

Scandalous Grace – The Book of Hosea

The Ways of the Lord are Right

Hosea 14

Mark Vroegop

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the LORD; say to him, ‘Take away all iniquity; accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride on horses; and we will say no more, ‘Our God,’ to the work of our hands. In you the orphan finds mercy.’ I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely, for my anger has turned from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily; he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon; his shoots shall spread out; his beauty shall be like the olive, and his fragrance like Lebanon. They shall return and dwell beneath my shadow; they shall flourish like the grain; they shall blossom like the vine; their fame shall be like the wine of Lebanon. O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress; from me comes your fruit. Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.” (Hosea 14:1–9, ESV)

Last weekend Sarah and I visited the University where we met to attend homecoming, and Savannah was able to travel along with us. While we were waiting for the homecoming parade to start, we did our own “walking tour” through the campus, reminiscing about what our college experience was like.

We walked through various buildings, showing Savannah where we went to classes, pointing out the old cafeteria, and where the big painted rock used to be. It was a great trip down memory lane. But there was one spot that I specifically wanted to show her. I said, “Right over there was a bench. And on that bench was where I decided to marry your mom.”

I remember going for a prayer walk as I was thinking through our future and the Lord’s will. Our relationship had reached a point where it was time to move forward toward marriage, and that spot became a turning point – a defining moment.

Now, there have been other moments like that in my life. An internship in college, a missions trip to the Philippines, the birth of my children, the loss of a daughter, and candidating at College Park would be some of the highlights. I’m sure if you looked back on your life, you would also have various defining moments.

What is true in life is also true when it comes to a person’s spiritual life. For those who become followers of Jesus, their relationship begins with a common defining moment.

It is the turning point that the Bible calls repentance. To become a Christian means that you have turned away from trusting in yourself and toward trusting in Jesus. Repentance means that you’ve turned away from your sin and toward following Jesus.

To put it in terminology connected with Hosea, repentance means concluding that “the ways of the Lord are right.” Chapter 14 is the final message from this helpful book, and it is a call to embrace a turning point or a defining moment.

Why Hosea?

We started this series at the beginning of September. Next week, we’ll take two weeks to turn our attention toward the nations, and then we’ll spend three weeks talking about what it means to worship together on the Lord’s day. As we conclude our study in this wonderful book, let me remind you why we were studying Hosea.

Allow me to review with you the four reasons we studied Hosea:

- 1) Hosea helps us to remember the beauty of God’s grace by feeling the scandal of it. Its aim is to speak to your mind and your heart.
- 2) Many believers are unfamiliar with the twelve minor prophets (Hosea – Malachi), and there are really valuable lessons for us to learn. We shouldn’t skip these helpful books.
- 3) Hosea addresses the painful problem of spiritual adultery, an issue that did not end after the prophets went off the scene. This is an issue that we need to carefully consider and feel deeply. And there are similarities to Israel’s culture and ours with which we need to wrestle.
- 4) Hosea has multiple foreshadows of the gospel in it. We can read it through the lens of the New Covenant, and renew our love for the work of God’s scandalous grace in our lives.

The hope for this series was to make you stop and say, “What? Whoa!? Wow!” My prayer is that you would see the seriousness – the scandal – of your sinfulness, but that you will also see the greatness of God’s love. God chose to deliver the message to a wayward people through an illustration of a husband’s love for a wayward woman. The enacted metaphor delivers a powerful message. It invites us to feel what God feels.

The theme for Hosea is really the theme of every person who has experienced God’s mercy. Here’s the summary for chapter one: God gives grace to wayward people because He is God.

Central to this grace of God is repentance – a turning point from where we are to where God wants to lead us.

So, let’s take a look at this final chapter of Hosea and see what we can learn about repentance and consider what kind of repentance the Lord wants us to embrace today, regardless of where we are from a spiritual standpoint.

Repentance

As is often the case in the Bible, the first word of a chapter is really important. It sets the theme and the priority for what follows. The first word and verse one is a central theme for this book:

“Return, O Israel, to the LORD your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.” (Hosea 14:1)

The book of Hosea was written because the people of Israel were stumbling in their sinful ways. Their wealth, the political culture, and spiritual idolatry were like rocks along a path. As they were walking along, they kept stumbling over these issues. Hosea is trying to wake them up to the reality and the foolishness of what is happening.

That was the entire purpose of the illustration of Hosea’s marriage to Gomer. The story and the image are designed to pull on the heart-strings of God’s people and to shock their conscience. The people had become so accustomed to the way things were, that a poignant metaphor was needed.

