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August 16th: Hosea 14 & John 14:15-31

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Israel restored. The promise of the Spirit.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 14. 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 shoot 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. The book of Hosea concludes in chapter 14.

Israel is here addressed in their situation of judgment, and then the heroes of the book across time are addressed more generally. Andrew Dearman remarks upon the degree to which the vocabulary of this chapter is found elsewhere in the book. The commonality of the language in this chapter with earlier parts of the book reflects its development and resolution of the book's broader themes.

Joshua Moon observes that the one part of the chapter where the commonality of language with elsewhere in the book is least pronounced, in verses 5-7, makes sense when we recognize that it is one of the rare parts of Hosea's prophecy that speaks of the restoration and flourishing of Israel. More particularly, chapter 14 reverses many of the themes of judgment of chapter 13. Moon summarizes some of the verbal indicators of this motif of reversal.

Iniquity, chapter 13 verse 12, is here taken away, chapter 14 verse 2. Concern for political might to save, chapter 13 verse 10, is now admitted as fruitless, chapter 14 verse 3. Repudiation of the work of their hands, chapter 13 verse 2 and 14 verse 3. Yahweh's anger, chapter 13 verse 11, removed, chapter 14 verse 4. And Israel's standing as Jew that dissipates, chapter 13 verse 3, is replaced by Yahweh as Jew that revives, chapter 14 verse 3. In short, the central prophetic message of Hosea stands in front of us as the last thing in our ears as the book comes to a perfectly fitting conclusion. The chapter opens with an invitation to return to the Lord and a description of how Israel might go about it. This is not the first time that Israel was presented with a call to return in the book.

Earlier in chapter 6 verses 1 to 3, come let us return to the Lord for he has torn us that he may heal us. He has struck us down and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us.

On the third day he will raise us up that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. He is going out as sure as the dawn.

He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. Perhaps the most astonishing thing is that after all that Israel has done, after all of Israel's betrayal, infidelity and iniquity, at the very time that it is in free fall, having stumbled over the precipice, descending headlong into the abyss of exile, it is still offered a path of return to the Lord. Even as the nation is lowered into its grave, the people are not altogether forsaken.

The prophecy of Hosea began with the prophetic sign of taking a wife of Horeb and having children of Horeb. That prophetic act ended with Hosea in chapter 3 taking Gomer back to himself. In verses 4 and 5 of that chapter, the prophetic sign act was explained as follows.

For the children of Israel shall dwell many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or household gods. Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the Lord and to his goodness in the latter days. Beyond the call to return to the Lord, Hosea offers Israel the words of confession with which it could make this return.

At the heart of Israel's failure was its misplaced trust, the trust that it placed in its various lovers, the Baals, foreign powers and even their own kings, rather than trusting in the Lord their God as their divine husband. Israel needed to confess its fault, the insufficiency of Assyria to save, and trust only in the Lord. The Lord alone should have been their source of confidence and security.

They must be cleansed by him and then perform true worship to him. After so many statements of judgment in the book and the terrible sentence that the nation was now suffering, the word of the Lord in verses 4 to 7 is a word of restoration and healing. The Lord would repair what was broken, he would restore them from their apostasy.

Like the glory of the sunshine coming after a terrible storm, they would be bathed, the new in his love, his anger has abated. As Meir Gruber observes, there is a stark contrast between the way that Israel is described after its restoration and the way it is described earlier in the book. In chapter 9 verse 16, Ephraim is stricken, their root is dried up, they shall bear no fruit.

In chapter 13 verse 15, though he may flourish among his brothers, the east wind, the wind of the Lord shall come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain shall dry up, his spring shall be parched. In chapter 6 verse 4, in chapter 13 verse 3, the imagery of Jew was used of Ephraim. In both cases it was the short-lasting character of the Jew that was focused upon.

Ephraim's love is like the short-lasting Jew in chapter 6 verse 4. In chapter 13 verse 3, we are told that they themselves would be like the morning mist or like the Jew that goes away early, like the chaff that swirls from the threshing floor, or like smoke from a window. Here however, the language of Jew reappears, but it's used in a positive sense. The Lord will be like the refreshment of the Jew to Israel, causing Israel to blossom like the lily.

While some commentators have disputed the reading, verses 5, 6, and 7 all make a reference to Lebanon at the end of them. In verse 5, Israel will take root like the trees of Lebanon. The trees of Lebanon were famous for their grandeur and their quality.

Israel would also put out new shoots. Not only would this eschatological Israel be more firmly embedded in the land, its life would spread out over the land. In addition to the majesty of the trees of Lebanon, in verse 6, in language redolent of the Song of Songs, it is the beauty and fragrance of Lebanon that is highlighted.

Hans Walter Wolff quotes Herman Guth, In the regions where the mulberry, olive, and fig tree grow, the ground is covered with myrrh, thyme, lavender, sage, citrose, styrax, with fragrant shrubs and herbs which fill the air with pleasant odours, particularly when the wanderer treads upon them. The language here then is language not just of strength and security, but also of delight and beauty. Commentators are divided on verse 7, should we understand the opening statement here to refer to a return and dwelling under the Lord's shadow or under Israel's shadow.

Considering the way elsewhere we have imagery similar to this used, with great trees representing kings and their rule, offering shade for those who take rest beneath them. It would not be entirely surprising if this were a reference to people coming under the shade of Israel's restored boughs. In addition to its new security and fragrance and beauty, Israel would enjoy great fertility and fame.

The fertility is described with reference to the grain and the vine, and their fame is associated with the wine of Lebanon. Somewhat ironically, this is the only reference that we have in scripture to this wine of Lebanon. The lesson that Israel was to learn from all of this was that its security, its provision, and its fruit all came not from idols but from its divine husband, the Lord.

