

Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 12, Hosea 13

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It's good to see each of you here tonight. Thanks for coming. We're looking at chapter 13 in the third part of the main body of the book, which I have called No Truth, No Faithfulness.

We've seen no knowledge of the Lord in chapters 4, 5, and 6, and we've seen no steadfast love for the Lord in 6 through 10 or 11, and now no faithfulness to the Lord. When Ephraim spoke, people trembled. He was exalted in Israel, but he came guilty of Baal worship and died.

Now they sin more and more. They make idols for themselves from their silver, cleverly fashioned images, all of them the work of craftsmen. It is said of these people, they offer human sacrifices.

They kiss calf idols. Verse 1, the first part of it, speaks of the influence that Ephraim had once. They were exalted in Israel.

What happened, according to the rest of the verse? They turned to idols. They turned to Baal, and let me remind you again that Baal is, among other things, the storm god. And as I've said, Israel has no big river like the Euphrates or the Nile that they can use for irrigation.

For Israel, everything is dependent on those storms coming in off of the Mediterranean, and as they come to that central ridge, dropping their rainfall. So, it's important to pacify the storm god. It's important to have him in your corner.

What's the connection between part 1 of verse 1 and part 2? Before and after. Exactly. And why the after, given that before? Yes, when they served God, God blessed them, and then they turned their back on God.

But again, what's the connection there? Yes, yes. When Ephraim spoke, people trembled. He was exalted in Israel.

What's the connection between that and the rest of the verse? Pride. Oh, I don't need God. I'm doing very well.

People are impressed by me. People listen to me. People do what I say.

I don't need God. What does Paul say? Not many mighty, not many noble, not many wise. Why not? Because they don't need God.

They're getting along just fine, thank you very much. Over and over again, it is in those moments when we have failed, in those moments when life has come apart. As they say, there are no atheists in foxholes.

Exactly, exactly. They didn't know that they needed God, as we don't. Again, I've been thinking a lot.

I mentioned last week Dr. Brown's speaking at the college about the unchurched. I've been thinking a lot about that. These people have not lost their faith.

They've simply found it unnecessary. Who needs God? I'm doing fine. Who needs church? Who needs church people? Who needs Jesus? I'm doing fine.

Years and years ago, I saw a little piece. Students found out that their professor had once been a very ardent Christian, and he was clearly not an ardent Christian now, and they said to him, how did you lose your faith? He said I didn't really lose it. He said that when I went to graduate school, I found out I didn't have a lot of time for him and didn't really need him, so I put my faith in a drawer.

A few years later, I thought it'd be nice to have a little faith, maybe, and I went to the drawer and opened it. There was nothing in there. I don't need God.

And oftentimes, it is the tragedy, the crisis that forces us to say, oh my goodness, I can't get along without God. So, I think in many ways, this is a very powerful verse. When they were exalted, they turned, and the Bible makes this point again and again.

The idols, and I want to say the idol gods, are the works of our hands, and I want to go a step beyond that. They are the works of our minds. We have not only constructed the image. We've constructed the idea.

This is a God who exists for us. Now, again, I want to look at the second part of that verse. They became guilty of Baal worship, a man-made religion, and died.

Huh? What's the connection there? Spiritually, they died? Yes. Now, why? Why does this lead to death? Baal could not provide life. Baal could not provide what they really, what you and I really need.

Now, let's pursue that a little more. Why not? Well, he's not God, yes. Why do the works of our hands and the works of our minds not lead to life? Alright, it makes us think we're the source of life.

What else? Okay, okay. What else? Okay, okay. The only source of life is God.

We cannot produce life. Now, it's going to be very interesting. Most of us here probably won't see it, but some of you will.

I think maybe if Jesus delays 100 years from now, the world may be proving this voice with a vengeance. This may very well not turn out to be a blessing. Now, I'd like to be proven wrong, and perhaps I will be, but my sense is that given humanity's fallen nature, whatever we produce is going to have a death-dealing part of it.

Looked at on paper, communism is an extremely elegant political theory. It makes all kinds of sense, and that's why emerging countries keep falling for it, but it leaves out one thing: our fallen nature. We're all equal, and some of us are a little more equal than others.

So, instead of the state withering away, the state became all-powerful in the hands of a select few. We can't produce life. Left to ourselves, we produce death.

It seems like that is not the case, and people keep denying it all the time, but every generation proves it again. The 20th century was the answer to the 19th century, and the 19th century, in many ways, is Hosea 13 1a. Europe had the world by the tail.

