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August 8th: Hosea 6 & John 10:1-21

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I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. Jesus the Good Shepherd.

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Transcript

Hosea chapter 6. 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. His going out is sure as the dawn.

He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. Therefore I have hewn them by my prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings. But like Adam they transgressed the covenant. There they dealt faithlessly

with me.

Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood. As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests band together. They murder on the way to Shechem.

They commit vilny. In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing. Ephraim's whoredom is there.

Israel is defiled. For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed, when I restore the fortunes of my people. Hosea chapter 5 ended with a description of the sickness of Ephraim and Judah, a sickness which could not be healed by the king of Assyria.

They had cut themselves off from the Lord by their sins, and the Lord was like a predatory lion to them, about to maul them. The hope of their deliverance was expressed in the final verse, I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me. Chapter 6 opens with a different voice, perhaps the voice of Israel in response to the words of the Lord.

However sadly these words are probably not the actual words of Israel itself, although some commentators have taken them that way and the chapter divisions in our Bibles might lend themselves to that understanding. Rather these might be the words that the Lord is hoping to hear from his people, the words that would represent the acknowledgement of their guilt and the earnest seeking of the Lord referenced at the end of the preceding chapter. Another likely possibility is mentioned by Joshua Moon, that these are the words of the prophet himself encouraging the people, as one of them himself, to return to the Lord.

The Lord has turned back from them, so they must turn back to him. The Lord as we have seen is the real source of Israel's sickness, and consequently getting right with him is the real hope of their healing. No lesser power will be able to deliver or restore them.

The Lord could revive them in a short period of time, raising them up after two days, on the third day, enabling them to live before him once more. Alternatively, rather than seeing the after two days and on the third day as two ways of speaking of the same thing, some commentators see this more as an example of the sort of numerical formula that we encounter elsewhere in the Old Testament, in statements such as, for three transgressions of Judah and for four, or three things are too wonderful for me, four I do not understand. The connection of healing with deliverance from death here, especially as the raising up occurs on the third day, has unsurprisingly excited Christian readers of this text.

St. Augustine is just one of many examples of Christian theologians who heard this text as a prophecy of Christ and his resurrection. Indeed, the claim that Jesus was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, which we find in 1 Corinthians chapter 15

verse 4, has been heard as an allusion to these verses in Hosea, while the story of Jonah has also been proposed as a background for 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse 4. Three days and three nights is a weaker connection than on the third day. Moon is likely correct in seeing Hosea chapter 6 verse 2 as the central text in Paul's reference to a more general theme in the Old Testament scriptures, connecting a broader motif of the third day as the day of deliverance after a period of testing with the specific event of resurrection.

We might think of the third day provision of a substitute for Isaac on Mount Moriah, the third day restoration of the chief cut-bearer, the third day theophany of the Lord at Mount Sinai, the third day healing of King Hezekiah, or the third day appearance of Esther before King Ahasuerus. Moon assembles a fascinating array of Jewish texts that connect resurrection more generally with the third day. In Christ, the third day resurrection expected for the faithful more generally becomes focused on the one man who stands at their head, the condensed expression and anticipation of the destiny of the people as a whole, which will be achieved in and through him.

The question of whether the raising up is a raising up from death or a raising up from sickness shouldn't be pressed too strongly. Andrew Dearman writes, In verse 3, the Lord is compared to the dawn and the rains, the source of life and fertility within the land. He is the faithful provider and sustainer, and if Israel returns to him, he will be their restorer.

However, while the Lord as the source of healing might be like the life-giving sun and rains, which consistently nourish and revive the land, Israel and Judah are fickle, their love like morning mist that soon vanishes. The Lord has prosecuted his covenant against them by his prophets, sending forth his judgments and calling them to account. His judgments are described as like the light going forth, piercing the darkness and revealing what has formerly been hidden.

