responsibility? It's Adam. Adam was formed first, then Eve.

“Though you, Israel, play the harlot, let not Judah offend. Do not come up to Gilgal, nor go up to Beth-aven.” Beth-aven.

You remember the word aven in Hebrew is the word for evil? Now, this is directed at the southern kingdom of Judah. Watch closely here. Where is Gilgal? Northern kingdom or southern kingdom? Northern.

Gilgal is up in the north. Gilgal is northern kingdom. Where is Beth-aven? It's not a real place.

This is a nickname. Remember when they would say Ish-Baal's name, they wouldn't say Ish-Baal, they said Ish-Bosheth. Instead of man of the Lord, Ish-Baal, because Baal had become perverted, they took a word and changed it.

I gave a whole lengthy exposition on my disenchantment with people taking over words and giving them new meanings and then telling you you can't say them anymore. This is what happened in Israel. Baal used to mean Lord.

Lord in small caps. The Lord God. He was Baal.

Well, that term was co-opted by the Amorites and used for these false gods. They were Baal. They were Baal.

And so God says, “I'm going to have to get you to quit saying Baal and start calling me your husband because this term has come to mean something it was never intended to mean.” There's one and only one Lord.

And it's the Lord God Yahweh in heaven. The Lord our God is one Lord. One Baal.

But you've multiplied the Baals. You have used Baal and brought under that big circus tent all kinds of evil. Well, this is Bethel.

What was the origin of Bethel? That's where Jacob met the Lord. That's the house of God. But they had made it the house of aven.

Remember when Jesus says, “My house shall be called a house of prayer. You made it a den of thieves.” These are places in the northern kingdom. This is God through Hosea talking to Judah and saying, though you Israel play the harlot, let not Judah follow your bad example.

You and Judah don't go up to Gilgal, which had become a center of pagan idolatrous worship. And don't go up to what used to be house of God and is now house of evil. Beth-aven is Bethel.

Don't swear an oath saying, “As the Lord lives.” You're taking the Lord's name in vain. Israel is stubborn like a stubborn calf.

Now the Lord will let them forage like a lamb in open country. What happens to a lamb in open country? I was reviewing all of this when people are talking about happy animals and should you only eat plants and, well, you could eat the animals if they were happy, but so many of them are raised in these awful conditions. And they said, “Well, what do you think happens to those animals when they are out in the open and nature takes its course?”

Have you ever seen National Geographic and the gazelle and the lion? Is it more humane for an animal to be standing there blinking in the sun and the next minute he's gone because he's been humanely slaughtered in preparation to turn him into food, or do you want to leave him out in the open like a lamb where a coyote is going to eat him while he is still bleating and saying, “Where's the rest of the flock? And hey, somebody help me”? You've seen these little calves and cows and things.

Nature is, as the poet said, red in tooth and claw, and the idea that everything should be natural—actually, properly motivated and well-intentioned humans can do a much better job of animal husbandry than raw nature. Be that as it may. Stubborn calf? How do you know a calf is stubborn? Do you look at a pasture and say, “Well, there's a stubborn calf.”

How do you know a calf is stubborn? You have a rope around it and you're trying to get it from one pasture to another. You're trying to pull it through a gate. You're trying to get it into a stall so it can get its inoculations or whatever.

I've dealt with stubborn calves the whole time I was growing up. How do you know it's stubborn? Because you as the keeper and the authority are trying to get it to do a thing that it manifestly doesn't want to do and will not do. Like a stubborn calf, one that does not bend itself to its master's will, God says, the Lord says, “Fine, I'll turn you loose and you're going to be like a lamb in the open country.”

You want to go your own way? Go your own way. See how long you last. One lamb in open country.

What are the chances? Come back in a week and look for the scattered wool on the hillside. Blowing in the wind. No calf.

Maybe a few bones. “Ephraim is joined to idols. Let him alone.”

Their drink is rebellion. They commit harlotry continually. Her rulers dearly love dishonor.

This is a tough thing in Hebrew, and I haven't worked it all out. The word there, rulers, is actually like shields. But you get the intent of it in the next verse.

“The wind has wrapped her up in its wings, and they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.” The picture that came to my mind, and again I haven't worked this all out, but I got the idea that somebody's trying to use a shield but the wind caught it and blew it away.

