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August 15th: Hosea 13 & John 14:1-14

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The Shepherd become the predator of the flock. I am the way, the truth, and the life.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 13. I am the Lord your God from the land of Egypt. You know no God but Me, and besides Me there is no Saviour.

It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. But when they had grazed, they became full, they were filled, and their heart was lifted up. Therefore they forgot Me.

So I am to them like a lion, like a leopard I will lurk beside the way. I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs. I will tear open their breast.

I will tear open their heart. I will tear open their breast. I will tear open their breast.

I will tear open their breast. I will tear open their breast. I will tear open their breast.

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I will tear open their breast. I will tear open their breast. And there I will devour them like a lion as a wild beast would rip them open.

He destroys you o Israel for you are against Me against your helper. Where now is your King to save you in all your cities? Where are all your rulers those of whom you said, Give me a King and princes. I gave you a King in my anger and I took him away in my wrath.

The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up, his sin is kept in store. The pangs of childbirth come for him, but he is an unwise son, for at the right time he does not present himself at the opening of the womb. I shall ransom them from the power of Sheol.

I shall redeem them from death. O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? Compassion is hidden from my eyes. 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, it shall strip his treasury of every precious thing.

Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God. They shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open. The beginning of Hosea chapter 13 harkens back to a time when Ephraim was elevated among his brothers.

Ephraim, the second son of Joseph, who was raised above his brother Manasseh, was the son who most represented Joseph's part within the nation. If the power of the south was Judah, the power of the north was Joseph, and particularly Ephraim. However, this once great tribe brought destruction upon itself.

He incurred guilt through Baal, and died. Joshua Moon suggests that the death in question here is the end of the house of Ahab, the destruction of the Amrites, who had particularly given themselves to the worship of the Baals. Alternatively, we might see in this the downfall of Hosea.

However, even after such a downfall, they continued to compound their sin, making for themselves metal images. The metal images referred to here, which are made out of silver, are presumably not the same as the golden calf of Bethel set up by Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. Rather, these might be gods for household shrines, or alternatively gods on high places.

In a point typical of prophetic critique of idolatry, Hosea points out that these are all the work of craftsmen. These creations of human artisans are completely unfitting to represent the creator god who has created all things. Verse 1 speaks of Israel's death.

In verse 3, they are compared to a morning mist or dew that vanishes early, or like the chaff from the threshing floor. They will not endure. As the sun rises, or as the wind comes, they will disappear or be driven away.

Although they have gone after strange gods, God reminds them in verses 4 and 5 of the relationship, the long-standing relationship, that he had with them as his people. He was the god who brought them up out of Egypt and led them in the wilderness, providing for them there. At that time of their greatest weakness and dependency, he was the one providing for them.

They know no other god in such a manner, no god who has guided, delivered, protected, and supported them as he has. It is precisely in this intimate knowledge that existed between the Lord and his people that the tragedy and the betrayal of their going after other gods is most clearly seen. The imagery at this point is imagery that is implicitly that of shepherding.

The Lord shepherded his people, he brought them like a flock out of Egypt and into the promised land, where he gave them good pasturage. However, when this flock had grazed and become full, they neglected and forgot the Lord who had brought them up. The warning of forgetting the Lord at the time of fullness and plenty is one that is familiar in various parts of the Bible, particularly in the book of Deuteronomy.

Deuteronomy chapter 8 verses 10 to 14. And you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Take care lest you forget the Lord your God, by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today.

Lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, that your heart be lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. As they forget the Lord, however, the Lord, who was once their shepherd, becomes like their predator. Another description of the Lord as a predator is found earlier in the book of Hosea in chapter 5 verse 14.

For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away. I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

The final word of verse 7 in the Hebrew, translated as keep watch or lurk, or in Moon's translation as well-trodden, is a play upon the word for Assyria, as in the preceding

chapter, puns give a clue about certain connections. Here, the agency of the Lord's destruction will come upon his people through Assyria. The Lord is compared to a leopard or lion.

He is also compared to a she-bear robbed of her cubs. The image of the she-bear is not just an image of violence and predation. Rather, the she-bear is a violent beast that has been bereft of something most precious to her.

In comparing the Lord with a she-bear, we might think of the way in which Israel has been taken from the Lord by her unfaithfulness and the Baals as perhaps being akin to the cubs that have been taken from the she-bear. They have rejected the Lord and put their trust in their king and also in various foreign policies. However, one by one, their kings were overthrown by others, and their fickle foreign policy brought destruction upon their head as they vacillated between Egypt and Assyria.