What the Lord desires from his people above all else is covenant loyalty and genuine knowledge of him. Sacrificial ritual apart from such devotion is empty and vain. Sacrifice was always supposed to function as a sort of enacted prayer, and performance of sacrifice, apart from the genuine love of the Lord, was a form of people's drawing near to the Lord with their lips while their hearts were far from him.

This is a common theme in the message of the prophets and the Psalms. In 1 Samuel chapter 15 verse 22, the prophet Samuel declares the Lord's judgment to the rejected King Saul. And Samuel said, The Lord makes a similar point through the prophet Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 1 verses 10 to 17.

I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts. I do not delight in the blood of bulls or of lambs or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who is required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings.

Incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me. I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread out your hands I will hide my eyes from you. Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean, remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes. Cease to do evil, learn to do good. Seek justice, correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Hosea chapter 6 verse 6 was of course a text that Jesus referenced on a couple of key occasions in his ministry recorded in Matthew's Gospel. In Matthew chapter 9 verse 13 Jesus answered the Pharisees who accused him of eating with tax collectors and sinners, saying that they needed to learn the meaning of this verse. He again accused the Pharisees of ignorance of the meaning of this statement in Matthew chapter 12 verse 7 after they had accused his disciples of breaking the Sabbath when the disciples had plucked and eaten the heads of grain.

Later in chapter 23 verse 23 he would challenge the scribes and Pharisees in similar terms. Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law, justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.

Above all other things the Lord desires the hearts of his people. No quantity of sacrifices can compensate for the absence of that. The law, whether the sacrificial regulations or the moral requirements of the Ten Commandments, was always to be fulfilled in and through love.

Commentators differ over the meaning of the term Adam in verse 7. Some, observing the participle there later in the verse, argue that it must be a geographical reference, relating to a sin committed at a place called Adam. In Joshua chapter 3 verse 16, in connection with the stopping of the waters of the Jordan so that the children of Israel could enter the Promised Land, there is a place called Adam mentioned. Dierman observes the syntactically similar expression in Hosea chapter 10 verse 9. From the days of Gibeah you have sinned, O Israel.

There they have continued. There the reference is clearly to a geographical location. Given the location of the city mentioned in Joshua chapter 3 as the likely site of a river crossing on the border between Ephraim and Gilead, this might make sense.

Like at Adam, they transgressed the covenant. If this is the case then the reference is an obscure one, but as Dierman argues it might relate to political intrigue associated with

Gilead, such as the 50 men from Gilead that had assisted Pekah in his treacherous murder of Pekah Ha'at, breaking the bond that should have united the people and their ruler. The fact that Gilead is mentioned in the next verse adds strength to this reading.

Another popular reading cedes this as a reference back to Adam in the Garden of Eden, breaking the covenant of works. However, as Michael Shepard points out, despite the popularity of expansive uses of the term in both Reformed systematic and biblical theologies, the term covenant is not actually employed elsewhere in reference to the situation that existed prior to the fall. It is important to recognise that the term covenant within scripture is deployed much less broadly than it is within systems of so-called covenant theology.

While this doesn't mean that we can't use the term covenant in a stipulated sense within our theologies and see the components of such a covenant so defined in Eden, it does mean that we need to be careful not to confuse the senses in which we are using this term. Moon defends the historically popular reading of Adam as a reference to man, whether our first father Adam in particular or humanity more generally. There, might relate, he argues, not to a geographical location but to a rhetorical one.

Adam is paradigmatic for covenant breaking and later Jewish texts read Hosea chapter 6 verse 7 in this way. Much as we see in the case of Abraham's faithfulness being described as if for fulfilment of the law in Genesis chapter 26 verse 5, language of covenant could appropriately be read back into the story of Eden. John Goldengate offers something of a mediating reading of this text, suggesting that as the heroes were first listening through it, they might initially have thought of the story of Eden when they heard the name Adam, before it became clearer that it was the place Adam that was in view.