In our nation’s history of race relations, the march in Selma, Alabama, was that kind of metaphor. If you’ve seen the movie or know the history, it is the story of three marches over Pettus Bridge protesting the killing of a man during a voter registration march. The brutality of local officials and the murder of a pastor who protested was reported all over the country. It shocked the conscience of the country and led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Martin Luther King said this about the moment:

“Selma, Alabama, has become a shining moment in the conscience of man. The confrontation of good and evil compressed in the tiny community of Selma, generated the massive power that turned the whole nation to a new course.”¹

Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, was a defining moment. Hosea is calling on the conscience of the people of Israel to realize their stumbling. They have become so accustomed to their sinful culture, that they hardly notice it anymore. Like the proverbial frog in the kettle, their sinful ways had become very natural. That is why Hosea calls them to return. The shock value of the metaphor and his strong words are designed to help them see themselves clearly, but also to turn them back to the Lord.

What is repentance? The Hebrew word for *return* means to turn away from one thing and toward another. The first time the word appeared in Hosea was in 2:7 in reference to the hope of Gomer turning from her lovers and to her husband. The way it is used there is a helpful way of thinking about repentance. It is comparable to an adulterous spouse turning from her lovers and coming back to his or her spouse. Repentance means that you cannot have both.

Repentance is a turning away from one and toward another. In Israel’s case, it is the hope that one day she would turn away from her idols and her sinful actions, and that she would turn to the Lord (Hosea 3:4). But at present, her sinful actions are making her repentance more difficult (Hosea 5:4).

Now what we find here in Hosea is more fully explained in the New Testament. Here are ten thoughts:

1. The Greek word for *repentance* means a change of mind or a change of heart. It is a change of direction, orientation, and even motivation
2. The call to follow Jesus involves leaving the old life behind (Luke 14:33)

¹ <https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/selma-50-years-later-the-shining-moment-in-the-conscience-of-man>

3. Jesus' message was: "Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 4:17)
4. Repentance is a vital part of being truly converted (1 Thess. 1:9)
5. Baptism is symbolic of, and the first step in, repentance (Acts 3:19)
6. Repentance is a gift from God (2 Tim. 2:25)
7. Repentance and faith are linked together – two sides of the same coin (Acts 20:21)
8. True repentance, from true faith, results in good works (Matt 3:8)
9. Sorrow and sadness does not necessarily equal true repentance (2 Cor. 7:9-10)
10. It is possible for some to have hardened hearts so that repentance is not possible any longer (Heb. 6:6)

So, when Hosea calls the people to return, it fits into a much broader theme that runs throughout the entire Bible. Repentance is a complete and irrevocable about-face from the past to a future shaped by the demands of God's reign.²

What does repentance involve? The text continues by identifying what a heart of repentance would sound like or produce. Verse two indicates that this is some kind of prayer. There are three things to note here:

1. They should appeal to God (v. 2)– "Take away all iniquity..." They should ask God for forgiveness and re-establish their relationship with Him.
2. They should renounce their trust in other things (v. 3a). Whether it is in the realm of politics, military might, or idols, they must turn away from those things.
3. They should base their hope on the character of God (v. 3b) – "In you the orphan finds mercy."

In genuine repentance, we throw ourselves upon the mercy of God, turning away from the things that took His place, and we appeal to Him forgiveness.

One of my favorite set of verses about this in the New Testament is 2 Corinthians 7:10-11. It helps us to see the heart of true repentance.

"For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter." (2 Corinthians 7:10–11, ESV)

Christian, does that sound like you? Did you know that repentance is a vital part of what it means to be a follower of Jesus? Do you have a repentance that is genuine? Has your profession of faith in Christ resulted in a turning away from things in your former life?

When I'm sharing the gospel with someone, I'll explain it to them like this: "Now, receiving Jesus means that God has changed you. That means there are some things in your life that have to change. My guess is that you know some of them right now. But you'll find others. And when you do, embrace

² Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 880.

the change. Keep turning from your former life and turn to Jesus because you now have a new Master.”

But repentance doesn't stop there. It continues throughout your life as a follower of Jesus. You embrace repentance every day. You keep repenting, not because you have to in order to keep your salvation. No, you repent because you know the dangers of sin and the promise of what comes with repentance – restoration.

