

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 4, Hosea 5

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We're looking at Hosea chapter 5 this evening, hope you've picked that up and if you've looked at all at next time's lesson you'll notice I repeat myself so you're prepared if you do tonight for next week, at least in some way. Let me remind you of the geography. Originally when the two or two parts of the nation divided, Benjamin, which is basically right here, went with the north and it is one of the ten tribes.

But pretty early on the Judeans expanded and basically took in all of Benjamin here. If I could see this, I think that, I'm not quite sure what that is. Bethel is located right here just over the border from Judah.

So, very, very close there the golden calves. The other golden calves were of course at the far north, the red dot up there. But these locations, Gilgal was located within this part of Benjamin, which Judah did not take.

Gibeah and Ramah are located here. So, these locations that Hosea mentions are in the border area between the northern and southern kingdoms. Hosea regularly calls the northern kingdom Ephraim.

Ephraim is the tribe located in the center of the country, and it's basically the ruling tribe among those. It's the area that survived longest before the Assyrians finally took it. So, when you talk about Ephraim, you're not talking merely about that tribe; you're talking about the northern kingdom.

The habit of the Bible is to use mockery, so Bethel is called Beth-Avon. Not house of God, but house of wickedness. And that's regularly showing up in the book.

So, we talked a bit last week about a recurring theme and we see it immediately in the first verse. Who does Hosea hold responsible for the situation in the country? The priests and the royal house. The spiritual leaders and the political leaders.

In other places he'll include the prophets in here too, but in this case these two. So what should these political leaders and religious leaders, what should they be doing? They should be honoring the covenant and what does that involve? Pardon? Leading and teaching, yes. What are the terms of the covenant? Loyalty to Yahweh, number one.

Love of others, yes. Treating others as you would like to be treated. It's the golden rule.

So, there you have it. You see it in the Ten Commandments. The first four having to do with God and the next six having to do with how you treat other people.

Why is it important to God how we treat other people? What does he do to us? Creation. He made us; we are made in his image. We are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

Now again, this is rather unique in world religions. Why don't other gods want their adherents to treat people in that way? All about power and control. The gods are humans written large.

So, we don't care about other people, so therefore, the gods don't. But this God is remarkably different. This God is more concerned with others than he is with himself.

So, the political leaders and the religious leaders we've said should have been leading and teaching. What else should they have been doing? Can we put it in an even larger context? What should these leaders be doing in terms of what we've just been talking about? What should they be setting an example by doing? Justice, mercy, kindness. They should be sublimating their concerns for those of their people.

They should be caring more for their people than they should be for themselves. What's going on here is exactly the human problem. I am God. Get out of my way.

So, you become a leader for what? You need to enrich yourself so that the people can take care of you. We've just turned it on its head. This is the remarkable thing about Jesus Christ, who lays down his life for his people.

So, I say here, what attitude characterizes them? Self-serving. What attitude ought to characterize them? Serving others. And again, you hear Jesus saying this, I did not come to be served.

Oh, my goodness. Why did you come then? I came to serve and to give my life. Oh, my goodness.

180 degrees different. So, hear this you priests, pay attention you Israelites, listen Royal House, this judgment is against you. You have been a snare at Mizpah.

Mizpah probably located, there are a couple of Mizpahs, one is here, the other is clear up there, Mount Tabor, alongside the Sea of Galilee, it's the Mount of Transfiguration. So, from south to north, here's what's going on. Now notice, notice

the verbs here and go on into verse 2. What have these leaders been doing? Slaughter.

Tabor, it's what? A net, a snare. Yes. One author I read said that their people are snared, netted, and pitted.

So again, it is not merely that they're overlooking the needs of their people; they are rapaciously trapping them and using them for their own purposes. So, in verse 3 then, I know all about Ephraim, Israel's not hidden from me. I rather suspect that what's going on there is that they are publicly worshipping Yahweh, but privately, they're worshipping their idols, their magical rituals, that sort of thing, as though God didn't know. I know all about Ephraim. Israel's not hidden from me.

Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution. Israel is corrupt. Why prostitution and not adultery? We've talked before about the covenant being a marriage covenant.

Israel is married to Yahweh. Why doesn't he accuse them of adultery? Why does he accuse them of prostitution? What's the difference? All right, they're seeking something from them. How else are prostitution and adultery different? One encompasses more people than others, prostitution, I assume you're saying.

All right, yes. Adultery at least has some element of relationship, some element of love. Prostitution, zero.

Let's think more about prostitution. What shouldn't prostitution issue in if you do your prostitution right? Children. The last thing you want is a kid.

There's nothing productive, there's nothing healthy, there's nothing relational about it. What can I get out of this for myself? I am rather insulted by the term that the prostitutes use for their tricks; they're Johns, but so be it. The John simply wants stolen pleasure.

