

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 8, Hosea 9

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That song, along with “And Can It Be,” are two of the most powerful of the six, seven, or eight thousand hymns that Charles Wesley wrote. It depends on who you talk to. I spent a lot of time in the background of this lesson because of the threshing floors and wine presses, both of which were critical in the agricultural process of the ancient world.

The grain harvest began with barley and that was at the time of Passover in middle April. It continued then through the rest of April and into May and the wheat harvest begins about the first of June and that continues on through the month of June. Then July is sort of left hanging and then the figs begin to come in and then the grapes are at the end.

Olives are in between figs and grapes. Grapes coming about the middle of September to about the middle of October. The threshing floors were on the tops of bare hills.

The grain is cut and brought in and piled in piles on the tops of those hills on the threshing floors, and then an oxen or in this case, chapter 10 is going to talk about Israel as a heifer who is driven around on top of the pile of grain to husk it to get the kernels separated from the husks and when it's felt that that's done and sometimes the ox would be pulling a heavy sledge, a sled with maybe stones driven into the bottom of the wood to again facilitate this process. Finally, when they think it's separated enough, then you come with a winnowing fork, and a winnowing fork is basically a basket with a long handle on it, and you throw it into the air on a windy day. It doesn't do you much good if it's not windy.

It's a windy day, and the wind blows the husks away, and the heavy grain falls back to the ground, and that's the threshing floor. That's a task that would be, could be a matter of a week or more that they're threshing, and it was amazing when I was in India a few years ago to see people still threshing their grain in exactly the same way, and I was thinking Moses would really be at home here. But it's the threshing floor, and then that is also the high place, the place where you worship the gods.

The gods live on mountaintops, and so this place where hopefully you've had a good harvest, a good place to praise the gods who have produced the harvest, or if it's been a bad harvest to try to placate the gods so that maybe you'll survive this year and have a better one next year. The wine press, on the other hand, is down in the valley. If it's poor people, then you've basically got just a stone basin that's been hollowed out, and you stomp the grapes with your bare feet.

That's hard to tell socially where you draw the lines, but if you're more wealthy, then you have a press, and the grapes are put in a very loosely woven basket, and these baskets are piled up maybe six or seven high, and then you have a long wooden lever, and on the end of it you hang a bag of stones, and it's got a hinge back here and the weight of that lever down on those bags of grapes squeezes them out and the juice flows down again into a stone basin where it's collected. It's fascinating the story of Gideon. Gideon is threshing grain in a wine press.

Why? Because he was scared to death. If you throw those husks up in the air, everybody for miles around says, oh, they're threshing over there because that glittering husks, those glittering husks are blown away. So, he's down here.

There's no wind down in that valley, but hey, it's better to get a cup full of grain than have the mob. I'd steal it all. But the wine press is the place where the new wine is pressed, and the new wine is beginning to, it's sort of like cider that's beginning to harden a little bit, and you can drink quite a bit of it before you get totally drunk and again it's in that context. The end of the harvest, this is the wine press, this is the grape vines, the end of the harvest. Hopefully, it's been a great harvest year, and this is the time to make love, not war.

And so, the vine press is a great place for fertility orgies. So that's the background to some of what's going on in this chapter as he talks about the threshing floor and the wine press. We saw, oh let me say, we will not meet now for two weeks.

We'll not meet next week or the following week. We'll pick up again on the Monday night of Thanksgiving week, whatever that is, 18th, I think. So, if you come next week, enjoy yourselves.

20th, okay, okay. So, we'll pick it up then, and we'll go five weeks straight, finishing on the Monday before Christmas. Okay, okay.

We talked last week in chapter eight about a series of the sins of Israel and we identified four and perhaps five. We begin with trying to make kings without God's approval or acceptance. We're going to sort our problems out with political machination.

The second one was the calf idols worshipping the idol of Yahweh. Again, I'm quite certain that they were very proud of themselves. They worship Yahweh but as bulls.

The third was foreign alliances making deals with first Assyria, then Egypt. The fourth was a religious ritual. Again, what we're seeing here is what's classically called syncretism.

They're not abandoning Yahweh to worship Baal. They're just mixing it all together. So, they're doing their religious rituals as the Bible commands in an attempt to manipulate God.

Finally, perhaps verse 14 of chapter eight should be considered a fifth one. Israel has forgotten their maker and built palaces, and Judah has fortified many towns.