Turned out it was a serpent's tail, but we had figured it out. We had everything understood. Rationality had answered all of our problems and was going to answer the handful that were left.

There could never be any more war because everybody understood that war is destructive, and we were too smart to destroy ourselves. And instead, we had, and as many have commented, there are not two world wars. There was one with a 20-year break to get another crop of 18-year-olds.

They turned to Baal and died, and we're trying to pick up the pieces. 75 years later, we're still trying to do so, and we're not doing a very good job of it.

I'll say more about that in a minute. Okay, now they sin more and more. They make idols for themselves from their silver.

We make things to worship to take care of ourselves with our money, like paying a Japanese baseball player 700 million dollars. 700 million dollars. O-H-T-A-N-I. Ohtani. Yeah. So, there it is.

We're using our silver to make ourselves an idol. A guy who's really good at catching a little round thing or hitting a little round thing. Now, I want you to look at verses 2

and 3, and I'd like to see if you get the same atmosphere that I do, or if you did, if you did your homework.

Now, they sin more and more. They make idols for themselves from their silver—cleverly fashioned images, all of them a work of craftsmen.

It is said of these people, they offer human sacrifices. They kiss calf idols. Therefore, they will be like the morning mist, like the early dew that disappears, like chaff swirling from a threshing floor like smoke escaping through a window.

What's the difference in feeling between those two verses? Okay, yeah, I think that's one thing. What else? How does verse 3 feel? Hopeless? Elusive? Hollow? Empty? Dead? Verse 2 is full. It's full of all kinds of stuff.

The phrases sort of fall over each other. Then, in verse 3, it's just this feeling of emptiness: mist, dew, chaff, smoke.

Powerful poetry. Powerful poetry. We have filled our lives, and what we've filled our lives with is mist, dew, chaff, and smoke.

Verse 4, But I have been the Lord your God ever since you came out of Egypt—you know no God but me, no Savior but me. I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of burning heat.

Now this is the question that we need to continually ask ourselves. Why should I serve God? And there's a wrong answer here. Don't give it.

What does this verse say? What do these two verses say? Why should we serve God? Because of what he's done for us, not because of what we can get out of him. What has God done for me lately and again? Well, he's done very little for me. I'm the one who has gotten an education.

I'm the one who's gotten a job. I'm the one who's married the cutest girl in the world. I'm the one who, what has God done for me? I can get along quite well without him, thank you.

If we serve him for what we can get out of him, it won't be enough. But if we serve him for love, for what he has given to us, oh my goodness, you heard all those I's in there. He gave me godly parents, gave me pretty good health, gave me a reasonably good mind, etc., etc., etc.

Oh my goodness, none of this is me. It's all him. But there's the watershed.

Who is responsible for the blessings in your life? You or God? And it's very easy if we go on there when I fed them, they were satisfied. When they were satisfied, they became proud. And then they forgot me.

Yeah, yeah. What God has done for the United States of America, what he has done for us, when I fed them, they were satisfied. When they were satisfied, they became proud.

And then they forgot me. It's interesting that in the Bible—I think I've probably commented on this before—thanks and praise are synonyms. Virtually all thanks in the Bible are directed to God for himself.

I did a study of this a while back and was quite shocked. Most of the expressions of thanks in the Bible are for God, not for what he's given us, not for what he's done for me, but for who he is. So, this is why it's sort of a single concept.

So, that's where gratitude is absolutely essential in the Christian walk. We must never forget who God is and how He demonstrates his character in his goodness. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His faithfulness is forever.

As soon as we begin to forget this, we're in trouble. Because we begin to worship the works of our hands and our minds, I did this.

I accomplished this. No, you didn't. No, you didn't.

Your Father graciously accomplished it through you. Don't forget that. Don't forget that.

Someone said I don't understand why God chose the Jews. Oh, I do. They're such excellent examples of the rest of us.

So, I will be like a lion to them. Like a leopard, I'll lurk by the path. Like a bear robbed of her cubs, I don't want to mess with a mama bear.

I will attack them and rip them open. Like a lion, I'll devour them. A wild animal will tear them apart.

So, the question there is, is this merely the fury of a frustrated tyrant? What are we talking about here? What's happening? From provider to predator. Uh-huh. And why does that happen? Because of their disobedience, the discipline of a loving Father.

Yes? Yes? Okay, they've chosen the other gods, and he's fighting for his beloved out of jealousy. Uh-huh. Let's turn to Romans chapter 1. There is a New Testament.