Restoration

The remarkable thing about repentance is the way the Bible positions it not just as the right thing to do, but also the better thing to do. God motivates us to turn to Him or return to Him because of the divine healing and blessing that will be received. In other words, part of the attraction of repentance is what is offered on the other side. Let's see how this appears in Hosea.

God attempts to woo Israel back to Himself and He offers them the following:

1. *Healing for their apostasy.* God's desire is to change their affections, what they love and what they keep turning to. In their returning to Him, God aims to address the core problem that led them down the wrong road in the first place.
2. *Love them fully and deliver them from wrath.* God waits with open arms for His children to come home. He does not want to discipline them. He longs for them to be free of the judgment that is coming. God is ready and promises to love them.
3. *Refresh them.* In language that is reminiscent of the Garden of Eden, Hosea uses words that give the impression of a luxuriant garden. A place of rest, beauty, and refreshment.
 - God will be like dew to Israel, providing what they need.
 - They will benefit and be blessed – blossoming like a lily, taking root like trees from Lebanon, stability, beauty, and attractiveness will be the characteristic of God's people. Have you ever seen somebody who aged 10 years in a year because of their sin?
4. *Renew them.* In verse 7, the people will dwell under God's shadow. They will flourish like the grain. They will blossom like the vine and their glory will have returned. In verse 8 we find that God is personally caring for them and He will make them new.

What a glorious picture this is! It sounds like heaven, doesn't it? And in some respects it surely is. It sounds like the Garden of Eden, which in some respects it is. Why does this sound so glorious? God made us to long for this kind of reality. He created an appetite within us that craves this kind of peace, safety, health, and blessing. God created us with a longing for mended relationships, sexual purity, conflict resolution, and harmony.

When you are off running on a path that is contrary to God's will, there may be moments of pleasure and enjoyment. But at the end of the day, you know it is the wrong way to live.

Sin makes us tired. So tired. Tired of the lies, the manipulation, the false promises, and the nagging guilt. God offers the promise of restoration. In the Old Testament it was offered as a future promise:

"I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:25–27, ESV)

In the New Testament it sounds like this:

"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Romans 8:1–6, ESV)

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:17–18, ESV)

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22–25, ESV)

Do you hear what the Bible is saying? The scandal of God's grace is simply that God is still rescuing sinners from their sin. Like Gomer, God is still buying people out of the slavery of their own making. And He makes that purchase by the death of His Son. He provides not only forgiveness but a new power, by the Holy Spirit, to be new.

Just imagine what it would be like to have a restored marriage, to have a pure heart, to know that you are forgiven, to see real change taking place, and to be at peace with God.

That is what is offered to you through Christ by becoming a follower of Jesus. And that is what happens even after you receive Jesus as you live in the reality of your restored relationship.

It doesn't matter where you've been or what you've done, God is ready and willing for there to be a new relationship with Him today.

Reflection

And with that, the sermons of Hosea come to a close. Except for one last verse: Hosea 14:9:

"Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them; for the ways of the LORD are right, and the upright walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them." (Hosea 14:9, ESV)

This final verse is a proverbial postscript. It is written to those, like us, who would read Hosea. It is an invitation for us to consider our ways carefully. It is as if Hosea concludes by saying, "Now that you've read my book, what will you do?"

This verse appeals to those who are wise and discerning. Have you heard what Hosea has said? Do you know that you are Gomer? Do you understand the shocking image of an adulterous woman wandering away? Did you feel the tension and the weight of this book?

If "Yes," then let them sink into your heart. Understand these words. Know these words. Get them in your bones. Be warned and be encouraged.

Because the bottom-line is rather simple: the ways of the Lord are right.

And then there are two paths: we either decide to walk in the ways of the Lord, or we choose to be those who are transgressors and stumble. There are only two paths to be on. Every one of us is on one path or the other.

Jesus said that there are two paths – the narrow and the wide (Matthew 7:13-14). Psalm 1 tells us that there are two kinds of ways – the way of the wicked and the way of the righteous (Psalm 1:6). And the Bible tells us there are two eternal destinations – heaven or hell (Rev 20-21).

The book of Hosea is about a God who gives grace to a wayward people because He is God. That is the scandal of His grace. He is ready and willing to pour out grace on all those who would come to Him.

So the question you and I must ask is simply this: which side of God's grace are you on today? Why not agree with God today about the path you are on and say, "The Ways of the Lord are Right."

Why not turn from your sin and turn to Christ?

Why not be the Gomer that came home?

Why not make today a defining moment in your spiritual life?

Why not embrace the gift of scandalous grace?

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