I'll send fire on their cities. It'll consume their fortresses. So maybe that's a fifth one.

In chapter nine, we pick up with three more issues—in one sense, it's two more—and then the windup, and we'll look at that. Do not rejoice, Israel. Do not be jubilant like the other nations.

Again, I think this is a pretty clear reference to the harvest festivals. Rejoicing, partying, getting drunk. Don't do it because you have been unfaithful to your God.

Now here's the thing that runs all the way through the Bible. Your God is not like the other gods. The God who has revealed himself to you is not part of this world.

The God who has revealed himself to you is not one of the gods. He is God. So this vision that God has been giving to Israel for a thousand years of his uniqueness.

He is not sexed. He cannot be manipulated by magic, on, on, on.

You've been unfaithful to it because your God, the revelation that has been given to you, is so different, and that has required a different kind of behavior from you. It is also required the very opposite of syncretism. It has required absolute loyalty.

Yes, you could worship Baal and Asher. You could worship Baal and Zeus. Yeah, it was not a problem.

There are many gods, and the gods express themselves in many ways, but not this one. Not this one. And clearly, clearly, that becomes a major issue.

Do you want us to put all our eggs in one God basket? Do you want us to risk everything to one God? You love the wages of a prostitute on every threshing floor. Oh, our neighbors are having fun on the threshing floor. Open marriage has been practiced for a long time.

And you want us not to do that? The threshing floors and the wine presses will not feed the people. The new wine will fail them. Why won't these harvests feed the people? All right, they will fail.

God will cause them to fail. Why else? Now, think about this not only literally, but think about it metaphorically. Why won't these pagan harvest festivals feed the people? Exactly, exactly.

Man shall not live by bread alone. Oh, yes, there may be good harvests, but they won't feed the people. They will not because they're not from God.

They're not an expression of God. They're not a gift from God. Well, of course, they are, but they're not recognized as such.

And the people will spiritually starve. They will not feed the people. And we see that happening again and again.

I often have thought about Peter and the others going fishing. I don't know about you guys, but I'm going back to fishing. And the nets were empty.

And you know, as long as Peter lived, even when the nets were full, they'd be empty. And he knew that. And so, again, as I've said to you many times, I hope there are instant replays in heaven.

I'm going to see that picture. Misty morning, some fellow standing on the beach there. And why is it when you've never caught anything, somebody says, how's the fishing, boys? And it's interesting that the Greek text has the word *paideia*, children.

Have you caught any fish, children? But I'm positive it's just the boys. He's not calling them children. How's the fishing, boys? And you hear Peter saying, well, I haven't caught a thing.

And John says, Peter, it's the Lord. Peter is over the side. Interestingly, he's probably in a loincloth.

He puts his tunic on to jump in the water. Doesn't want to show up before Jesus in his underwear. This is my chance.

This is my chance to be fed. Jesus already has fish there on the fire. And so kindly says, hey, bring some of yours.

That's Jesus. I'm inclined to go on there, but I won't. But there it is.

These things won't feed you. Your bellies may be full and extended, but you'll be hungry. Because of what you're really, truly needing.

They'll not remain in the Lord's land. Ephraim will return to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria. Hungry, hungry.

All right, then verses four through seven. They'll not pour out wine offerings to the Lord, nor will their sacrifices please them. Oh, really? Why not? Such sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners.

All who eat them will be unclean. This food will be for themselves. It'll not come into the temple of the Lord.

What do you do on the day of your appointed festivals on the feast days of the Lord? Even if they escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them. Memphis will bury them. Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briars, and thorns will overrun their tents.

The days of punishment are coming. The days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this.

So, what's the sin here? I'd call it the hypocrisy of ritualism. The hypocrisy of ritualism. Yes, yes, yes.

Here it is again, the syncretism. They're worshiping the fertility gods and goddesses on the threshing floor and in the wine presses. And they're also worshiping Yahweh with this useless ritualism.

Ezekiel has a terrible, terrible picture. He says, you sacrifice your children to Moloch, the king, down in the Hinnom Valley, the dump, Gehenna. And then you come up the hill with blood on your hands to worship me in my temple.

Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness. Those who eat them will be unclean.

Now, what's that saying? I mean, here you are. You're fulfilling the Levitical requirements. You're doing all the rituals and all the religious stuff, but it's making you unclean.

How can that be? No longer a means of grace. They worshiped him with their mouths, but their hearts were far from them. It wasn't really consecrated to the Lord.