Verse 10 might speak to a time after Shalmaneser V removed Hosheav from the throne. The king has failed. The foreign policy has failed.

The Baals have failed. And now they have to deal with the Lord, who is opposing them like a lion or a she-bear robbed of her cubs. In this context of the loss of the king, rulers and princes, the Lord recalls the initial sinful request of Israel to have a king like the nations.

The Lord was Israel's king, but in 1 Samuel they rejected the Lord as their king and sought a man over them instead. Now the consequences of their sinful rebellion, in which they took their cues from the surrounding nations and sought a king like them, rather than trusting in the Lord as their king, has led to a point where the Lord, who first gave them that king, has left them bereft of a king and the surrounding nations are preying upon them. The imagery of verse 12 might relate to a situation where evidence was gathered together in a bundle, ready for a trial.

Ephraim will have to give an account for itself and a sentence will be passed against it. Imagery of the pangs of childbirth are found elsewhere in scripture. In Isaiah chapter 26 verses 17-19 In Isaiah chapter 66 verses 7-9 Before she was in labor she gave birth, before her pain came upon her she delivered a son.

Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labor she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth? says the Lord. Shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb? says your God.

Here the image seems to present Ephraim as the child that does not know the proper time. Ephraim is the child whose time has come to be born and he does not present himself at the opening of the womb. Perhaps he's stillborn and the nation is going to

miscarry.

Birth pangs are elsewhere in scripture connected with times of suffering. At some points in scripture, such as in the story of the Exodus, birth pangs herald a new birth. At other points, however, labor pains arrive but no child is born.

Jeremiah also uses such imagery in his prophecy. As the judgment comes upon Jerusalem, she is like a woman in labor, but no child would be born from her pain. Verse 14 is famously used by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

In its original context, however, it's far from clear that the meaning is positive. The majority of commentators seem to understand its statements as rhetorical questions. Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from death? The implied answer in both cases is no.

The Lord is not going to deliver his people from these great enemies. He's going to give them over to the power of death as we see elsewhere in the prophecy. What's more, not only is God not going to save his people from these forces, he's going to summon these forces against them.

O death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting? is an invitation to death and Sheol to come on the scene with all their terrors. They will be the executioners of Ephraim, enacting the dreadful sentence of the Lord upon his rebellious people. Such a reading of the text here is certainly not universal.

There are several commentators and translations that give the text here a more positive meaning. However, the final clause of the verse does make this difficult. Compassion is hidden from my eyes.

The people are condemned. The nation is going to be slain and buried in the lands of its exile. When Paul refers to this statement in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, it seems most likely to me that he's taking this statement, laden as it is with the darkest themes of judgment, and showing how the light of the Lord's redemption from slavery and the grave is fulfilled in the story of Christ's resurrection.

He connects it with the text of Isaiah chapter 25 verse 8. He will swallow up death forever and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. The final text reads as follows in verses 54 to 57 of chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians. When the perishable puts on the imperishable and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? The sting of death is sin and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Words that were once a summons to these powers, to slay a

people that had broken the law, are now words of triumph over these powers.

As they have been robbed of their mastery by Christ's resurrection. Earlier in the chapter the Lord had spoken of himself as the one who knew Israel in the wilderness. Here however at the end of the chapter he talks about returning Israel and its land to the state of a wilderness.

The wilderness itself will pursue and overtake them in the east wind of the Lord. The final end of Samaria will be bitter. On account of its rebellion it will experience the full cruelty of the Assyrians.

Children will be dashed in pieces and pregnant women ripped open. A question to consider. This chapter gives a very negative portrayal of Israel's history with its kings.

I gave you a king in my anger and I took him away in my wrath. However the book of Deuteronomy seems to make provision for a time that would come when Israel would enjoy kings in the land. How should Israel have enjoyed its king in a way that did not lead it to rebel against the Lord? John chapter 14 verses 1 to 14.

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms.

If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also, and you know the way to where I am going. Thomas said to him, Lord we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way? Jesus said to him, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him, Lord show us the Father and it is enough for us. Jesus said to him, Have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does the works.

Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do, and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father. Whatever you ask in my name, this I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it. Discussing Jesus' farewell discourse in the Gospel of John, Frederick Dale Brunner suggests that we find a Father sermon, a Son

sermon, and then a Spirit sermon. In this part, Jesus reveals the way to the Father, the truth of the Father, and the life from the Father.

The big question that hangs over John chapter 14 and the chapters that follow is that of how the disciples would relate to Jesus after he had gone, and the question of how Jesus would in some form come to his disciples after that point. Of course, Jesus would come again to his disciples in the resurrection. He would come again to his disciples in the gift of the Spirit.

