

## Dr. John Oswalt, Hosea, Session 13, Hosea 14

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Well, we come to the end of our journey tonight. Thank you to a number of you who have been here for every session. Others of you for most of them.

So, that's very encouraging to me. Thank you. In some ways, chapter 14 mimics chapter 3. It's, Israel is on the slave block, and God comes not to mock, not to hurt, not to laugh at what might happen to this woman who was once beautiful, but he comes to buy her back.

And so, in the opening of verse 14:1, return Israel to the Lord your God. Throughout the book, we've had those calls to return. We've also had other pictures.

If we look at chapter 3 verse 5, afterward, the Israelites will return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. They'll come trembling to the Lord and to his blessings in the last days. That's 3:5. Then 5:4. Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God.

And we want to talk about that a bit. A spirit of prostitution is in their heart. They do not know the Lord.

It is a terrifying verse in many ways. Then chapter 6, verse 1. Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces, but he'll heal us.

He has injured us, but he'll bind up our wounds. Then chapter 7 verse 10. Israel's arrogance testifies against him, but despite all this, he does not return to the Lord his God or search for him.

And finally, 12:6. You must return to your God, maintain hesed and Mishpat and wait, and trust in your God always. Again, this is a powerful verse. So, when we look at all of those verses together, what things strike you? What are your observations on those passages? Return.

Return. Turn back. And as you've heard many, many times, it is the Hebrew word that is simply to turn around.

So, we see a number of calls here, don't we? Calls to turn. What else do we see? Okay. Promise of healing and restoration.

What else? Yes. Yes. So those three things, I think, stand out in those repeated verses.

The calls to do it, the promise that if they will, there will be healing and restoration. And yet, at the same time, there are things preventing them. What prevents them? Their deeds.

Arrogance. I don't need to return. Okay.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

A spirit of prostitution. Something in us that doesn't want the pure but wants the tainted. I don't want good meat.

You want meat that's just a little off. Here's another kin lawism. Evil always looks better than it is.

And good never looks as good as it is. Especially in movies. Yes.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. This is where we see a certain spirit of correctness in Calvinism, if I may say it. Does a person get to the point where God hasn't stopped wooing them, but they can no longer hear him? I think that's what we read in both 1st John.

There is a sin that leads to death. I don't tell you to pray for that. How interesting.

And in Hebrews. Now, if someone says to me, I'm afraid I've committed the unpardonable sin. I say, no, you haven't because you're concerned.

It's the person who isn't concerned who may well have. And the book of Hebrews is pretty explicit. If a person has really been converted solidly and has been living an earnest Christian life and then turns away and pulls down contempt on the cross, he says there's no sacrifice left for that person.

And I would say again, it's not because God stops loving them. He hasn't decreed their damnation, but they can no longer hear the words of love. Right now, all around us here in this room are all kinds of sounds.

Some classical music, some music that's not so classical, but we can't hear it because we don't have receivers. It's the same way with this person. They have smashed their receiver, and they can no longer hear God's message of love.

So, the question for you and me is, is that in any way referring to me? Do I prefer the evil to the good? I see so much today that is called edgy. And most of it is over the edge. But there it is.

Now, there's a word that shows up here. NIV says, your sins have been your downfall. Does anyone have another translation? Does anyone have the English Standard Version? Okay.

The word that is used there, we've talked a bit about this before. The word has been, since King James Day, translated as iniquity. There is no modern English equivalent for it, unfortunately, because it is the second most frequent word describing sin in the Old Testament. The most frequent word is the one that is translated sin.

And the next most is translated transgression. This one, again, we've talked about this before. Interestingly, it has the same connotation in both Hebrew and Greek.

It is the idea of missing a target. So, in that sense, it can be both unintentional, you planned to hit the target, but you missed it, and intentional. No, I didn't want that target.

I wanted to hit something else. This one describes fully intentional. I know where the fence is, and I'm going over it.

Nobody shuts me in. Some of you here might be old enough to remember that song from the 1940s, and I think it was. Don't fence me in.

I know where the limits are, and I'm not staying within them. So, this one is a very general word describing any deviation from God's plan for our lives. This one, much more specific.

