

Hosea

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[0 : 00] ...over the northern part of Israel, and from the death of Uzziah to the reign, the beginning of the reign of Hezekiah was itself over 60 years, something nearly 70 dates.

Well, we don't need to be worried about that, but he exercised a long ministry he must have had for those days of very long life.

And through his long ministry, sadly, Uzziah was to see the people to whom he spoke, going further and further away from their God, slipping into idolatry deeper and deeper, and coming at last into the sad state of captivity, being overwhelmed by the Assyrians.

That northern kingdom of Israel, you may recollect, was taken into bondage and completely overwhelmed, whereas Judah later on was taken into captivity, but there was a remnant left there.

And it would seem that Uzziah not only prophesied of these things, but actually lived to see them.

[1 : 42] His message, then, is largely a message of warning, of admonition, of a call to repentance to a people who are very sinful and wayward and rebellious.

And it is a very vigorous message. People find the prophecies somewhat difficult. I think our English minds, for one thing, find them particularly difficult because there are sudden changes of metaphor and illustration, and very vivid illustrations are used.

But the message of Hosea clearly is a call to return to the Lord, a call to turn in true confession and in true desire before it is too late.

It was the word of the Lord, we remember, that was sent by his prophet. One commentator describes the book of Hosea as being a message especially suitable for times of decline in the Church of God, especially suitable for that.

Now, you here at Forest Fold are favoured, and in a sense, you are somewhat remarkable, because you have been blessed and increased.

[3 : 26] You have seen, instead of seeking smaller premises, or meeting in a vestry behind the chapel, as in various places where I go to, you have seen this place enlarged.

Necessity for greater capacity. You have seen the blessing of the Lord in that way. And I'm sure that in these days, that is somewhat remarkable.

And I only mention that because it is in the context of this word. Some of you here were at the annual meeting of the Pilgrim Homes in Tunbridge Wells recently.

The speaker in the afternoon was Brian Edwards, President of the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, a man in a position to know something of the scene in the professing Christian church.

And his comments, I felt, were rather sad, but rather acute. He spoke of many places that increased at the expense of others.

[4 : 52] He spoke of a general picture in our land, of a slide to modernism era, of a sad apathy generally, and coldness spiritually.

If I understand him aright, that was his assessment. He didn't spend a long time upon that, but that was how it came over.

And surely the words then of the book of Hosea are relevant. They are relevant generally then.

In the general sense relevant to us, if I might use that word in the widest sense, to the Christian church, there is need for reviving.

There is need for repentance. There is need for restoration. There is need for the Lord to work in a mighty way, to gather many into his kingdom.

[6 : 01] A general need of reviving. And there is need individually. Let me press the point to you personally. I do not know.

Obviously how many are truly children of God. I do not know how many of you are really born again. I do not know how many of you are true seekers after the Lord.

How many of you believe with all your heart on the Lord Jesus Christ. But I know this, that there is great need. I know that personally we need this.

We need to turn to the Lord. We need more than just an outward semblance of religion.

We need more than just to gather with others. We need to be gathered into that fold of Christ Jesus with them. not just to meet socially, but to meet with the Lord.

[7 : 14] We need to be born again. You need to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ with all your heart.

You need your sins forgiven. You need to know that you have a place laid up for you in heaven. You need to be walking with the Lord and fruitful in his grace.

You need it. I do too. And let me just expand the point a little further and say that those who have, perhaps for many years, known the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, truly believed, have been born again, are there not times when you need reviving and refreshing?

times, perhaps when you need to be awakened again and brought back, times when we become cold and perhaps somewhat choked with the things of this life and the cares thereof, when we need a bit of pruning.

I was reflecting on this. I remember when I worked on the farm at Cherry Gardens, I worked for my dear brother in the Lord, David Obert.

[8 : 48] It was an orchard. They were mainly quite old apple trees. They'd grown up and got thick. David asked for advice from the advisory service.

the ministry of agriculture. And the young man came out. He was very good and very practical. And he said, oh yes, these trees, they've got too, much too tall and much too thick.

He said, you must let the light in. You must let the light in. Into the very center of them. And his advice really could be summed up.

He said, take out the maximum of wood with the minimum of cuts. And that's what we did. And made a difference to them. But you see, what an illustration.

Have we got a bit like that? Do we need cutting down? Do we need the light to be let in again? The light?

