

Hosea 14 – “God’s work, not ours.”
Sermon at All Saints Waitara. Rev. Bruce Stanley
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Handout available today...

The consequences of sin

* **III** – Victoria Long decide to try gambling. She won \$300 on the pokies. So she started playing every week. Then every night. One night she won \$2500. The next night she lost it all. Then, she started embezzling, stealing money from her employer. By the age of 58, she had been married for 23 years, she was a mother, a grandmother, and she had stolen over \$500,000 from her employer and went to prison.

Sin has consequences. Punishment. Sometimes we can get away with it. Sometimes we don't get caught speeding by the police, or we get away with parking illegally. Sometimes guilty people get away with crimes. But in a just a fair world, people pay for their crime.

And that's where Israel are at the end of book of Hosea. They had done the wrong thing. They had put their trust in other gods. And because of their unfaithfulness, because of their sin, they were about to face the consequences of their sin – Israel will now become slaves to Assyria and Babylon.

Today in chapter 14, we're going to look at God's final responses. There are 4 amazing, perhaps unexpected, responses from God in this final chapter. And the first is this...

*** God calls out to us**

Turn with me to verse 1:

* *“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord.”*

God calls out *“Return, O Israel”*

God doesn't just **stand** there faithfully. God calls out. **“Return”**. We have a God who is willing to call us back to him. And that's the first thing: we have a God who loves us enough to **call us** back, not just stand there waiting.

III – As a parent, when I make dinner for my kids, I don't just put the dinner on the table and start eating. I call out to the boys. Sometimes they don't hear me; sometimes they choose to keep watching the TV and ignore me. So I call again. Why? Because I know they need to eat. I know they NEED dinner. And even if they're being rebellious by ignoring me, I don't stop calling them.

That's the first amazing thing: God is a loving Father, so he calls out to us to return. He does that through his word, or through other people, but always by speaking to our hearts.

The second amazing thing is this:

*** God says “Come as you are”**

Does he call on them to return with sacrifices? Does he tell them to return with a changed life? Does he tell them to change their ways and **then** return to him? No! He calls them to return with words and ask for forgiveness. Nothing else, but to ask for forgiveness.

* *“Say to him: “Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips.” ”*

III – I want you to imagine you go and see your doctor with a broken arm. And the doctor says: “Go away, fix up your arm, and **then** come back and see me when you’re feeling better and I’ll help you.”

Or say you go to your mechanic because your car won’t start. The mechanic says: “Bring your car back when it’s working and I’ll have a look at it.”

Or imagine you go to the gym and they tell you “Come back when you’re in better shape.” When you ask for help, whether it’s from a doctor, a mechanic, or the gym, you don’t expect those answers.

When we turn to God for help, we don’t expect him to say: “Fix yourself up and **THEN** I’ll help you. What does God ask of us? Does God say that before we join up, before we turn back to him, we have to fix all our problems? We have to be perfect? Do we have to come with him with a changed life? Do we have to get rid of everything in our lives which make us sin **before** we can come to God?

Does a doctor say, “Come and see me when you’re healthy”?

God says: “Come to me **now**, as you are, broken.” You see, we can only come to God by asking for His forgiveness. Nothing we **DO** will make God love us more. And nothing we’ve **DONE** will make God love us less. And nothing **WE CHANGE** will make God love us differently. God loves us as we are. When we’re obedient **AND** when we’re faithful. When we’ve run away from him in our sinfulness and rebellion, God wants what any good and loving father wants. He just wants us to turn around, come home and ask for forgiveness.

*** Here’s a question for us to think about today:**

Let’s keep with the theme of Hosea and imagine a practicing prostitute joined our church. And what would we say to them if they said: “How do I become a Christian?”

Would we say: “Well, you need to stop doing what you’re doing. Stop being a prostitute and turn to God.” Is that what we would say?

Or would we say, first of all, “Turn to God and ask him for forgiveness for **all** of your sin”?

Do you see the difference? Sometimes we often say to people – “Get rid of the sin in your life and **then** turn to God.” But God says: “Turn to me” first.