He further notes that the association with Adam might recall the first crossing of the Jordan when they had entered the land and dedicated themselves to the Lord, a commitment that they had subsequently broken. While the term Adam might strictly denote the place called Adam then, that place was selected because it also evoked connotations with the solemn commitment to the Lord that they had made at their first entry into the land and also to the treachery of Adam at the first fall of man. As scripture is a literary text such connotations can also be aspects of its divinely intended meaning.

An overly narrow focus upon revelation as declarative propositions can make us forgetful of this. The description of Gilead as a city of evildoers is possibly a figurative way of characterising that region of the Transjordan more generally. The priests lying in wait might also be a reference to their involvement in Pica's treacherous assassination of Pekah Hire and his rebellion more generally.

The references here, as Moon emphasises, are general rather than particular and perhaps we should be cautious of tying them too strongly to one historical event.

Gilead's treachery was not merely displayed in that one act but it had been functioning as a rival centre of power to Samaria for over a decade. Israel has become defined by outrageous treachery, by disgraceful infidelity and by shameful defilement and uncleanness.

And if Judah thinks that it is innocent in comparison to its wicked brother to the north it is informed that a harvest time is set for them too. A question to consider within the Old Testament lore itself, how does the Lord show that steadfast love and knowledge of him is more important than sacrifice? John 10 verses 1-21 Truly truly I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep.

To him the gatekeeper opens, the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.

This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. So Jesus again said to them, Truly truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them.

I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy.

I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

He who is a hired hand and not a shepherd, who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. He flees because he is a hired hand and cares nothing for the sheep. I am the good shepherd.

I know my own and my own know me, just as the father knows me and I know the father, and I lay down my life for the sheep. And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.

So there will be one flock, one shepherd. For this reason the father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.

I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my father." There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, ♦He has a demon and is insane.

Why listen to him? ♦ Others said, ♦ These are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind? ♦ When reading John chapter 10 it is important that we do not detach it from that which precedes it. It is still a response to the Pharisees and the leaders of the Jews after the healing of the blind man.

In casting the formerly blind man out of the synagogue, the Jews were claiming authority over the flock of God, acting as false shepherds. And this is the background for the conversation that Jesus has describing himself as the shepherd and the door to the sheep. And some of the themes being explored here are ecclesiological themes, themes that relate to the church as the flock of Christ.

The imagery of sheep and shepherding comes to the surface here, but it is not the only time within the gospel that we see this. In chapter 1 we see it as Jesus is the lamb. In chapter 21 where Jesus tells Peter to feed his sheep.

And here he is the shepherd and the door to the sheep. The biblical background to shepherd imagery is immensely important. Israel descended from shepherds.

If you think about characters like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, these were all shepherds. Joseph was a shepherd. The great leaders of the nation, Moses and David, were shepherds, both literally and symbolically.

Moses led the people out with his shepherd's rod. And David was the great shepherd of the house of Israel. In passages like Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23 verses 1-4, the unfaithful shepherds, the unfaithful rulers of Israel were condemned.

Elsewhere we see God himself being described as the great shepherd of his people in places like Psalm 23. In this chapter Jesus alludes to verses such as Micah 2 verses 12-13. I will surely assemble all of you, O Jacob.

I will gather the remnant of Israel. I will set them together like a sheep in a fold, like a flock in its pasture, a noisy multitude of men. He who opens the breach goes up before them.

They break through and pass the gate, going out by it. Their king passes on before them, the Lord at their head. God's flock is gathered together and led out by the gate.

Christ calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. This might be seen as an image of the Exodus. Remember that the Exodus is described as the leading of a flock out of Egypt with the rod of the shepherd Moses.

That imagery is used in places like Isaiah chapter 63 verses 11-12, Psalm 77 verse 20 and elsewhere. There is a striking of the false shepherd of Pharaoh. This sort of shepherd imagery might also help us to understand other episodes within the Gospel.