If you saw the Martian movie where Matt Damon's blasting off from the red planet and they say, “Well, to save weight, you've got to take the nose off your craft and you're going to put a tarp over it,” and he says, “Seriously? I'm blasting off with a tarp over the nose?” And, well, of course, as soon as he launches, the thing just blows away.

That's the idea here. What you think is going to be protection, what you think is going to be sufficient for the occasion, is going to blow away in the wind. Remember our other verse: “Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles.”

You control, you have that strength and that ability to rise above. Here the wind has wrapped her up in its wings and is going to carry it, like Jesus told Nicodemus, “The wind blows wherever it wants to. You don't know where it comes from and you don't know where it's going.”

They shall be ashamed. Why? Verse 19, our study: they will be ashamed because of the misdirected intent of their sacrifices. You express your priorities in what you do.

Are you bringing an offering to the Lord? Hear this, chapter 5, verse 1: “Hear this, O priests. Take heed, O house of Israel. Give ear, O house of the king, for yours is the judgment.”

What do we see in the preceding chapter? Not going to judge the daughters, not going to judge the wives. Can't expect them to be faithful to a nincompoop like you men have been.

King, priest, house of Israel—house meaning the elders, the rulership—because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. The revoltors are deeply involved in slaughter, though I rebuke them. I know Ephraim. Israel is not hidden before me.

For now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry. Israel is defiled. They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God.

There's one theme here, one idea to remember and reflect on. Think back on this Sunday. What did we cover in church on Super Bowl Sunday, one of the most distracting days of the year? They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God.

The solution does you no good. The sacrifices do you no good. Hear me now: the work of Jesus Christ does you and me no good if we are not directing our deeds toward turning to our God.

You cannot benefit from a solution if you do not recognize the problem. You can't set the goal and follow the plan if you don't find the goal worthy. It's not worthwhile.

Oh yeah, I might wish for it from time to time, but I'm not serious enough about it to make it a goal. Find the plan and follow it. It's just a wish.

The spirit of harlotry is in their midst. It's a motivation issue. It's an attitude problem.

They do not know the Lord. Notice, if you reflect on who the Lord is, this motivation will come, this dedication and appreciation will form. My people perish because they don't know the Lord.

If you knew the Lord, you would love and appreciate the opportunity that He has provided, the Savior that He has provided, the plan that He has made, and the means of approach and the means of success, the means of fulfilling hope and inheritance and fulfillment now and in the age to come. If you know the Lord.

Well, knowing isn't just an abstraction of knowledge. It is that knowledge being the object of our faith. It is reality to us.

It is the established foundation of our thinking. They do not know the Lord. Verse 5: "There pride testifies to His face."

What is pride? Pride is essentially everything that starts with self: self-interest, self-centeredness, self-love, self-involvement. That's pride.

"The pride of Israel testifies to His face. Therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity. Judah also stumbles with them.

With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord." What's in view there? Why do you go to seek the Lord with flocks and herds? What's going to come from the flocks and herds? Sacrifice.

Flocks and herds, they will go to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him. He has withdrawn Himself from them. They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children.

The proof of their harlotry is the fruit of that time spent in false pursuit, false worship, false priority. It has borne its fruit. There are children in the world as a result of this consistent attitude.

"Now a new moon shall devour them and their heritage." What does that mean? A new moon shall devour them and their heritage. These people are looking forward to the new moon because it's one of their favorite festivals.

What is a new moon? How much light is coming from the moon when it's new? Zero. The new moon is the black disc, right? Men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil.

They don't say, "Can't wait for the full moon." Can't wait for the new moon. It will devour them and their heritage.

This thing they are looking forward to is going to be their downfall. The thing you turn yourself over to, the thing you exchange the glory of God for—Romans chapter 1—is going to be your undoing. It is going to be your master.

You will be its slave and you will not escape. "Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah." Northern kingdom, southern kingdom.

Where is Gibeah and Ramah? Up north. Ramah, hangout of King Saul. Remember Samuel was up in Ramah. Saul was at Gibeah.

“Cry aloud at Beth-aven.” Bethel, house of God turned into the house of evil. “Look behind you, O Benjamin.” Benjamin is the northern part of the southern kingdom, right?