And praise God for that. If we had to change our lives and get rid of sin before we came to God, well, none of us would be sitting here today. Sure, we may not be prostitutes who sleep with people for money, but what about the way we prostitute ourselves to other gods? And what about those sins others don’t see? The lust, the hate, the envy, pornography, the desire and greed for money. If God said: “Get rid of your sin, then come to me”, none of us could come to him! Who here can get rid of all their sin?!!!

So how do we deal with our sin? Turn to verse 4 – a verse that contains a deep truth about God that we often forget. The third amazing thing:

*** God says “I will heal you”**

Verse 4 tells us that **God** is the one who heals:

** “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them.”*

It is **God** who heals our sinfulness. God calls Israel to come to him and ask for forgiveness. Then **HE** will heal them. Not only does God **forgive** our sins; **he heals us** of our sinfulness. We must not just pray: “God **forgive** me”. We also need to pray: “God **change** me!”

We cannot heal ourselves from sinfulness. But God can. Amazing fact number three. He calls us. He calls us to come as we are. And he wants to heal us. And now, finally, amazing fact number 4: as we turn to verses 5-8, God doesn't just heal us, he blesses us.

* God blesses

Let's read on: vv5-7

** "I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow. His splendour will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will again dwell in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a vine, and his fame will be like the wine from Lebanon."*

4 beautiful images here:

* 1. Dew is life

Imagine the desert – dusty, dead, dry – yet when the morning comes, dew is all over the ground. And without that dew, the plants in the desert wouldn't grow. That dew is life-giving. God is their life giving dew.

* 2. Roots are strength

Like the cedar of Lebanon, God is sending down roots. This is a picture of strength – of being established in God – his foundation is strong.

* 3. Shoots are growth

The young shoots will come up everywhere – a picture of the growth of the new life God's people will experience as they grow.

* 4. Finally, Fragrance, shade, flourish, blossom, fame – all symbols of blessing to themselves and to others.

This is not only life, but strength, growth, and blessing - this is a picture of a changed Israel. This was God's prostitute wife! Yet, these verses read like a love poem from God to his people. And we don't see this happen for a long time. ("It won't happen overnight!") This is a picture of the future that God promises for those who come back to him. **When they come**, God will heal them and love them, strengthen them, grow them and bless them. This is a picture of the way things are supposed to be, and will be, with God and his people.

* So what about us?

* Have a look at verse 9: (Screen)

The book ends with this little verse which basically asks – "What about you?"

Are you wise and discerning? Do you realise that these things apply to you today? Do you realise that God is calling you. He wants you to come to him and ask for forgiveness. He wants to heal you from your sin. And he wants to bless you with eternal life.

Will you walk his way, or will you stumble?

Sometimes we can pretend we don't have a problem with sin. Sometimes we realise the problem and try to self medicate. Try to fix it ourselves. But we can only change when we turn that problem over to God and allow our hearts to be changed by the work of His Holy Spirit.

It's quite possible that many of us here today are struggling with sin in our lives. We all sin, but you may have a particular issue you're dealing with. Let me say three things about that as I finish. And if you don't think you need to hear this now, keep it under your hat for later in life!... maybe for as early as tomorrow!...

* First of all, **Jesus has died for you on the cross.** Turning to him and asking for forgiveness means that Jesus has paid for your sin. Be assured of that and remember that you are a child of God with eternal life because of what Jesus has done for you.

* Second, **don't try and fix yourself.** You need to pray. Hand the problem over to God. He has given us the gift of His Holy Spirit who works in our hearts to change us to be more like Jesus. **Let him** do that in your life.

* Third, and finally, **you are not on your own.** Often we find it hard to share these things. But I want to encourage you to share it with someone you trust as a Christian. Whether it's me, or your home group leader, or your spouse, or a friend. Why? So you can pray about it together.

Too often we think that we're strong enough to overcome things on our own. I think we often convince ourselves that if we work hard at it, we can overcome sin. But the only way to be strong as a follower of Jesus, is to become weak; to admit our sin, to recognise our failures, and allow God to heal.

I going to pray for us all now, and if you would like to pray more after the service, or during the week, I'm going to ask you to please come and talk to me or Heather so we can make a time to do that with you.

Let's pray.

Pause to reflect on our sinfulness and our desire to fix things ourselves.

Then prayer: God forgive me. God change me.