I do know that. Verse 18, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Isn't that an interesting phrase? We look at the wicked prospering and we don't realize the truth.

The truth is that's not going to go on forever. Who suppress the truth by their wickedness. Now, here's what I wanted especially to call your attention to.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. Now, as we've said before this evening, in our satisfaction, in our fullness, in our ease, it may appear that we don't need a God. But get to the place where your resources are not enough, and God's existence is very plain.

Those guys on the battlefield whose mouths are a cesspool, when everything begins to fall in, what do they do? They pray. They pray. I read a book just this past week where the guy said, I was amazed.

I didn't know where that prayer came from. It was just there because I was scared to death. Yeah.

For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, eternal power, and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse. Now, here, this is finally what I want to call your attention to—verse 21.

For although they knew God, knew that God existed, knew that there was a divine power, what didn't they do? They did not glorify him as God and did not give thanks. And notice what it says: did not give thanks to him for himself. And so, what is the result? Their thinking became futile, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal human beings and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore, God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. Now, we have started out, and the wrath of God is being revealed.

How is God's wrath being revealed according to that verse we just read? Giving them over. So, it's not, it's not a red-faced tyrant saying, you can't do that to me, I'm going to get you, I'm going to kill you, I'm going to tear you apart, you can't do that to me. It is God saying you've chosen a road, and that road is death.

I'm going to let you take that road. I'm going to let you have that road. Now, it's interesting; we don't think very much about it in this way, but sexual perversion doesn't result in life.

Babies aren't born. It results in death. Death for the human race, if it is continued in long enough.

So yes, we've got this strong poetic language about the danger, the disaster that comes from refusing to glorify God or give thanks to him, but we've got to constantly think God's wrath is not expressed in the sense of personal tit-for-tat. Oh yes, he's a person, he's hurt, he's angry, but the judgment that falls on us is the judgment that is simply a matter of cause and effect. Live in ways you weren't designed to live, and it's not going to work well.

It's going to work to your own destruction. Exactly, exactly, exactly. That first chapter of Romans, especially from 18—well, the first chapter as a whole is a great chapter, but especially to think about the nature of our existence, verses 18 to the end of the chapter is amazing.

Okay. You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your helper. They are trying to live life against the grain and wonder why it keeps hurting.

Now, I want to think about that with you a little more. Why doesn't life work when we don't submit to God, and why does life work when we do submit to him? Yes, yes. How has he designed life to work? When you think about the good life, what's involved in that? Right, my relationship with him has issues in relationships with one another.

God has made the world for relationship. Now, what is necessary for healthy relationships? Trust, trust. Your wife can trust you.

Your children can trust you. Your neighbor can trust you, and what is necessary if you're going to be a trustworthy person? Moral integrity that comes from where? Trust in God. If you know that your life is in God's hands and those hands are good, you don't have to be grasping.

You don't have to covet what your neighbors have. It really begins in trust, in a trustworthy God. Again, forgive me. You've heard me say this many times, but I'll say it again.

Why did God start where he was with Abraham? He didn't offer him eternal life. He didn't offer him heaven. He didn't offer him salvation.

He didn't offer any of that good spiritual stuff. He said, I'd like to give you a piece of land, and I'd like to give you a baby, and I'd like to give you a reputation. Huh? As I said many times, there's nothing spiritual about land, especially under your fingernails.

And there's nothing spiritual about a baby at 3 a.m. with a full diaper. And reputation, we're supposed to give that up, aren't we? What's God doing? He is countering the devil. The devil convinced Eve and Adam that God was not trustworthy.

He's not on your side. He doesn't want to give you what you need. He's playing his own game.

You give your life to him, and he'll probably send you to Wilmore, Kentucky, or Africa, one of those places. You can't trust God. And God is starting at ground zero.

I know what you want, Abraham. Would you let me give those to you? And again, I've said it a times, all the angels held their breath. What do you think, Michael? Will he do it? The last 25 didn't.

I'm quite confident Abraham wasn't the first one to that God made this offer. And I wonder if their house had burned down the week before or something. Or Abraham had lost his job.

Or they wrecked their car. Or their camel, as the case may be. Because as we've said again and again, it takes a crisis to bring us to the place where we will dare to trust him.

So, if there is a trustworthy God, then I am free. Sorry about this marker. I don't have to be a grabber.

My neighbor doesn't have to worry about whether I'm going to steal his stuff while he's away for a weekend. That's what a marriage is. A profitable partnership.