[9 : 51] What about our hearts? You know, the Lord said, it was the Lord Jesus Christ speaking by his spirit to the churches in the book of the Revelation.

I have somewhat against the ethicist. Thou hast left thy first love. Thou hast left thy first love. You're not so warm.

You're not so zealous. You're not so much involved.

You have become somewhat overgrown. Well, here is a word then that speaks of a reviving and refreshing.

The prophet Hosier then speaks to a people who have gone away from their God.

[10 : 49] They have turned to idols. They have made that house of God into a house of idols. It's interesting to see that he speaks of Beth-Avon.

Beth-Avon and Beth-El are the same place virtually. But whereas Beth-El means the house of God, that was where initially God appeared and spoke to Jacob.

This is none other than the house of God, exclaims Jacob. The very gate of heaven. This is Beth-El. And there wasn't much there, was there?

There certainly wasn't any golden calf there. But ultimately it became the king's chapel. Very ornate, I imagine.

With the priests offering their idea of sacrifices. Not according to the law of Moses, but their own idea. Jeroboam's idea.

[11 : 54] And the golden calves that were worshipped. And the people had gone far off from the living God. they turned away. Does it happen today?

I'm afraid it can do. Not perhaps with such gross idols, but there are other things that people worship.

Position, honour, wealth, and status. And the status, those things, the various things that may draw our hearts away.

Hosea speaks then to a people and let's come to the verse. He speaks of fallow fields and fruitfulness.

He speaks of the need of heavenly husbandry. Thinking of the fallow fields, I remembered them.

[13 : 06] When I was a boy going to school, I passed on school days through an area of Manchester called Fallow Field.

And I didn't think much about it. It was quite an ordinary suburban area. But the very name reminds us, it reminds us, of course, in the first place of the expanding city swallowing up the farmland.

but then it reminds us in its very name of that centuries-old way of resting the land at times, of leaving it without a crop.

Fallow. There used to be the rotation and so many years with various crops and then the land was left to rest.

You find that, of course, under the law of Moses there was that provision that the land was to have that rest from production.

[14 : 15] In these days, I understand they call it set-aside. Similar thing. And farmers get paid for not growing crops. Well, in a way it's a similar idea.

Give the land a rest. But, of course, there are problems. There are problems, and what may be very good and suitable for the land is not necessarily entirely suitable for our souls.

things. I want to think then of the things we may think first, of the need to be fruitful.

The need to be fruitful. This is emphasized, isn't it, for the people of God, for us all throughout the word.

God, and in that passage we read in St. John chapter 15, the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, it is emphasized to us, every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he purgeth it, he taketh it away.

[15 : 40] The need to be fruitful. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit, so shall ye be my disciples. There is the emphasis, I have chosen you, said Jesus, to his own apostles, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain.

Necessary, that we should be fruitful, we need to have that fruit of the Spirit. We need to be fruitful in faith, in hope, in love.

We need to be fruitful in every good work, if we desire to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. And we may remember as again the Lord Jesus Christ, spoke in that parable in St.

Luke chapter 13. It was the fig tree, was planted in the vineyard, and he came seeking fruit, seeking fruit.

Well, yes, it's what we expect, isn't it, of a fruit tree. We don't just expect flowers, or ornamental leaves, but fruit.

[17 : 08] fruit. I come, these three years, I come seeking fruit, finding none. There is that need, we need to be fruitful.

It's emphasized in those epistles of Paul, as he writes to the Galatians, chapter five, that well-known passage, but the fruit of the spirit.

He's been speaking of the fruit, of the sinful heart, the flesh, the works of the flesh, what it brings forth, the sinful things that rise up from the unrenewed heart, horrible things, violent things, sad and ungodly things, things which are shameful and he says, they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, fruit, the fruit of the spirit.

He speaks to the Philippians in chapter 1, verse 11, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God.

I understand that to mean that those who truly believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and love him will want to be like him and want to produce those things that he did and that are honouring to him and they will ask for his grace and they will seek his help and they will desire his spirit that they may walk in his steps and be more like him.

[19 : 24] Be fruitful in that way. The fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ in the epistle to the Colossians chapter 1 and verse 10 similarly slightly different wording but similar thought the apostle says that you may walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.