I'm sure they did all the rituals. They perverted it. Now, again, it's nice to think about people 2,500 years ago.

Is it possible for us to do this? How? Going through the liturgy without meaning it? She rolls her hair up on Sunday morning but lives like the devil the rest of the week. Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles

a person. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, and slander.

These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone. My mother didn't really believe Jesus. I hope both Mother and Jesus will forgive me for that.

Ritual cleanness accomplishes nothing. Ritual cleanness is an object lesson designed to teach us the truth. There is that which will defile you in the presence of God.

There is that which will make you unclean in his presence. Did you get the point? Yeah, okay. So, as I like to say, Abraham says, pass the bacon.

Now, there's another possible underlying thought here. When they are taken into exile, they won't be able to do any of this stuff. They won't pour out wine offerings to the Lord, nor will their sacrifices please him.

They won't be able to make any. So, I think there's a double entendre going on here. The present sacrifices that they are offering do not please him; do not make them clean in his sight, and the day is coming when there won't be any.

Again, if you remember back in chapter 2, Hosea says, God says through Hosea, I am going to take them into the desert and woo them in the desert. That's the exile, where they won't be able to make these offerings, where they won't be able to do this religious stuff, and they will find the Lord again. In your notes, for question 2, I said Matthew 15:8 to 11.

That's really the lead-in. The better is these, verses 17 to 20. So, if you're keeping your notes, correct them there, please.

Notice verse 6, then. Even if they just escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. Remember the situation.

Here is Assyria coming from the northeast. What are we going to do? Well, let's depend on Egypt. Egypt will help us against the Assyrians, and Hosea says, good luck with that.

Egypt, if they were to prevail, will do what, according to that verse? What's the problem with human alliances? They're humans. Pardon? Humans are fickle by nature. It's interesting that diplomats talk about our interests.

What are the interests of our country? Charles de Gaulle said, France has no interests, France has goals. It's not a question of making deals that will be in our interest, no. It's a question about using people to achieve our goals.

The one thing you have to say about de Gaulle is he said what he thought. So, all of these deals, the fertility gods, the unclean worship. Now, look at verses 7 and following.

The days of punishment are coming. The days of reckoning are at hand. Let Israel know this. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired person a maniac.

The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim. Yet, snares await him on all his paths and hostility in the house of his God. They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sin.

Now, if we think of this list as a summary of their sins, and as I've said here at the top, their sins being the things they've trusted in place of Yahweh, how do these verses fit in? Verses 7, 8, and 9. What is their sin here? Ignoring the warning, mocking it. The prophet is in danger in the house of God. So, there's a sense in which what we see here is both the cause and the effect of the previous.

Notice what he says. Because your sins are so many and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool. Let's think about that for a minute.

Because your sins are so great, the prophet is considered a fool. How does that work? No one likes to be told they're doing something wrong. Okay, their minds are so corrupted that what is truth seems idiotic.

Their thinking has become nonsense. Sin becomes so ingrained that anything that stands against it seems foolish. In the last few days, they have wanted their ears tickled.

The truth is offensive. We're there, aren't we? We're there. I was almost nauseated by a Wall Street Journal article in the Saturday paper.

Within 10 years, males will be able to produce their own eggs. It's a Japanese researcher has already done it with mice. Forgive me, but I'm glad I'm old.

What in the world are our children and grandchildren going to be faced with? And if someone were to say, God made you male and female, go forth and reproduce, how's that going to be treated? Hostily. You can't say that to me. You think we humans haven't learned a thing.

Snares await him on all his paths and hostility in the house of his God. They have sunk deep into corruption as in the days of Gibeah. Gibeah, Judges, chapter 19.

Amazing story. The Levite and his concubine. And the narrator of Judges is so, so gifted.

He doesn't have to tell us what to think. The Levite has a concubine. That already raises a question. So, they come to Gibeah of Benjamin to spend the night.

The old gentleman says, don't spend the night in the square. Don't pitch your tent out here. Come in the house with me.

Sodom, bring him out that we may know him. I have seen an article in which the author is saying, they just wanted to be friendly. Give me a break.

Give me a break. Well, we don't want to allow homosexual gang rape, but we'll allow heterosexual gang rape. Put the concubine out.

And when he finds her body on the doorstep in the morning, he is furious. Chops her body up in 12 pieces. Sends each piece to one of the other tribes.