The prostitute wants cash. Neither of them want the other. Purely transactional.

Yes, yes. Ephraim, you have now turned to prostitution. Your religion is simply for the purpose of using God for what you want, and that kind of religion only wants your cash.

We have to ask ourselves, what about my religion? God, what have you done for me recently? He says in verse 4, a spirit of prostitution is in their heart. They do not acknowledge; they do not know, we talked about that last week, didn't we? They do not know the Lord. And I ask you to look up this passage in Psalm 78.8, that they should not be like their fathers and mothers, a stubborn and rebellious generation, a

generation whose heart was not steadfast, all over the place, double-minded, whose spirit was not faithful to God.

And ask the question, how does a spirit of prostitution help to define original sin? Okay, okay, we are easily pulled off the track to be no longer faithful. We approach God for what we can get out of him. People who go to church when they're having problems, and otherwise, you never see them.

What else? Think about the original sin that we're all born with. Self-centered, a spirit of prostitution. There is a spirit within us that is contrary to faithfulness.

Perhaps you'll remember. If you don't, I'm telling you now that most of the time, when you see the word faithful in the Old Testament, the actual word is true. A spirit of prostitution loves lies more than it loves the truth. I've said this to you many times, but I'm up here, so I get to say it again.

We never had to teach our children to lie. Strange thing about that. It was getting them to tell the truth that was the problem.

Why is that? Because when we lie, we think we can change reality in our favor. Honey, did you do that? No. And the cookie is all over their mouth.

But there it is. Truth calls me to account. Truth challenges me.

I don't like that. The spirit of prostitution says I can warp reality to my own benefit, which, of course, is exactly where our society is today. There is no truth to challenge me.

Nothing stands in my way. I can make a reality in any shape I want. To which I say with my Chinese friend, Raza Rukh.

And with that, too, sir, with the spirit of prostitution, you see that the act shows what the attitude of the heart is. And when your heart's defiled, defiled deeds come out. So, with the prostitution, they were the nation and us, too.

We get into bed with these other gods, whether it's money or people, simply for the benefit of money or political gain. Yeah, yeah. What can I get out of it? And so, as a result, they do not know the Lord.

Now, spin that out a little bit with me. If you have a spirit of prostitution, you don't know the Lord. Why? Because he's true, and you're not.

You don't want to know him. He stands over against you, challenging you to change your way of living. You have chosen to live a lie and you cannot know the one who is never a lie.

So, the question then is, again, looking at that passage, what's the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives? By the fruit we bear, yes. What kind of fruit? Love. Self-giving, self-denying love, which is in fact really the only kind of love there is.

I don't know how many of you are on Bonnie Lashbrook's mailing list, but she sent it out this week; what was it? A four through eight-year-old's definition of love. They were wonderful. All of them have that idea of self-giving and self-denying.

I like the one where the child said, and it's a little old man and a little old woman who have lived together a long time and still like each other. Yes, the Holy Spirit will give us faithfulness when it doesn't pay. The Holy Spirit will make us steadfast when everything around us is coming loose.

So, the question is, which spirit marks my life and my behavior? Am I characterized by a spirit of prostitution? I want my way and I want God to conform to my way, to take care of me. Or is my life marked by the Holy Spirit? So, in verse five, he says their arrogance testifies against them. Now, how do arrogance and the spirit of prostitution, how do they relate to each other? Okay, if you're not forced to keep your commitment, it makes you arrogant.

Pride, yes. Not accountable. Self-centered, you think you have all the answers.

I know better than God. I know how to meet my needs. I know what my needs are and I can meet them my way through my efforts.

I'm fascinated, again, I've said this before, but one of the things that impresses me about the Bible is a five-year-old who can read can get the basic truth and you can spend your life studying it and never get to the bottom. I think about Genesis chapter three. Will I let God define my needs? No, I'll define my needs.

Will I let God supply my needs? No, I don't trust him to do that. I'll supply them. I'm not counseling passivity here where we sit on our hands and say, okay, God, let her go.

But I am saying, and I see this so many times, that we diligently seek God's will. Lord, how do you define my needs? How do you want to meet them? He'll use our abilities. He'll use our circumstances.

But there's all the difference in the world between that and my simply running ahead and using my abilities and my circumstances to meet my needs. That's the difference between Isaac and Ishmael. God said to Abraham, you're going to have a child.

How are we going to do this? Not through Sarah, obviously. Oh, let's do it through Hagar. No, no, they didn't ask God how he wanted to do it.

And you see that over and over again in the Bible. Where people do something that is not in and of itself wrong, but they simply did it for themselves and didn't ask God how he wanted to do it. Now, he may want to do it through a miracle.

