

Finding Your Story in HIStory:
What Will You Do When the Alarm Goes Off?
The Book of Hosea

March 4, 2012

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Text Introduction: We are in the middle of a series we are calling “Finding Your Story in HIStory.” Our aim is to show what God is doing in history to pursue a relationship with His creation—especially His most prized creation—humanity. We have been hitting some of the high points of the Old Testament to observe this history. We have followed the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and noted that they would establish themselves as a nation. We have seen them with a desire to be like all of the other nations as they demand a king. Last week, we heard of their deep rebellion against God—a rebellion that would eventually lead to their being invaded by a foreign enemy, and many of them enter a time of exile out of their Promised Land. This was the ultimate consequence of their sin against God. Along the way, God constantly called out to His people through prophets. The last 17 books of the Old Testament contain the message of these God appointed prophets. We could consider any of them to understand this part of the story, but I want to isolate just one—Hosea.

Text: Hosea 5:1-9 ¹ Hear this, priests!
Pay attention, house of Israel!
Listen, royal house!
For the judgment applies to you
because you have been a snare at Mizpah
and a net spread out on Tabor.
² Rebels are deeply involved in slaughter;
I will be a punishment for all of them.
³ I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from Me.
For now, Ephraim,
you have acted promiscuously;
Israel is defiled.
⁴ Their actions do not allow them
to return to their God,
for a spirit of promiscuity is among them,
and they do not know the LORD.
⁵ Israel’s arrogance testifies against them.
Both Israel and Ephraim stumble
because of their wickedness;
even Judah will stumble with them.
⁶ They go with their flocks and herds
to seek the LORD
but do not find Him;
He has withdrawn from them.
⁷ They betrayed the LORD;
indeed, they gave birth to illegitimate children.

Now the New Moon will devour them
along with their fields.

⁸ Blow the horn in Gibeah,
the trumpet in Ramah;
raise the war cry in Beth-aven:
After you, Benjamin!

⁹ Ephraim will become a desolation
on the day of punishment;
I announce what is certain
among the tribes of Israel.

Introduction: I saw it with my own eyes. Two years ago during one of the presentations of *The Singing Christmas Tree* here in our auditorium the dry ice machine kind of got of control and the fire alarm went off. It was loud and interrupting. A mysterious voice said, "This is an emergency...Please go to your nearest exit." And then it happened. From my vantage point, it was as no one moved. Suspecting I guess the reason for the alarm, no one moved. Thankfully, we were right. There was no emergency, but I'm still interested in the fact that no one sensed the urgency to move.

That scene sort of reminds me of the prophets of the Old Testament. They sounded the warning of God's judgment, but saw very few results.

Hosea prophesied to the Northern Kingdom of Israel in the days before the exile. The message, though, is one of urgency that God's judgment is about to fall. God used Hosea's marriage to a woman named Gomer as an analogy of God's relationship with Israel.

The most complicated question in Hosea is Hosea's marriage to Gomer. The question concerns whether Gomer was a prostitute before or after Hosea married her. That is, did Hosea marry a pure Gomer who then turned to prostitution or was she a prostitute when he married her?

The analogy is powerful either way, but I believe that it is most consistent with Israel's relationship with God if Gomer became a prostitute after marrying. God is declaring that the nation had committed spiritual adultery in forsaking Him and His covenant.

Hosea, like all of the Old Testament Prophets, is a story of God warning Israel and Israel ignoring that warning. Chapters 4-14 of Hosea are more than likely a compilation of the sermons that Hosea preached during his 50 year ministry. These chapters give us a good idea of the kind of responses that are possible when we face the warning of the LORD. How do you respond? What will you do when the alarm goes off? Three possible responses are noted in Hosea.

Response #1: Harden our Hearts

One response to God's conviction is that we harden our hearts against His conviction. This is the case as expressed in Hosea 5. Hosea 5 gives us the characteristics of a Hard Heart.

Characteristics

How can I recognize that my heart is growing hard?

1. I have difficulty hearing from God. (5:1)

Notice the three different ways that God says, “Listen!”