Profitable to both parties. And profitable to the world. And as we see marriage being destroyed before our eyes, we are walking down a road where there are lions lurking on both sides.

Mama bears that have lost their cubs. Because we will not submit, we won't give him a chance to prove that he's trustworthy.

I like Psalm 46. Everybody liked to quote it during the COVID thing. Here's the Living Oswald version.

Relax and discover that I am God. King James says to be still and know that I am God. But it's still.

Stop running around. Stop trying to solve all your problems yourself. Trust and obey.

Okay God, I'm going to let you have my life. I'm going to let you show me how trustworthy you are. And I can stand before you tonight and say, oh my goodness, he's been trustworthy all the way.

All the way. But there it is. If you can entrust your life to God, then you can be a trustworthy person.

And if you are trustworthy, then there's the possibility of those. It's not just marriage by any means. Profitable partnerships that are life-giving and produce good results.

And there it is. Where is your king that he may save you? Where are your rulers in all your towns? Of whom you said, give me a king and princes. So, in my anger, I gave you a king.

In my wrath, I took him away. The guilt of thee from is stored up. His sins are kept on record.

When we won't trust God, what do we expect of our political rulers? And by expecting that of them, what do we condemn them to? Exactly. They cannot succeed. It's impossible.

And forgive me if I get political here, but I've thought again a good deal about this. We have two ways of thinking about government in our country now. The government exists to provide for my needs.

The government exists to protect my liberties. Our founding fathers when they created the Constitution, and I've gotten hooked on the great courses since COVID, and I'm watching one right now on the creation of the Constitution. Very interesting.

That's what they fought about for that whole summer, is what kind of a government do we have to have to protect our liberties? The reason we have a Senate is because under the Confederation, one state had one vote, and it was chaos, but states like Rhode Island and Delaware were unwilling to give that up, so we've got a Senate. But if the king has to exist to provide my needs, it's over. It's over.

Please. If you refuse to repent, then the record of your sins is never forgotten. But if you repent, your name is written on his hands.

Yeah. Yeah. No, no.

Ephraim becomes, and what he's doing is he's playing off two persons, Judah and Ephraim, the South and the North. So, Ephraim is just a code word for the Northern

Kingdom. But by this time, the territory of the Northern Kingdom is mostly reduced to the area of Ephraim.

So, it's both poetic, a figure of speech for the larger institution, but it's also historically accurate in that Naphtali and Issachar and Zebulun and Asher, they're all gone. Gad and Reuben is gone. So, most of Manasseh is gone.

A part of it is still there. So, it's, as I say, poetic for the whole Northern entity but also historically accurate in that this is where we are. Pains as of a woman in childbirth come to him, but he is a child without wisdom.

The baby says, hey, I'm not leaving this place. This is comfortable. All my needs are supplied.

You want me to go out into the cold world? Forget it. When the time arrives, he doesn't even have the sense to come out of the womb. Now, in verse 14, the Latin term is *crux interpretum*, an interpretive crossroads, a problem.

What mine says is, I will deliver this people from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will have no compassion.

Now, NIV puts a blank between where, O grave, is your destruction, and I will have no compassion, but there isn't a blank. It's just the last statement in the verse. Huh? How do we put those together in the middle of everything he said and what he's going to go on to say in the next verse? And then you remember that in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul quotes the latter part of that verse.

Where is your sting, O death? Where is your victory, O grave? And he's clearly talking about it in positive terms. So that has meant that historically, the verse has tended to be read positively, just sort of sticking in the middle here. But more recently, there's been a suggestion that, to me, makes a good deal of sense.

And that is that, actually, the opening two sentences are rhetorical questions. Shall I deliver this people from the power of the grave? Shall I redeem them from death? Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your victory? Now, we can't prove that because Hebrew has no way of marking rhetorical questions. If it's an indicative question, where are you? Then, you've got an interrogative form that can be used.

But it's like this. Shall I? Just like in English. Shall I do this for you? Answer yes.

Shall I do this for you? Answer no. So, I think that that's the correct understanding, that here it is negative, that he is calling on death. I'm the bear.

I'm the lion. I'm the leopard. Come on, death.

Come on. Am I just going to deliver these people who have not repented, who have not turned away from their sin? No, I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to have compassion on them in their continued, satisfied, forgetful sinfulness.

Now, I get to heaven and meet Hosea, and he says that was not a question. I'm going to say, yes, sir because we have seen him shift back and forth in other places.

