

KNOWING AND RESPONDING RIGHTLY

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Humans are cunning creatures aren't we? We are experts of deception. I have noticed this in my son. He has a fake cry, and he knows exactly when he should pull it out, and exactly who should be around when he pulls it out, and he knows what he is trying to get when he does pull it out.

As we have begun to discipline Owen we have also noticed he has a wonderfully unconvincing, insincere apology. He knows the words to say, but his heart is not behind his words, and it's easy to tell by the expression on his face.

In one sense we all do this. We all know how to work the system. We've learned to dance the drama of day to day life knowing how and when to respond to things even if those responses aren't genuine.

We've learned to act surprised, concerned, worried, happy and involved all for the sake of our audience.

Well we are in a position in the book of Hosea where the people of God are being forced to respond. When John spoke to us last week he preached on Hosea 5 which gives the laundry list of Israel's sins and concludes with these words to God's people: **Hosea 5:14-15**

Because of Israel's sins, God is removing himself from his people. If this story were a movie, we have just entered straight into the moment of action. How are the characters in this story going to respond to God removing himself from his people?

Take your Sunday School glasses off for a minute, think about how worked up we get in a chick-flick when the main couple enters a moment of conflict and one of them walks out on the other. In this instance we want Tom Hanks to chase down Meg Ryan and make things right. How much more should we be concerned with God almighty removing himself from his people? I want you to feel this tension as we begin our text this morning.

If you are taking notes I want to give you the two part larger structure of this text. Hosea 6:1-3 outline the people's response to God, and verses 4-11 outline God's response to his people. That is the big picture of this text, but what I want to do is break that big outline down into three separate components which we will look at for the next little bit, but first I want to **pray**.

So as we just read, God is disciplining Israel through the removal of his presence. He says he was going to be dry rot to his own people.

So Hosea picks up the microphone here. Hosea, who is the acting prophet in this story is in a position of mediation between God and his people. He is there to help the people respond rightly to God's revealed will.

So the first thing we are going to look at here is **Hosea's Call. Hosea 6:1-3**

Hosea is calling for God's people to return to the Lord. That in itself is very significant. Hosea is not simply calling for the people of God to stop sinning. He is not asking them to be sorry. He is asking them to return to the Lord.

It is not enough for the people to return to the Lord and continue to live in sin, nor is it enough for them to stop sinning but remain separate from the Lord. The full cry of the prophet is return to the Lord. Stop what it is you are doing and return to God.

What's even more interesting about Hosea's call is the reason for their return. **Hosea 6:1-2**

Did you see what Hosea just said? Look back **Hosea 5:14**. Here we see God tearing, and God carrying Israel off so that no one can rescue them. It would be easy for someone to read that text and see God as a big bully in the sky, slapping wrists and handing out spankings like an angry father. But look at the purpose in God's discipline.

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.

What a great love is this? How gracious is it that it is through God's discipline that we once more gain access to God. God has removed himself from his people so that we may return from our sins and live before him in greater worship.

The sad fact of the matter is that Israel didn't have a corner on the market when it came to sin. We are all sinners. Our sin seeks to separate us from God. We are our biggest problem. And yet in those times where we are reaping the sour fruit of our sinful seeds, we are not too far gone from God's redemption. Our sin, as grievous as it is, offers us an opportunity of repentance.

The author of Hebrews quotes Job in **Hebrews 12:5-6**. God's discipline of sin is not separate from his plan for your joy, or your holiness.

What is Hosea's final plea to a sinful people: **Hosea 6:3**

Let us know God, let us press on to know God. This makes sense doesn't it? Why in our right minds would we return to the one we sinned against? A bank robber doesn't willingly return to the bank and confess his sin, and a sinner shouldn't want to return and confess of his sin...unless we truly know the Lord.

You see without a knowledge of God, we can only know God as a God of judgment. You will realize it here on this earth, or you will realize it when God judges the earth. But with a knowledge of God, we can know God as sure and merciful to his people.

Hosea is pleading with the people of Israel, saying know this God. Know his mercy, know his grace, know his wrath is real, but his mercy is imminent.

Now park that thought, because we are going to come back to it.

That was Hosea's call to his people. The next portion of scripture we are going to look shows us **God's Critique** of the people's response. The passage doesn't tell us if the people responded immediately to Hosea's pleas, all we see is God's response to Hosea's call. **Hosea 6:4-6**

When we break it down there are three responses we can have to any given circumstance. The first is that we can choose not to respond. Secondly we can choose to respond insincerely. And lastly we can respond rightly.

When we initially began to work through the book of Hosea, I thought that this book was for the first class of people. I thought the primary audience was for the lost, unresponsive, hardened sinners who were unaware of God. But as we look at this story, I have been overwhelmed by Hosea's message to the second class of responders.