In chapters 5 and 6 for instance, in chapter 5 Jesus meets a lame man near the sheep gate, bringing him back into the temple fold of Israel. Jesus here describes himself as the true door for the sheep. In chapter 6 Jesus leads a large multitude out like a flock across the sea and provides them with food.

There is a strange detail in chapter 6 verse 10, there was much grass in the place. Why point that out? In chapter 10 verse 9 we see a suggestion of an answer. He will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Who is the doorkeeper or the watchman? In verse 3 it's probably the faithful leader of the people in contrast to the Jewish leaders and the Pharisees. The biblical imagery of the shepherd as we've seen already is fairly deeply rooted within the text. But the shepherd is a rough and violent figure often, not especially like our vision of shepherds.

When we hear about shepherds we might think about idyllic scenes, bucolic landscapes in the Lakeland in England, or we might think about these very tame pastoral settings. But yet that's not what we find in Scripture. The shepherd is often a figure who struggles with wolves, with wild beasts, with thieves and bandits, and with the perils of the wilderness.

He's associated with death and conflict and difficulty. We need to measure our concepts of pastoral ministry against biblical models. If we think about the pastoral ministry we're often thinking about that very domestic idyllic scene and the way that the shepherd is just this gentle, kind, tender figure.

And there's certainly that aspect of tenderness and gentleness with the flock. But the shepherd also has to be a conflictual character, able to drive off wolves, protect the flock, give safe and good pasture, someone who's able to suffer hardship and die for the sake of the flock. The flock is in dangerous territory and we need tough and dedicated leaders.

Now there's an allusion to Numbers chapter 27 verses 15 to 17 here. In that place Joshua is established as the leader of the people in replacement of Moses. And there's a reference to coming in and going out there.

Christ refers to the people of Israel as like sheep without a shepherd on a number of occasions. And he is the true shepherd. Jesus' use of the terminology I am at this point also relates his identity to that of God.

He is not just the great Davidic leader. He is God himself come to deliver his people. One of the primary points of this section is to highlight the intimate relationship between sheep and shepherd.

The sheep have been given into Christ's hand by his father. He calls them all by name. They know and respond to his voice.

You can maybe think of Mary Magdalene in chapter 20 verse 16. It is when Jesus calls her by name that she recognises his voice. In chapter 5 verse 25 there's another example of a parallel.

The dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. Lazarus is a further example. Even the grave cannot prevent the sheep from hearing their shepherd's voice.

And the true shepherd is someone who will lay down his life for the sheep. Unlike the hired hand, we can think about the Jewish leaders, we can think about the Pharisees. These are not going to lay down their lives for the people.

But the true shepherd will. Jesus here speaks also of forming a larger flock. A flock that involves other sheep from elsewhere.

Jesus brings in the Samaritans, he will bring in Gentile sheep, he will form one new flock of both Jews and Gentiles. And the church is very much in view in this imagery. Remember again that the background of this is someone who has been cast out of the synagogue.

Someone who is a paradigmatic believer or disciple. Someone who has been delivered by Christ, given new sight, brought through the healing waters and made part of a new people. He's cast out of the old people but now he's going to be part of a new flock.

And Christ is forming this new flock around himself at this time. It's profoundly encouraging to reflect upon the fact that the Father commits us as his sheep into the hands of his Son, the true shepherd. And no predator can snatch us from his protection, nor from that of the Father.

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. This is the image that is presented in this chapter. That Christ is the true leader of his people.

But not just this grand shepherd operating on a great scale. But one who has an intimate love and knowledge and commitment to his sheep. One who will lay down his life for his sheep.

One who has that intimate connection that his sheep know his voice. And he can address each one of them by name. This is a deep and intimate connection.

Not just the connection that we might associate with a king or a lordly ruler over a great nation. But one who has an intimate connection with those who are his own. A question to reflect upon.

Jesus makes a startling statement in verse 17. And the logic of it is worth reflecting upon and thinking about. I lay down my life that I may take it up again.

What is the logic of that statement? And how does it better help us to understand the death and the resurrection of Christ?