That was Isaac. I've always loved the comment someone made. Hebrews says that Abraham prepared to offer Isaac believing in the resurrection.

Well, he had seen a 99-year-old woman get pregnant. What's so hard about the resurrection? But there it is. The arrogant heart and the spirit of prostitution.

I can meet my needs myself, my way, because I do not trust God. They don't know God. If you know God, you know he is trustworthy.

If you know God, you know he's on your side. They were both guilty. He was forced to do it.

He didn't have to. And he said that's what he wanted to do. Their arrogance testifies against them.

Judah also stumbles with them. How many times does Judah appear in this chapter? Five times. Five times.

Judah is coupled with Israel. Hosea is often characterized as a prophet of Israel, and I think that's fair, but it's not merely Israel. Now, Judah doesn't have any idols.

I mean, they don't have golden bulls. They do have a temple. When you read the books of Kings, they're not as far down the road as Israel is.

And yet, verse 5, Judah also stumbles with them. Verse 10, Judah's leaders are like those who move boundary stones. Verse 12, I'm like a moth to Ephraim, like rot to the people of Judah.

When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah his sores. Verse 14, I'll be like a lion to Ephraim, like a great lion to Judah. Why is he including Judah in this diatribe? Pardon? Okay, Judah didn't do anything to try to stop it in Israel.

They were warming up to it. They were warming up to the same wrong idea, the same prostitutional idea, if I may coin a word. The seed had sprung up into a plant in Israel.

But the same seed is planted in the ground of Judah. It's there. And Hosea, by inspiration, knows that nothing is going to be done to stop its growth.

It's just going to take a few longer years for the plant to grow. Canada and the United States. Canada's ahead of us, but we're not far behind.

Ezekiel refers to them as two sisters. He calls Israel the older sister and Judah the younger sister. But my goodness, in the end, he says the younger sister outpaced the older sister.

My goodness. So, here it is. So, the question then for you and me is, is there a seed planted in my life? Oh, it hasn't sprung up yet.

It hasn't borne fruit yet. But what about my attitude toward God? Am I truly, truly submissive to him? Am I truly in love with him? Do I know him? Or, in fact, am I trying to use him? And am I treating his gifts as though they're ultimate? Again, idolatry. The attempt to use this world to benefit myself.

You don't have to have a little statue in your closet to be an idolater. I want the gifts. Forget the giver.

This, of course, is exactly what was going on in Genesis 22. Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love, and sacrifice him. Now, I'm fascinated that the next verse is, so Abraham arose early in the morning and started off.

I'll bet it wasn't as simple as that. I'll bet that was a long night. God, how could you do this? This is your promise.

This is what you gave me. If it's a choice between Isaac and you, I keep Isaac. Yeah.

God didn't want Isaac. He wanted Abraham. It's kind of quiet in here.

So, verse 6. When they go with their flocks and herds, for what? To seek the Lord. See, they have not turned against the Lord. Oh, they really have.

But, on the surface, it's just they want, if I may put it this way, Jesus and. They're not turning against Jesus. But they're just pretty sure that Jesus is not enough.

Yes. Almost certainly. From what we read here, it's not a real commitment.

They're not really seeking the Lord. But they are seeking the Lord. And the question between seeking and really seeking.

Razor blade. They don't attribute to God what is His. Okay.

Okay. They don't attribute to God what is His. Manipulation.

Yeah, I think all of these are there. What I want to emphasize, though, is we're not talking about people who've said, Oh, I reject Yahweh. I don't want anything to do with Him.

He's worthless. I'm going to worship Baal now. They want Yahweh and Baal.

What can I do to get my needs supplied? And God says, well, good luck with that because you won't find me. He has withdrawn Himself from them. They are untrue to the Lord.

Now, what is it for you and me to be true to the Lord? Pardon? To keep His statutes, yes, yes. I want to do what you say. To love Him above all else.

Put it into the marriage context. What is it for me to be true to Karen? Well, stay out of other women's beds. Is that all? No.

That's just the beginning. I like what Malachi says when he says, Guard your spirit, therefore, and be no longer treacherous. Where does divorce begin? It begins in your spirit.

When you allow little divisions to creep in, here again is spirit. So that in my heart, in my mind, in my thinking, I need to be utterly true to her.

They are unfaithful to the Lord. They are untrue to the Lord. We've all been saying it.

Oh, I'm true to the Lord. I go to church all the time. I'm true to the Lord.

I don't worship my car. I'm true to the... What about my spirit? Is my spirit His? They're unfaithful to the Lord. They give birth to illegitimate children.

Think about that for a moment. What illegitimate children could we be giving birth to? Compromise. Okay.