He would come again to his disciples in his presence at particular moments and particular acts, and then he would come to his disciples in a climactic manner on the great day of the Lord. But at this point, the disciples are unsettled. They've been told that Peter is going to deny Jesus.

They have some inkling, perhaps, that Judas is about to betray him, and they know that something is going to happen to Jesus in the coming day. All of this is weighing upon them. Jesus speaks to them in that condition, Do not let your hearts be troubled.

The charge that he gives here is one that contrasts with his own internal state. He is very troubled in his spirit at this point. The charge that he gives them is one that recalls the sort of charge that Moses gave to Joshua.

Joshua was called to be strong and courageous, not to lose heart, to be confident as he went forward. Like the departing leader Moses, Jesus addresses his disciples on his departure. He is concerned for his disciples at this point, calling them to believe in God and to believe also in him.

The connection that he establishes between faith in the Father and faith in himself at this point is significant. Perhaps it reminds us of the statement we find in the story of the Exodus in chapter 14 verse 31, where the people believe in God and in Moses following the Red Sea crossing. Jesus goes on to talk about the fact that there are many rooms in his Father's house.

Where is the Father's house? Perhaps the best way to think of it is as the temple of Jesus' own body. This is less a dwelling place than it is an indwelling place. Jesus will take his disciples to himself.

Many understand this as a reference to heaven and the eternal state. This may be part of the picture. However, I think there is a much more immediate fulfillment than this.

I don't believe that the place that Jesus is preparing is heaven per se. Rather, the place is his body, the church. As we will see in the book of Revelation, the church is prepared in heaven.

But it is prepared on earth too. In order to prepare this place, Jesus must die, rise again,

ascend into heaven, and give the spirit to form the church, bringing us into God's presence. This interpretation can be strengthened by other references to God's dwelling in this chapter, especially in verse 23.

Jesus and the Father will make their home with the believer, making the believer a room in the new temple that Christ is preparing. On the last day, the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven, as we see in Revelation chapter 21 verse 2. Jesus declares that he is the only way to the Father here. He is the one who comes from the bosom of the Father, and he is the one who will lead his people into the presence of the Father.

He speaks of himself as the way, the truth, and the life. He is the truth throughout the Gospel of John. Throughout, he has been describing himself as the true version of things.

He is the true light coming into the world. He is the true bread from heaven. He is the true vine.

And he is not just the true this or that or the other. He is the truth. He is also the one who has life in himself.

He is the source of eternal life. He is unique in all of these aspects. There is no other person like him, and there is no other way to the Father save than through him.

He is the image of the Father. He is the only begotten son. He declares that if you have seen him, you have seen the Father.

The Father is known in Jesus. Jesus does the Father's work. He acts with the Father's authority.

He speaks the Father's words, and the Father is in him. If you want to know the Father, you will know the Father in Jesus, and Jesus is the way. On several occasions in the Old Testament, there are contrasts between different ways.

The way that leads to life, and the way that leads to death. The way of wisdom, and the way of folly. The early church came to be known as the way.

Jesus is the way into God's very presence. He is, as the author of Hebrews states, the new and living way into heaven itself. The movement that Jesus will make in his death, resurrection, and ascension will blaze the trail and lead the way by which his people can have access to God, by which they can approach the Father.

Jesus declares to his disciples that whatever they ask in his name, he will do for them, for the Father's glory. They will act as representatives of Jesus' personal rule. They will act as authorized agents, continuing his work.

As they do so, he promises that they'll perform greater works than he has done. They are continuing his work in the power of his spirit. It is because he goes away, ascends to

God's presence, and receives the fullness of the authority of the spirit which he gives to his church, that they will perform these greater works.

As we proceed through this chapter, and those that follow, we'll see a lot more said about Jesus' disciples, and how they should relate to him after his death, resurrection, and ascension in Pentecost. This is all preparing them for what is about to come. Jesus is speaking to them in their doubts, struggles, difficulties, fears, and anxieties, giving them the confidence and the comfort that they need to go forward.

A question to consider. Working through these chapters, we can see that there is a progression in Jesus' argument, an argument that is presenting a response to a very immediate problem, the problem of the fear of the disciples and their anxiety. However, it speaks to something far beyond this, speaking to the continuing life of the church, and what it means to relate to a saviour who has seemingly left the scene.

What are some of the ways in which Jesus' teaching here, and John's framing of his gospel narrative more generally, equip us to live when Christ seems to be absent?