Are we going to let this go on? They have sunk deep into corruption as in the days of Gibeah. Yes, yes. Verse 10, when I found Israel, it was like finding grapes in the desert.

Here's this harvest language again. Oh, wow. Wow.

Here I am, dying of thirst and starvation in the desert, and looking at these luscious grapes. That's how I felt about Israel. That's how I felt about you.

When I saw your ancestors, it was like seeing the early fruit on the fig tree. You remember? Jesus and cursing the fig tree. That wasn't about a fig tree.

That was about Israel. God found that fig tree of Israel, and there was early fruit. Oh, good, good, good.

And people are troubled, I think rightly, because the story about Jesus says it was too early for figs. Well, what in the world is he doing cursing the tree? Because it wasn't doing what he did, it's a parable. It's Israel.

Israel that had produced early fruit and so pleased the father. Now Israel has no fruit at all. But when they came to Baal Peor, now again, remember the story.

Balaam, the high paid prophet, was hired to curse Israel when they were on their way into the promised land and he couldn't do it. Every time he opened his mouth,

he blessed them. So, what did he do? After it's all over, he told the Moabites, just introduce them to your fertility God, Baal Peor.

The language in verse 10 is powerful. When they came to Baal Peor, they dedicated themselves. It's not merely that they got involved with this fertility God.

They dedicated themselves. Elijah says to Ahab, you have sold yourself to sin. They dedicated themselves, and I like what NIV does here, to that shameful thing.

The Hebrew says they dedicated themselves to shame. They sold themselves to what would shame them. They sold themselves to behavior that would not glorify humanity but would degrade humanity.

And they became as vile as the thing they loved. Sin, you see, is not merely something we do. It's something we become.

As vile as the thing they loved, now, we've talked about Hebrew before. This is not the word hesed, choosing the best for another at whatever cost to yourself.

No, this is the word ahav, which is affection. They fell in love. They fell in love with sin.

They were attracted by it, and they succumbed to it. And again, the Hebrew word that is translated as vile is so expressive. Detestable.

Sickening. Tragic. Oh, my.

Choose the way that the prophets point us to. Choose the way of joy. Choose the way of purity.

Choose the way of life. Choose the way of fullness. And become all those things.

Or choose the other way and become all those things. This is Isaiah. This 44th chapter of Isaiah is so powerful.

This is the strongest mockery of the practice of idolatry in the whole Bible. He takes about 20 verses to do it. And in the end, it is you have planted this tree in the forest.

You've nurtured it very carefully. It's the best wood you can possibly afford. Finally, it's matured.

You cut it down, and you cut it into two logs. One log you use to eat your supper, and the other log you plate with gold and bow down to it and say, save me. And you sort of see Isaiah going, aye, aye, aye, aye, aye.

Such stupidity and ignorance. Their eyes are closed. They cannot see.

Their minds are shut. They cannot think. The person who made the idol never stops to reflect on why it's just a block of wood.

I burned half of it for heat and used it to bake my bread and roast my meat. How can the rest of it be a god? Should I bow down to worship a piece of wood? The poor, deluded fool feeds on ashes. Here again, notice the double language.

You use this piece of wood to cook your supper, and you use the same piece of wood to make a god. What have you eaten? You've eaten ashes. He trusts something that cannot help him at all, yet he cannot bring himself to ask, is not this idol that I'm holding in my hand a lie? And again, the word here is a powerful word.

It's not the simple word for lie. It is a thing that is a disappointment, a thing that is a deception. So, it's not merely false, but it's totally misleading.

It's a word that's often used for idols in the Old Testament, and it's a bit of a mocking word. Why don't you go worship your deception? Why don't you go worship your disappointment? And, of course, then Romans 12:8. Since they thought it foolish to acknowledge God, he abandoned them to their foolish thinking and let them do things that should never be done.

Ephraim's glory will fly away like a bird: no birth, no pregnancy, no conception. Again, hear the fertility stuff going on in there? You worship these gods in order to get crops.

You worship these gods in order to get lots of children. You worship these gods to get abundance. And, in fact, you're going to get the opposite.

Even if they rear children, I'll bereave them of everyone. Woe to them when I turn away from them. Now, I point out here, three times, 12, 13, 16, God says, I'm going to take away their children.

But I wonder if we could think about it another way, not merely the obvious: their children are all going to die. But, as I stated here, how likely are people who do what these people do to produce children who love God? They are going to lose their children. And again, we look at our society where broken people are losing their children right and left.