2. I think I can hide from God. (5:3)

We all know intellectually that God knows all things and sees all things, but in the midst of sin, maybe we rationalize that no one else knows. God always knows. Some years ago, I saw a man confronted by the police for stealing meat at the grocery store. As it turns out—those glass panes that look like mirrors at the meat market are only one way mirrors. The workers in the back can see through these mirrors into the store. Apparently, the store workers had observed the man stuffing meat into his coat. The man thought he had positioned himself in such a way as to get away with stealing, but he could not get past the store employees who could see all.

We try to position ourselves in such a way so as no one can see our sin, but God always sees. Trying to hide from God or thinking that we can hide from God is a sure indication that our heart has grown hard.

3. I would rather sin. (5:4)

We know that our hearts grow hard when we begin actually to desire to sin.

4. I begin to rely on myself. (5:5)

5. I feel alone. (5:6)

Ultimately, we will feel alone. God has not moved, but by the hardness of our hearts, we will feel alone. Sin does that to us. The guilt of sin causes us to feel as though we are all alone.

Consequences

The consequence of a hard heart is that we get increasingly away from God. Like a cycle, we get farther and farther away from God.

Response #2: Counterfeit our Commitment

The second response that we might make to the LORD’s conviction is to counterfeit our commitment. That is, we might say that we renew our commitment, but in reality, we do not. An example of counterfeit commitment is evident in Hosea 6:1-3.

¹ Come, let us return to the LORD.

For He has torn us,
and He will heal us;
He has wounded us,
and He will bind up our wounds.

² He will revive us after two days,
and on the third day He will raise us up

so we can live in His presence.

³ Let us strive to know the LORD.

His appearance is as sure as the dawn.

He will come to us like the rain,
like the spring showers that water the land.

Characteristics

If you stop reading at verse 3, you might think, “Finally, Israel is returning to the LORD.” But, notice verse 4. Verse 4 begins to show us the characteristics of a counterfeit commitment.

1. Confession, but no commitment. (6:4)

⁴ What am I going to do with you, Ephraim?

What am I going to do with you, Judah?

Your loyalty is like the morning mist
and like the early dew that vanishes.

Israel’s words, as recorded in 6:1-3 look right, but God sees right through their words and sees their true commitment.

2. Worship, but no walk. (6:6)

⁶ For I desire loyalty and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

Consequences

A counterfeit commitment is no commitment at all. God sees right through our words. We might fool people with our words, but the One who judges righteously will judge us rightly.

Response #3: Return in Repentance

The only acceptable response is to return in repentance.

Notice how the book of Hosea concludes in chapter 14. (1-3, 8-9)

1 O Israel, return to the LORD your God,

For you have stumbled because of your iniquity;

2 Take words with you,

And return to the LORD.

Say to Him,

“Take away all iniquity;

Receive us graciously,

For we will offer the sacrifices of our lips.

3 Assyria shall not save us,

We will not ride on horses,

Nor will we say anymore to the work of our hands, ‘You are our gods.’

For in You the fatherless finds mercy.”

8 *“ Ephraim shall say, ‘What have I to do anymore with idols?’*

I have heard and observed him.

I am like a green cypress tree;

Your fruit is found in Me.”

9 *Who is wise?*

Let him understand these things.

Who is prudent?

Let him know them.

For the ways of the LORD are right;

The righteous walk in them,

But transgressors stumble in them.

The only way to have revival is to respond to God’s conviction by repenting of our sin. The modern day church is much like Israel I’m afraid. God has called us to repentance, but we harden our hearts or counterfeit our commitment. We have sung louder and called it revival. We have changed worship styles and called it revival. We have changed churches and called that revival. We have written vision statements and called that revival. We have tried some fancy program and called that revival. However, the only way to ever experience authentic revival is to repent of our sin. We will never experience revival without dealing with our sin.

Remember, you can return to God.

When the alarm went off during *The Singing Christmas Tree*, I found out later that there was one group of folks who did heed the warning. Our Preschool staff was back in the Preschool area providing childcare for members of the choir, orchestra, and staff. They heeded the warning and moved outside. I pray all of us would have the courage to heed God’s warning and move.