Benjamin is right on the border. Some of Benjamin is actually technically up in the northern kingdom. He says, “Look behind you. Look right above you.”

“Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.” This is certain.

“The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out my wrath on them like water.” What is needful guidance, what represents reality and truth, they are removing it out of the way.

This is already a decision that is being made by churches with broadcast ministries. We have to skip over parts of the Bible because people will take us off the air. There is listener outrage if you cover certain topics out of the Word of God, so we will just take those out.

We will remove those markers of the boundaries of what is right and what is wrong, what is acceptable and what is abominable. We will just take those out. We are going to remove the landmark.

You don't know where the border is anymore. What is a landmark? It marks the edge of a thing. It marks the boundary of the border of a thing.

You don't put a landmark in your front yard. You put a landmark at the corner of your property, at the gate, at the entrance. It is a marker.

This is one thing. That is something else. Take away the marker, now I don't know what is right and what is wrong.

“I will pour out my wrath on them like water.” What is the most obvious case of God's wrath and water combined? Eight people floating in a tiny boat, right? A lot more than a three-hour tour.

“Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment because he willingly walked by human precept. Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rotteness.” When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound, Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb, yet he cannot cure you nor heal you of your wound.

You see that there are starting to be symptoms of your unfaithfulness and you run to the wrong solutions. The Christian community today, when you read the books and look at the websites and listen to the radio broadcasts and watch the TV programs, our households and our communities in the Christian faith are troubled. There is no end of difficulty.

Where are people turning for solutions? Any place but the Word of God. Let's incorporate meditation techniques. Let's try step programs.

Let's use personal accountability. Let's try the ways of the world. Let's run to Assyria.

He can't cure you nor heal you of your wound. God says, “I will be like a lion to Ephraim and like a young lion to the house of Judah.” It starts out gradual.

It starts out like a moth chewing. It starts out like rotteness eating away at the edge of something. A little rotten spot on the fruit: well, I can cut that out and use the rest of the fruit if I hurry, if I don't let it progress.

It starts out as a small gradual process, like a moth or a spot of rotteness. But God says, by the time you've visited these other solutions, I'm going to be like a lion. What's the difference in terms of destruction between a moth and a lion? You've got opposite ends of the spectrum, right?

Which would you rather be attacked by? I give you a choice now: I've got a moth in my left hand and a lion's leash in my right. Which one do you choose? Obviously.

But this is the progression. In no time, what you thought was just a moth or a spot of rot has become a devouring lion. God says, "Turn ye at my reproof, for why will you rot, O house of Israel? Why will you get moth-eaten, O house of Israel? Turn ye at my reproof or you are going to die."

The reproof starts out as a small symptom, but God doesn't have all day here. Turn or it goes from a moth to a lion. It goes from a spot of rot to utter destruction.

"I will tear them and go away. I will take them away and no one shall rescue. I will return again to my place." Separation until when? Until they acknowledge their offense.

If we do not recognize the problem and what a wonderful solution the Lord Jesus Christ is, then God is going to come and judge and then go away and leave us to think. And at the point that we recognize the problem, God will once again in grace make available to us the solution.

"I will return again to my place," God says, "until they acknowledge their offense. Then they will seek my face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek me."

How tragic that it takes judgment and discipline from God to get us to do what we naturally do when we know Him. It's never been more true, that little teenage song, "To know, know, know Him is to love, love, love Him, and I do." It is true of God.

The more you know of God, the more you recognize the greatness of His character and the greatness of His grace, the more a natural love, the love that we were built to express, manifests itself in us. So once we acknowledge the offense, we seek His face.

So chapter 6, call to repentance: "Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn, but He will heal us. He has stricken, but He will bind us up.

After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up." How many children with Hosea and Gomer? Two children and then a third.

And when you look at the narrative structure there, you can see the first two are lumped together and then the third comes after "conceived and bore," separates that third child. And what's the most important thing? Rising up on the third day, once again being Ami instead of Lo-ammi.

Third day He will raise us up. Why? So that we can return to the party, so we can get back to the high place in the shade of those wonderful trees up above the humidity? Feels good.

Why are we raised up? "That we may live in His sight. Let us know. Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord."

For you and me living in this age, with the opportunity to present the Romans 12:1 and 2 living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, our reasonable service, not being conformed to the world, being transformed by the renewing of our minds: let us know. Let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. And you are.

