

The unfaithful may come home to God.

Hosea 6:1-2 :

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

Scripture Readings: Hosea 6:1-6 and Acts 2: 1 - 4

Introduction:

Did you know that we also read about a prodigal son in the Old Testament? His name is Ephraim - another name for the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Although Ephraim (or Israel) and Judah were still "at home" in the promised land, before the exile, when Hosea wrote the words in our text, the prophet already in the Spirit saw them in a distant country, in exile. With prophetic vision he heard them say to their fellow Israelites in exile, "*Come, let us return to the LORD*" (vs 1). That is also what the prodigal son in Jesus' parable said: "*I will set out and go back to my father...*" (Lk 15:18).

The unfaithful ends up in strange land...

We all know why or when the prodigal son in the New Testament finally said this. He did not say this until he had spent all of his money and began to be in need and was reduced to desiring the food of the pigs he tended. Only when he felt fully defeated and when he had nothing left did he realise how helpless and hopeless he was. This convinced him to return to his father.

Hosea's wife in complete and utter unfaithfulness left him for a lover. She too was not willing to return to her husband's loving care, help and support, until she found herself being a slave and a prostitute in a pimp's house. The attractive lover turned out to be an abuser and a cruel slave owner. Only when she realised this, was she willing to be persuaded by Hosea to return to her loving, heart broken husband!

Ephraim or Israel acted exactly in the same way. Out of desperation Israel turned to Assyria, to a great warrior king, yes to a foreign general, for help. But that only made matters worse and God's people was led off into exile. Then, and only then, when the nation was severely oppressed and when their situation was completely hopeless, did they again remember the goodness and kindness of the Lord. Is this not what the Lord said through Hosea in the last verse of chapter 5: "*In their misery they will earnestly seek me*" (5:15b).

And this is the way we are; we will not go back to God till we have no friends and have lost everything. That was the case with Hosea's unfaithful wife. That certainly was the case with Israel and Judah. We also often see this with those among us who stray away. People have to hit rock bottom before they start thinking of their Father and our Father in heaven.

It is a disgrace that people often only return to God when there is no other option. But turning to God under such circumstances is still far better than never turning to Him at all.

Hosea tells about the process of returning to God.

When we look at what our text tells us about Israel (called Ephraim) and Judah, we see a distinctive process and order in their spiritual journey through which they would as unfaithful people again be reconciled with their Lord.

Firstly we see an acknowledgment of sin and misery. Ephraim says, (Hosea 6:1) "*... the LORD ... has torn us to pieces ... he has injured us ...*

These words are a confession of sin and guilt. It was no bad luck or unfortunate political and military circumstances that caused them to become slaves in a foreign country. They admitted that they

deserved their circumstances and they knew why the Lord had punished them. Judah knew why they were being torn and injured. Israel and Judah knew that because of their sins they fully deserved Gods righteous anger and his judgment.

Do you remember what the prodigal son said to his father? He said, "*Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you*" (Lk 15:21). And do you remember the admission of the thief on the cross? He said, "*We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve*" (Lk 23:41). In our text we hear Gods people confessing that they have sinned against heaven. In our text we hear them admitting that they are sinners. We hear them declaring that they are only getting what they deserve.

I can almost hear Hosea's wife saying to him: I acted like a fool! I made many mistakes! I am suffering as a result of my silly choices! May I please come back to you! To act in the same way as Hosea's unfaithful wife returning to her husband, was the only way also Gods people could start the process of reconciliation with the Lord.

The second step that Israel and Judah take in their spiritual journey, is that they remember where their deliverance will come from. They say, (Hosea 6:1) "... the LORD ... will heal us ... he will bind up our wounds.

Here they confess that the Lord's mercy is immeasurable and certain. Notice, there is no doubt about the Lord's mercy and love. They are firmly convinced of the Lord's healing. God will be like a father and also like a mother. With gentle hands he will bind up wounds and bring healing.

Not only do Israel and Judah confess their faith in Gods mercy, but they also believe that Gods deliverance will come upon them in the shortest possible time. They say, (Hosea 6:2) After **two days** (the LORD) will revive us; **on the third day** he will restore us ..."

This confession is remarkable when you consider that Israel's illness and Judah's sores are so serious that they are at death's door, so to speak (Hosea 5:13). In such a situation it requires faith, great faith, to believe that a restoration will take place. It requires an even greater faith to expect healing **to take place on the third day!**

The Bible is overflowing with different statements that all make this same point: that God is exceedingly merciful; that He forgives gladly; that He forgives numerous sins. Consider what happened to the prodigal son. He had sinned, and sinned terribly; yet his father forgave him, immediately.

This brings us to the third step that Israel and Judah take in their spiritual journey. They say, "*Come, let us return to the LORD ... that we may live in his presence.*" This is the language of true conversion. Gods people desire to live in the presence of God. They want contact with God. They want to walk with God. They desire a new relationship with the Lord, in spite of their earlier unfaithfulness.

Up to now they have not sought Gods face. They have prayed, but there was nothing more to their prayers than folded hands, closed eyes and well-known ceremonies. They have offered sacrifices, but there was no more to their sacrifices than some poor sheep being burned on the alter. They have sung songs, but there was no more to their songs than open mouths and fashionable tunes. But now all of that changed. They desire to live in the presence of God.

When Gods people say they want to live in his presence, they are also saying they do not want to live elsewhere. Like the prodigal son, they want to stay at home with their Father rather than stay in a strange, hostile country. They do not want to stray from the Father's sight anymore, for they know from experience what it is like to live away from the Father.

Gods people have had a change of heart. For them the one thing that is necessary is not prosperity, it is not health, it is not wealth, it is not freedom and it is not independence. The one thing that must happen now is to return to the "husband - wife relationship" the Lord desires from his people. *"Come, let us return to the LORD ... that we may live in his presence."*

The desire to live in Gods presence is what distinguishes genuine faith from false religion and the true Christian from being a fake. A fake conversion may lead to coming to the Lord, but he or she never wants to stay with the Lord, as it would ask too much of them. Truly turning to God means that I need to take up my cross and follow him, staying with him for ever.

Conclusion

We are a lot like Israel was during the times of Hosea. We often act like prodigal sons and daughters. We must also confess our sin. We must know our Saviour. We must realise and faithfully accept that the most important thing in life is to live in the presence of God. We must accept that the most important priority in life is to under all circumstances and in all situations be faithful to the Lord, our Saviour.

Like Israel and Judah we cannot do this by ourselves. We need Gods grace and mercy at work within us before any of this can happen. We need the Holy Spirit to urge us, to strengthen us, to lead us, to guide us, to fill us and to inspire us!

God gives us that grace and mercy in and through Christ Jesus. Did you hear the prophetic word that Hosea speaks about Christ in our text. Listen to the words of our text as a prophesy about Christ: *(Hosea 6:1-2) "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.* In the power of the resurrection of Jesus Christ only can we turn to God and stay in his presence for ever. By his resurrection power are we healed, are we saved!

It was Christ who was torn and injured by God for our sins, but after three days he rose again. And it is only because he rose again that we are able to live in the presence of God. Its only because he rose again that he could send his Spirit to be poured out on his church - on you and on me, for we can only live in Gods presence, when we are filled with the Holy Spirit!

This is the Word of God.

In the Name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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