The appearance of religion. As Paul says, lacking the power thereof. What else? Yeah? Yeah? Okay.

Money? It is simply a kind of religion that has all the appearances but is not the real thing. Counterfeit. Yes.

Yes. It's a child. It's alive, but it's illegitimate.

When they celebrate their new moon feasts, he will devour their fields. Sound the trumpet in Gibeah, just over the border in southern Israel. The horn in Ramah, that's just beneath the border in Judah.

Raise the battle cry in Beth-Avon, Bethel, which is just over the border. Lead on, Benjamin. They love their festivals.

Every seven days, Sabbath. Every four weeks, there is a new moon, Passover, first fruits, trumpets, and tabernacles. These two are post-exile.

This one was celebrated when they rededicated the temple after Antiochus Epiphanes had worshipped a pig there and Purim for Esther. Yes. Yes.

Yes. And God commanded all of them except Hanukkah and Purim. But there's the issue.

Again, we've talked about this before. This is the difference in the biblical understanding of ritual and the pagan understanding. The pagan understanding is ritual makes it happen.

Yes. Why am I going to heaven? Because following John Wesley's directions, I take communion every week. The biblical ritual reflects the reality of the relationship.

Well, if it's all about relationship, let's just forget the ritual. No. Because we are body and spirit.

We need to reflect in our bodies the spiritual reality or we can be kidding ourselves about the spiritual reality. So, it's a question of which is first. Here, the relationship is first, and the ritual reflects it.

Here, the ritual is first and supposedly makes the thing happen. This is why the prophets are so deaf on sacrifices because the people are all using them this way.

And so, I have challenged students for 30 years now to use the first chapter of Isaiah as a call to worship some Sunday morning. Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom. That gets their attention, wouldn't it? Listen to the instruction of our God, you people of Gomorrah.

The multitude of your sacrifices, what are they to me, says your God. I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams, and the fat of fattened animals. I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats.

When you come to appear before me, who asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? That gets the worship service off to a good start, wouldn't it? Who asked you to come in here anyway? Stop bringing meaningless offerings. Your incense is detestable to me. New moon, sabbaths, and convocations, I cannot bear.

Iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moon feasts and your appointed festivals, I hate with all my being. They are a burden to me.

I am weary of bearing them. Anyway, he goes on. But that's it.

That's it. The question is, am I doing those things that build the relationship in private worship and in public service, and then God will be pleased with the ritual that reflects the realities of the relationship? But if there's no real relationship there, God says, you make me sick.

Okay. Now, how does God describe himself? Verse 10. He will be what? Yeah.

What image does he use, though? A flood. I'm going to be a flood. Okay.

What image does he use in verse 12? I'm going to be a moth and rot. What image does he use in verse 14? A lion. Oh God, I really want to get close to you.

No, you don't. Not in the condition you are. Now look at verse 15.

Why is he doing this? Why is he flooding them? Why is he rotting them? Why is he devouring them? To get them to return. Until they have borne their guilt, admitted it, and sought my face in their misery, they will earnestly seek me. Now you got to fill in the blank exercise at the bottom.

God's intended last word is never destruction, which may be two words in that little blank. The last word. But that is up to you.

It is not his intent. Now, some of you have been listening to me for a long time. I hope this is not the first time you've heard me say that.

Let me say it again. God's intended last word is never destruction. Never.

That may be the last word, but that's up to you. It's not his intent. Now you're going to get another chance next week to fill that in again.

Hope you get it right next time. But there it is. There it is.

God does not say, I have had it with you people, and I'm going to wipe you out. I'm going to get rid of you. God says you're going to find me like a lion.

But when I've torn you, my intent is that you will say, good God, what a fool I have been. Take me back again. And we go back to our first three chapters.

Gomer is on the slave block. She's old now. She's no longer pretty.

Hosea has allowed that to happen. So, the auctioneer says, what am I bid? \$10? \$5? \$1.50? And somebody from the crowd says, \$30! \$30! Who was that nut? It was Hosea. And Gomer falls into his arms.

Then I'll return to my lair till they have borne their guilt and seek my face. In their misery, they will earnestly seek me. God's intended last word is never destruction.

That may be the last word, but that's up to you. It is not his intent.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for loving us. We who are born with a spirit of prostitution. We who seem genetically incapable of telling the truth.

Thank you for loving us. Thank you for seeing in us possibilities. Possibilities that merit your death for us. Praise you. Praise you. Forgive us, Lord.

Forgive me of treating you as an idol, a heavenly slot machine, have mercy upon us, O Lord. And help us to love you for yourself. Knowing that if you never give us another thing in this life, you've given us all that matters.

Yourself. Praise you. Glory to your name. Amen. Amen.