So there might be many other words brought but there is a selection the need to be fruitful with that obviously you will see the danger of being unfruitful the danger of this the awfulness and the sadness reminded you of those words of John 15 where it is said the barren branches those that do not bear fruit are taken away and in Luke 13 we have that emphasis where the owner of the vineyard says why cumbereth it the ground cut it down cut it down this tree that is not fruitful it's no use it's no use at all it's only taking goodness from the ground without any suitable and needful production what an awful thing isn't it to think of that sentence cut it down why cumbereth it the ground but the saviour spoke those words very emphatically solemn words presents to us a great danger that thought similarly had been brought out by

John the Baptist thought of his words we find them in St. Matthew chapter 3 the axe is laid to the root of the tree every tree that bringeth not good fruit is cut down the thought is introduced in the very first verse of this tenth chapter in Hosea Israel is an empty vine he bringeth forth fruit unto himself and in the margin of many Bibles it speaks abundance and you might think well that seems strange an empty vine but luxuriant growth well let me illustrate it it always brings to mind

I may have said to some of you before years ago we worked at a big house being converted into a school boarding school and the grounds generally were kept up but the kitchen garden what had been the kitchen garden was just left and there was a greenhouse that had long been neglected the glass broken there was a vine growing in this greenhouse well growing in the greenhouse it was growing out of the greenhouse it pushed its way out when we looked there were bunches of grapes but they were so small they were useless that vine had grown luxuriantly it had never been pruned all the strength had gone into branches and leaves when I read this verse in Hosea

I'm vividly reminded of that picture Israel is an empty vine he bringeth forth fruit unto himself well if you want the leaves of vine if you want just leaves if you want the stalks and stems well that's it let it grow it'll produce them but if you want fruit if you want fruit then you've got to deal with it very differently there's the picture isn't it is the danger of being unfruitful the danger of being left just going our own way not subject to the discipline of the Lord not subject to his word not subject not to obedient children that's a way to unfruitfulness you see well what is to be done

[24 : 30] I was saying of fallow ground that there are the dangers certainly there are you see you may know in a little measure in your garden if you just leave ground if you say well I give it a rest this year it's been very fruitful perhaps it needs to be left but then if you just leave it what happens well surely you know the weeds spring up the weeds spring up don't they you've got to keep the weeds down you can't just leave it like that otherwise it'll go wild well there's something of this thought here isn't there with the people of Israel break up your fallow ground this ground has been neglected it's got hard again

I remember a picture we walked out between the services and a bidden and some year or two ago there was a field I suppose it was set aside had just been roughly ploughed and left and all the weeds were springing along in the clods and I thought well that's going to be a difficult matter to get this back into shape he needs a lot of rain and he needs a lot of work well that's like our sinful hearts really isn't it they need a lot of the showers and they need a lot of work yes indeed to be just like this if you look at verse 4 in this very chapter you will see something in the figure that Hosea uses thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field hemlock was a strong and poisonous plant and it grew very readily and there is a picture like I tried to portray to you here is a field that's been left and there are these weeds just springing up everywhere well it's neither fruitful nor is it sensible break up your fallow ground there needs to be the preparation of the ground the preparation of the ground well this is always necessary even even in the garden of

Eden you may recollect in Genesis chapter three Adam was set to dress to dress the ground to look after it and when he was with Eve turned out of that garden of Eden it's interesting to read the end of chapter three I believe in Genesis that he was given that direction to till the ground Genesis three and verse twenty three therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken we have a very dear elderly man I was going to say old man but he's pretty vigorous still an elderly man his prayers are very sweet very direct and he often prays that the

Lord will till the ground of the hearers till the ground you see make it ready for the good seed to get into it it's an old fashioned expression but it's very suitable to till the ground what is to be done then well there is various processes I think the word in Isaiah chapter 28 is enlightening on this the end of Isaiah chapter 28 there is a little portion that speaks of the preparation of the ground doth the plowman plow all day to sow doth he open and break the clods of his ground when he hath made plain the face thereof doth he not cast abroad the fishes and scatter the cumin and so on for his god doth teach him to discretion and doth instruct him to discretion rather and doth teach him and there and what does the farmer plow for well he doesn't plow just to make neat stripes up and down the field but he plows that he might have a harvest that he might sow the seed but there are other things to be done then he has to break up the clods and harrow it and in various ways get it ready for sowing it's a picture isn't it of the work of