That's why you're here. This isn't necessarily the cool mountaintop with the shady tree. You are here, why? You want to know.

You want to pursue the knowledge of the Lord. "His going forth is established like the morning." Morning is the time of prospect, the time of opportunity, the time of hope.

The whole day stretches before you. He doesn't come to us like the evening. He doesn't come to us like midnight.

It's the morning. Rise up in the morning. It's a new day.

His mercies are renewed every morning. Great is His faithfulness. "He will come to us like the rain."

Remember when before He said, “I’m going to pour out my judgment like water”? You know, too much of the presence of God is the flood. The blessing of the presence of God is rain, and it’s a beneficial rain, not a judgmental rain resulting in the need for flotation.

“He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth.” Not the rain of the flood, not the heavens opened and the great fountains of the deep broken up. The former and latter rain.

These are the crop rains. These are the rains that were anticipated and were the object of great desire and great appreciation because that’s what made the crops grow. That’s what made everything work in the agricultural life of Israel.

“Oh Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Oh Judah, what shall I do to you? Your faithfulness is like a morning cloud and like the early dew; it goes away. Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets. I have slain them with the words of my mouth.”

“I have esteemed the words of His mouth more than my necessary food.” The Word of God can be such a blessing, such a comfort, such an encouragement, such a surety of blessing and reward and inheritance and opportunity, or it can hew us and cut us down.

Can’t help but think of Habakkuk up there in the tower: “I have heard your words. I have seen your works.” They can be words and works of blessing or they can be words and works of judgment.

“I have slain them by the words of my mouth. Your judgments are like light that goes forth.” Again, Habakkuk, the flashing rods of light and lightning that we saw.

“For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.” This has been our destination: mercy and the knowledge of God. That’s the goal.

That is the resolution of the problem. The sacrifice and offerings are the means of solving the problem, but the goal is not having the problem, right? The goal is having that health and life and connection to God where sacrifice and offering are really not necessary, not the point.

God knows I love Him. God knows I’m dedicated to Him. God knows that my life is a living sacrifice.

I strive to be holy and acceptable and pleasing in His sight. I know it’s my reasonable service, and I have been transformed by the renewing of my mind, and I know what is good and acceptable and perfect will is, and I pursue it, knowing—remember Romans 12:2?—knowing the good and acceptable and perfect will of God. I desire that knowledge.

I’m not interested in the sacrifice of goats and bulls. I never wanted to have my son die on the cross. What I do want, though, and willing to go through all of that, is knowledge and relationship: the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

But like men, they can’t see it, don’t appreciate it, transgress the covenant, and all the rest of this is that aftermath. We don’t have time to cover the rest of Hosea, but I think you see the point for us. It’s a matter of getting our priorities straight, of setting our goals responsibly and in the light of what we know, availing ourselves of the grace of God, recognizing the Lord Jesus Christ as the solution to a problem.

And when that problem is solved, what is the result? Knowledge of God, appreciation of God, fellowship, and the glory of God in us and through us. We living in His presence with the problem and the necessity for its solution behind us.

Mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than the blood of lambs. That’s the goal. Christ in the sacrifices is the way to the Father.

You can’t come to the Father without that solution, but the goal is not constantly revolving in the blood of Christ. The blood of Christ keeps on cleansing us from our sins. We keep on confessing our sins and He keeps being faithful to cleanse us and forgive us.

But that's not the goal: to have an endless circle of sin and forgiveness of sin and cleansing of sin and the blood of Christ applied. The goal is moving past that, knowing the good and acceptable and perfect will of God and dwelling in His presence, having knowledge of Him, appreciation of Him, reflecting His glory. Problem solved, goal achieved.

That's the call. That's our opportunity. And if we can remember that in the time that remains to us in this life, we follow the plan to get there.

We implement those steps to get there. Well, let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word. Thank You for how powerfully it communicates to us Your purpose, Your provision, Your plan, Your grace provided to us, expressed toward us, the drawing that You do to bring us to Yourself. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enliven these truths and cause them to live and breathe fire into our souls and motivate us as we see the expression of Your power and Your glory, and recognizing that rather than judgment, it can be power and glory that results in our blessing and our fulfillment of Your purpose for us and ultimately bringing glory to the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.