And so, it's possible here that it's simply, again, God's saying, yes, in the short term it's destruction, but in the long term I'm going to redeem them. In any case, that's how Paul is using those phrases. Thank God.

Jesus has arisen from the dead. Death, you have no sting. Grave, you have no victory.

Praise the Lord. Now, I think it's possible that Paul understood this in a negative light in its original context here. But he is saying that in the course of God's redemption history, he has changed the picture.

And now Christ has come and risen from the dead. And so, whereas death was victorious back there in Hosea's day and Israel went into captivity and died, praise God in the course of God's work in history. He's changed that all around.

And death has no sting. The grave has no victory. So, I think either way is possible.

But where Paul comes out is the conclusion to it all, and that's ultimately the right way of reading it. Have I confused you on this now? Do you understand what I'm saying? Great question. I think the point is to say to the sinner, you're not going to get out of this alive unless you radically change your way of thinking, unless you radically change your trust structure.

You're not going to get out of here alive. So, I think it's there as a warning to say, here's what's staring you in the face if you keep on the road you're on. People say, you know, oh well, you know, don't preach on hell.

Why not? Why not? Not all the time. Oh no, no, no. You'll upset people if you talk about sin.

You wouldn't want to do that. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, an east wind from the Lord will come blowing in from the desert.

His spring will fail, his well will dry up, and his storehouse will be plundered of all its treasures. The people of Samaria must bear their guilt because they have rebelled against their God. Now, this is the last part of this verse.

Well, those people in that ancient time were all barbarians. We're past that, aren't we? Have you read the paper? Have you seen the television? They will fall by the sword. Their little ones will be dashed to the ground.

Their pregnant women were ripped open. Exactly, exactly. We haven't moved an inch.

Human brutality hasn't changed at all. Only God can change that. And unless he does it, it's going to be the same a thousand years from now as it was two thousand years ago.

This is who we are, but it's not who we're intended to be. And it's not who we have to be. That's the good news.

That's the good news. One of the most memorable experiences of my life was in January of 1977. It was snowing in Kentucky.

Karen was in the house on North Lexington Avenue with three little kids, and the car was frozen in the driveway. And I was in Israel. And we stood on the ridge, turned that way, and you could see the Mediterranean.

It was an absolutely clear day. Turned this way and you could see 15 miles away into the Jordan Valley and then up to the Jordanian hills and beyond. The air temperature and the thermometer temperature were 35.

And the windchill was 10. There was a 35-mile-an-hour wind coming at us as cold as if it were coming out of a refrigerator. As I mentioned here, it's in Arabic the khamsin.

And it's absolutely dry. It dries up everything it touches. And we were all huddled in our parkas there.

And there was a Bedouin woman over here with her goats, with her black robes whipping around her knees. And we talked about Abraham and Lot. It was right there somewhere, not probably more than a mile from where we were, north or south.

And our guide said to us, as we looked down into the green Jordan, 15 miles. He said, you know what the temperature is there now? 74 degrees. Now he says, imagine Abraham and Lot standing there.

Abraham is the sheik. He's the grandpa. He has life-and-death power over everybody in his family.

And he says to Lot, you know what? We're going to have to separate. One of us will have to stay here and go there. Where would you like? And I know what Lot was thinking.

Lot was thinking, this old goat, he wants me to say, well, I'll stay here with the rocks and you take the grass. Ah, fat chance of that. I'm taking the grass.

And Abraham says, think you made a good choice. Blessings. How could he do that? He had learned that God can be trusted.

Better the rocks from the hand of God than the grass that you grabbed for yourself.

Thank you, Lord Jesus. You trusted the Father.

You trusted him to the end. You trusted him, knowing there was a cross in his hand, but you believed that the cross was not the end of the story. Thank you.

Thank you. Oh God, you have so blessed us in this good land. Every one of us has a hundred servants working for us.

And how easily we have forgotten you. How easily we have said, well, I worked hard for what I've got. Have mercy upon us, oh Lord.

Have mercy upon us. Would you yet turn us back to you? Will it take a disaster? I don't know. But turn us back to you, and we may be as a nation, a light in the darkness and not just more darkness.

Thank you, Lord. Thank you for these dear brothers and sisters. Thank you for their faithfulness in attending this study.

I pray, Lord Jesus, for each one of them that you will, especially in this Christmas season, give them a renewed trust in you, a renewed confidence in your care for them, and your ability to provide every need. In your name, we pray. Amen.