Hosea's message is good for the unresponsive, but the primary audience of his message is for those who illicit insincere responses. To use a Biblical phrase, it is for the hypocrites.

God's critique of Hosea's plea is that the people can all too easily return to God, but like a morning cloud, or dew, as soon as the sun comes up, it vanishes. Our repentance is often fickle.

God says rhetorically: What am I to do with you people? You come to me, and you play the part, but it isn't insincere. It isn't heart felt. There is no substance to your response.

Therefore, look at **6:5**. God says I have tried to show you your fickleness. He says I have hewn you with the prophets. Like a sculptor has to chisel away at stone, the prophets have attempted to shape your heart with the words of God. The prophets, much like Hosea have pleaded with God's people.

They have said turn from your sin or God will judge you in it. Repent, seek God, return to the Lord. God's judgment was made clear as light. It was seen, it was spoken to, it was experienced. And yet the people refused to let it impart lasting change. The stories of the prophets are littered with hot burning, but short lasting periods of repentance.

Verses 7-10 of Hosea 6 go on to show either literally or metaphorically the violence and depravity which follow the hypocritical responses of the people. They may run to God, they may offer their sacrifices and their peace offerings, but God is not amused, nor is he fooled at their hypocrisy.

God lays out his demands for right response in **Hosea 6:6**.

What does God require from his people, steadfast love and knowledge.

In the first chapter of Isaiah, the prophet gives a similar rebuke to the people: **Isaiah 1:15-16**.

What a scary ideal that there are those of us in here right now, who stand in God's judgment and wrath? There are church goers in this very place who are enemies of God. Hypocrites, white washed tombs. Knowing how to respond, but having no substance to their response.

God doesn't want your hands, he wants your heart.

So Hosea cuts to the chase when he is pleading with his people and he says, know God, let us press on to know the Lord. God himself says he desires steadfast love and knowledge. Let your love and your life be rooted in the knowledge of who God is....

This is what Hosea wants, this is what God wants, but God is unsure of the people's ability to do so. Look back at Hosea **5:4**.

You see there are many of us in here today who are familiar with the cry of the Israelites. You have lived in your sin, and the two days of waiting seem like an eternity. There are people in here crippled by sin, burdened by sin, destroyed by sin and they feel like they are trapped.

There are people in here today who know of the Lord. Who have a picture of the Lord, who get a glimpse of the Lord, but still do not know the Lord? How are we to turn and repent to someone we do not know? How are we to respond rightly to our sin if we do not have a proper view of the one being sinned against?

And God sees this, and he says: What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What Shall I do with you, O Judah? What shall I do with you, O sinner?

You lack love because you lack a knowledge of me. The prophets tried, and you rebelled. The Kings tried, and you were dissatisfied. How will you come to know me?

This brings us to a final point: **God's Provision**

Hosea 6:11

Hosea mentioned that sometimes we must endure suffering, he says after two days he will revive us. It may not be in the first hour, it may not be on the first day, it may not be on the second day, but God will revive us again.

Where the prophets, priests and kings failed to make God known among his people, God made himself known among his people.

John 1:18. Jesus came to make God known to us in ways never before possible.

In Hosea 6 we see a prophet pleading with God's people to return to God, to know him, and to live before him. But look at Jesus, the true and final prophet as he prays to his father hours before his death: **John 17:1-5**

You see Jesus has come that we may know God. That we may know of his sure wrath towards sinners, but also that we may be more sure of his grace towards his children.

What Hosea hoped for, what Christ enabled, and what God desires is for people to know him in a meaningful way.

True knowledge brings legitimacy to all our responses. A right view of God changes not only our response to sin, but our fight against it.

When we look at Christ, we are granted the clearest view of God we will ever have here on this earth.

We see a God who hates sin, but has mercy on sinners through the sacrificial death of his own son.

And because of that actual mercy, we know that when God is disciplining us for our sin, it is for our good. And we hold onto a full hope in God's gracious and loving hand amidst our broken and fallen trials.

Because we have a full and saving knowledge of God, we learn not only to hold on to hope, but to hold onto a power to resist sin. Because we know Christ conquered sin, we have the ability to resist it. Unlike our first Father, Adam who transgressed the covenant, we have our true Father Christ who fulfilled it. We have power over sin, because Christ defeated it.

And because we know God, and we know Christ, we are free to love not in the abstract, not through vain rituals and service, but we love with the fullness of our affections because hypocrisy has been supplanted by willful worship.

This God church, is our God. Let us return to him. Let us seek him. 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 heal us, and on the third day he will revive us that we may live before him. Let us know, let us press on to know, he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

Now through the power of Jesus Christ who has made God known to his people, let us heed the words of the prophet and respond in willful, sincere repentance and worship.