Children, again, it particularly breaks my heart to see a young woman with a couple of little kids taking up with some—I have words for it, but I won't use them. And

what does he do? He comes in and kills the kids. And she can't bring herself to stop him because she loves him.

So, as I've tried to say lots of times, the Bible will talk directly about what God does. I'm going to take away your children. Oh, my goodness, what a mean, heavenly tyrant.

How about he has so designed the world that if you act like that, you are going to lose your children. You reap what you sow. Yes, yes.

So, I think this is awfully important as we think about the Bible. And when it says so directly, God's going to do that. And we say, what? Let's think about it in the larger terms of how he has made the world function and what will happen to us if we do not correspond to that function.

Here again, the fertility language is so powerful. Verse 14, give them, Lord, what will you give them? Give them wombs that miscarry and breasts that are dry. Mm-hmm.

As you try to manipulate the world and satisfy your own needs, it's not going to work. The world is not made that way. Verse 15, again, look closely.

I will no longer love them. That's not hesed. It's ahav.

I will no longer feel a natural affection for them. Oh, he's going to keep loving them. He loves the devil.

But the affection that I felt for you when I found you in the desert like grapes or like early figs, you've killed it. You've killed it. Ephraim is blighted.

Their root is withered. They yield no fruit. Even if they bear children, I'll slay their cherished offspring.

My God, here's Hosea talking. My God will reject them because they have not obeyed him. They will be wanderers among the nations. Oh, my.

Oh, my. Well, that's a dark chapter, but it, I think, speaks to our situation today and the challenge for us. Ten will be somewhat dark, but a few glimmers here that will be more hopeful for us.

Questions, comments, or observations before we close? Yes. Yes. With prostitution, there's a loss of children.

Another thing I didn't mention, but how many million have we aborted? A lot. To satisfy convenience, to satisfy desire. Yes.

Yes. Other questions, comments? Yes. Yes.

Yes. You talked about fruit. Yes.

Yes. Particularly when Jesus cursed the fig tree. Isn't it God that gives us fruit? Sure.

So, I mean, okay, the tree doesn't bear fruit. The tree doesn't bear fruit by itself. God gives the fruit.

Well, again, we got to be careful not to push the analogy too far. The point being, the tree of Israel should have borne fruit, and particularly at this moment when its Messiah has come, it should be springing into blossom. Nothing.

Nothing. So, it's that analogy that's going on here, that at the moment when the tree, Israel, should be bearing fruit, it's not. Yeah, I can always say I don't know.

Since we are so much like how Israel was then and we're living it now, as Christians, what is our hope? Are we preparing to go into Babylon? Is that the, or is there any hope, like is there, because there's so much rot in the tree, so to speak, should we just cut our losses and prepare to go to Babylon? Or what is the Christian response? I think the Christian question is, should we just cut our losses and prepare to go to Babylon? I think the Christian response is to live in eternal optimism. We serve God. We serve the God who is forever creative and forever able, and we should be prepared.

I'm a congenital pessimist, but in this moment I'm not a pessimist. We need to live with confidence, with expectation for what he could do, for what he might do, and go for it. Exactly.

Trust him forever, for wherever he's going to take us. Yes, yes. And that's, you know, that's, I love, I love the old story.

It is a darkened church on a Wednesday night, and there are three old ladies at the altar praying and weeping. suddenly, the back door bangs open, and a guy comes in waving the Bible and says, I've read the last chapter. We win! That's how we need to live. We win.

How that's going to happen, I don't know. That's his business, but he is able for whatever it is that we are called to face. Practical hope because of the outpouring that's continuing.

Yes, yes. God's at work. Yes.

The new Speaker of the House is a strong Christian.

All right, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you.

Thank you for noting that Hosea 9 is not the end of the story. Thank you that you led your people through the exile, enabled them to survive the exile and come out of the exile clean. So, we praise you.

Praise you that whatever has happened through the course of history, you have been the winner and we pray, oh Lord, that you'll help us to live in that same confidence. You are God. The world is yours.

You made it. Help us, Lord, to learn the lessons of Hosea. Help us not to replicate these sins.

Help us to listen to your prophets, to worship you alone with absolute loyalty, to surrender our desire to manipulate you so that you'll meet our needs. Help us, Lord, to live with confidence, with joy, with the awareness that you, having loved us, have loved us to the end. In your name, we pray. Amen.