As the book concludes, the hearer is more directly addressed. The words of the prophets are not just for their most immediate hearers and times. As Brevard-Charles has argued, to some extent the words of the prophets are abstracted from their historical contexts.

The word of the prophet Hosea does not cease to be relevant or to speak with urgency into people's situations after the northern kingdom of Israel has collapsed. Rather, its words can still address the modern hearer who meditates upon them and learns wisdom by them. A question to consider, the final verse of Hosea chapter 14 moves us from language that we associate more with prophecy to language of wisdom literature.

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.

How might this saying direct our hearing of the book? John chapter 14 verses 15 to 31. If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever, even the spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.

I will not leave you as orphans. I will come to you, yet a little while, and the world will see me no more, but you will see me, because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. Judas, not Iscariot, said to him, Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us and not to the world? Jesus answered him, if anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words, and the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.

These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you, but the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.

You heard me say to you, I am going away, and I will come to you. If you loved me, you would have rejoiced, because I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it takes place, so that when it does take place, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming.

He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here. The second half of John chapter 14 continues the theme of Jesus' coming.

Jesus is responding to the anxiety of his disciples as he has told them that he is going away. However, he is also addressing the reality of the church afterwards, the fact that we do not have Christ physically present with us. How is it that we can relate to a Christ who seems absent from us? Christ responds to this by speaking of a fourfold coming.

We can think about his coming in the resurrection, his coming at Pentecost, his coming in specific acts of power and presence within the history of the church, and then his coming on the final day to take his people to himself. Jesus speaks about all of these as ways in which he is going to be with and near his disciples, even after he has physically left and gone to his Father. In verses 16 and 17 he speaks about the gift of the Spirit.

The gift of the Spirit will be a way in which Jesus communicates his presence to his disciples. The Spirit will be one who calls alongside, to translate the term more literally, or someone who is a helper or a friend or a comforter or an encourager or an advocate. All of these could be interpretations of the term that is used here.

He is the Spirit of truth. Themes of witness pervade John's Gospel, and the truth of the

witness borne by the Spirit is given prominence. Christ bears witness, John the Baptist bears witness, and now the Spirit of truth will bear witness.

The truth will not be received by the Word, as the Spirit will not be received by the world. The world neither sees nor knows the Spirit. Earlier on we've been told that the wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes, and that so it is with everyone born of the Spirit and those born of the Spirit will not truly be recognized by the world, but yet the disciples know the Spirit.

The Spirit dwells with them at that moment, as he dwells with them in Christ. Later on, as a result of Pentecost, he will be in them, empowering them and also giving them a sense of Christ's presence. Christ assures them that he will not leave them as orphans, he himself will come to them.

They're going to experience his absence in a very keen way in a They will feel bereft of him. They will initially have no hope, and yet he will return to them. Although the world will not see him, they will see him, and because he lives, they will live.

Because of his resurrection, they will be resurrected, and in that day they will know that Christ is in the Father. They'll have an assurance of Christ's relationship with the Lord and the Giver of life, his Father, and they will also be assured in that moment of their relationship with Christ. Not just that Christ is the true image of the Father and the Word of the Father, but also that they are connected with him.

In verse 15, Jesus spoke of those who loved him, keeping his commandments. In verse 21, he speaks of the same thing. Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me, and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.

This connection between love and keeping the commandments of Christ is an important one, which John especially explores in his first epistle. When we look through the Gospel of John, we will have a clearer sense of what the commandments involve. First of all, Christ commands his disciples to receive and believe what he gives them, and then he calls them to love one another.

The keeping of the commandments then refers to these two things, to believing in him and to loving each other, as they believe and receive Christ and love each other, it will be a manifestation of the fact that they love Christ. In John's first epistle, John talks at great length about how we know that we know Christ as we keep his commandments. Judas, not Iscariot, asked Christ how it would be that he would manifest himself to his disciples, but not to the world.

And in his answer, Jesus teaches that he and his Father will come to the one that loves

him and keeps his word, and that it will be in that person that this presence is particularly known. Jesus has already spoken about the spirit being given to the disciples as a whole, but here there seems to be more of an individual emphasis. When the spirit comes, whom the Father will send in Christ's name, he will teach the disciples all things that they need to know, so that they will be made aware of everything that they need to know.

This may be a reference primarily to the apostles, rather than to disciples in general. The apostles will spread their inspired teachings to the rest of the church, so that the church is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. At the conclusion of this chapter, Jesus returns to the theme with which he began it.

At the beginning he told his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled, and now he gives them his peace and assures them once again that their hearts should not be troubled, that they should not be afraid. He is assuring them that he is going away, but that he will return to them in these various ways. If they love him, they will rejoice, because he is going to his Father, and his Father will give him all authority, and will send the Spirit in his name.

Consequently it is much better for them and for him that he goes. He tells them these things before they take place, so that when they do take place, they will not be afraid, but also so that they will have proof of his words, in order that they might believe. As if interrupting a conversation to look at a clock, to be reminded of an imminent appointment, Jesus tells his disciples that he cannot talk much longer with them, because the ruler of this world is coming.

Satan, however, has no claim upon Christ. Christ does as the Father has commanded him, so Satan has no purchase upon him. Satan can't ultimately defeat him, he can't hold on to him, and as Christ does what the Father has commanded, the world will know that he loves the Father.

This is the example that we should follow, as we do what Christ has commanded, so that it will be known to all that we love him. A question to consider, why is it a benefit for the Church that Christ leaves after the resurrection?