God in a sense sometimes the ministry of the word is like plowing a tough job steady job going on straight ahead looking ahead and looking in a sense far beyond the present work to some future blessing when Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 9 he says we plough in hope we plough in hope we're like that like the farmer he's looking ahead isn't he looking ahead to a harvest well so we should be it break up your fallow ground that work that needs to be done and that seeking to the Lord it is time to seek the Lord it reminds us surely of

[31 : 18] Isaiah 55 seek ye the Lord while he may be found call ye upon him while he is near when is it time to seek the Lord well it's time now that's the answer plainly it's time now while he may be found the word isn't saying put it off it's not saying that there isn't a good time it is reminding us it is time time to seek the Lord high time we need his work we need his help we need his salvation we need his restoring power we need his life we need his love we need him all together without me said Jesus he can do nothing if I might just recollect again

I remember dear Mr. Stanley Delves very solemnly remarking upon that very word and he said in his impressive weight but what if nothing is done and it fastened upon my heart indeed yes without me says Jesus you can do nothing but he asks very plainly and I ask you but what if nothing is done that's a sad and terrible picture to contemplate isn't it it is time time to seek the Lord yes indeed for we need him to work we need him to work by the Holy Spirit we need him to do great things for us we need him to blot out our sins we need him to revive his work in the midst of these years we need him to send the ministers of the gospel with authority and power and unction we need him to open the hearts of hearers

Isaiah in that chapter 28 said about the ploughman he opens and breaks the clods of the earth opens the earth and it reminded me of Acts 16 and Lydia Lydia whose heart the Lord opened you know sometimes it's represented well the Lord did a very gentle work with Lydia compared with that jailer aroused so dramatically from his sleep in the earthquake well in a sense that may be so but when you think of how it is recorded it was a deep work wasn't it to have the heart opened if your heart has been hard and closed and impenitent to have it opened well that's a most major work that's like an earthquake within isn't it really it is like an earthquake within that's what

God did he opened the heart oh that he would indeed open the hearts of many today to receive it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you how we need these blessings we might use the simple figure and you will understand it won't you with all the concern that there has been about the dryness of our climate recently and the need for the rainfall well it was so in Israel they needed those seasons of rain who may get the ground ready sow the seed but unless there is that combination of the warmth the sunshine and the rain your seeds won't grow will they they won't grow there have been times when we have realized that we sowed the seed and it's waited it's had to wait to germinate because we haven't had the rain spiritually that's what we need don't we we need that thinking of that combination quite a number of years ago in

East Germany when it was under communist reign I think brother Andrew said there were posters appeared early in the year they were in German of course but roughly translated it said without God and without son we will get the harvest done and he said when he went again in the autumn there were people queuing for a few loaves of bread at the bread shops and the authorities had quietly removed the posters because he said without God and without his son there isn't any harvest without God there isn't very true isn't it how true it is in the things of the gospel without him without his gracious influence without his spirit there isn't any harvest it won't be done there are the promises just let me turn you to some words in

[37 : 47] Isaiah again Isaiah 44 I will pour water upon him that is thirsty and floods upon the dry ground I will pour my spirit upon thy seed and my blessing upon thine offspring isn't it true that in this land if we had been dealt with according to our sins we wouldn't have had any rain at all I firmly believe that but the Lord has been merciful there have been showers I trust there are showers of blessing too and then in chapter 45 there is that prayer in verse 8 drop down ye heavens from above or is it the command of

God well we can use it in both ways surely drop down ye heavens from above let the skies pour down righteousness let the earth open and let them bring forth salvation and let righteousness spring up together well then there will be the time of the reaping till he come and rain righteousness upon you there are those words of comfort and encouragement you remember psalm 126 I think what pastor a while ago spoke upon it the anniversary service the sweet psalm that reminds us he that goeth forth and weepeth bearing precious seed shall doubtless come again with rejoicing bringing his sheaves with him to the promise of

God there will be a harvest there will be that springing up we shall reap says Paul as he writes to the Galatians in due season if we faint not if we faint not trouble with some of us is we do easily faint don't we well I do we do easily faint we need much help and strength may God bless his word then make you still fruitful and prosperous amen our closing hymn this morning is number 939 Jesus immutably the same though true and living vine around thy all supporting stem my feeble arms are twine

I can do nothing without thee my strength is wholly thine withered and barren should I be if severed from the vine 939 939 939 Thank you.

Thank you.

[42 : 21] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. our dear brother kneel this afternoon and thy kind presence and guidance through this day and now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us each Amen Amen