There's some argument about what it connotes, but almost certainly, it connotes objective reality. So, it sometimes gets translated as guilt. That is, I can say, well, it was just a little thing, let's forget it.

And this word says, no, you can't. Something has been altered in the nature of existence. Something has come into existence now.

And all of us who are married understand this. There's something between us, and it has to be dealt with. You can't just say, let's forget it.

It's got to be dealt with. So, he says here, return Israel to the Lord your God. Your iniquity has been your downfall. The reality of what you've done has knocked you down.

So, what are we going to do about that? What does verse two say? Yes. Yes. Literally, take words with you.

Yeah. Yeah. If you are going to turn back, the Greek word, other than repent, means to agree with.

If we're going to turn back, we've got to say to him, you were right, and I was wrong. Words. Well, words aren't enough, are they? What about that? What can words do? We'll be saved and condemned by our words.

Okay. To really repent and be sorry. Okay.

Okay. All right. It takes humility to really confess.

Words create in me a clean heart. Yes. The interesting thing is that in Hebrew, it's rather like iniquity.

The word, and since you came out on a cold night, you need to learn a Hebrew to wow your friends and neighbors with. The word is dabar. It's a soft B after a vowel.

Dabar. It means word. It also means thing.

And it also means event. Once again, when you've spoken a word, it's out there. And you can say, well, I didn't mean it, but it's out there.

It has become a thing. It has become a reality that is going to have to be dealt with. So, in the same way, what are these words? We say, well, sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me.

I think it's the other way around. Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can really hurt me. You can't un-hear them.

Or un-say them. Yes. So, in a real sense, it is, yes, how do we deal with the reality of iniquity? We deal with it with words.

Real words. Not cheap words, but a genuine confession. I was wrong.

I did what I should not have done. And I'm sorry. That's hard.

That's hard. But in a real way, Hosea is telling us that if the prostitute is to be brought back, then that spirit within her is going to have to be dealt with. And words will express that reality or not express that reality.

So, this is, I find these two verses very interesting in terms of the implications underneath in the very nature of the Hebrew language. So, take words with you and return to the Lord. And what are we to say in those words? Forgive.

Here again, I was wrong. I need forgiveness. And what's the next word? Receive in grace.

I don't deserve for you to receive me. I don't deserve for you to take me back. But please take me back as an expression of your grace.

And I think that's really why they are explaining in Greek the connotations of forgiveness. That is, don't receive my bad stuff. Let it go.

Get rid of it. Take it away. Okay.

Receive us graciously. Now look at this next one that we may offer the fruit of our lips.

What's more, we're told that elsewhere in the Old Testament, the fruit of our lips is a sacrifice. And it may well be that what we're talking about here, there are really two possibilities. One is we're talking about vows.

Let me now renew my vows. The wedding vows from back there years ago. Let me give you the fruit of my lips.

The other possibility is that, and this is in Proverbs, it talks about a man will survive on the fruit of his lips. The idea is that what you have spoken, spoken honestly, spoken sincerely, produces good results in your life. So that's another possibility here.

If you will forgive me, if you will receive me graciously, then I will use the produce of my life to bless you. So that's the other possibility. I tend to side a little more on the vows side, but... Yeah, yeah.

Sacrifices of praise. Yes, yes. The interesting thing is, none of this is what the Hebrew says.

The Hebrew says, we will give the bulls of our lips. If you've got a King James, you'll see that there. What? And as I've talked to you before, for whatever reason, the Hebrew of Hosea is less reliable than the Hebrew of most of the other books.

The word that is in the Hebrew is parim, and that is bulls. A par is a bull and im is plural. But fruit is peri.

In a consonantal text, they would look identical, except that that one's got an M on it. This one doesn't. And interestingly, the Septuagint translates it, fruit of the lips.

That's why most modern translations go this way: there was just a slip-up. Remember, vowels were put in sometime five or six hundred years after Christ. So, both of these would have looked like that.

The only difference between them would have been that M. So, here is a little text criticism for you. So, we're going to give you the fruit of our lips. What aren't we going to do with our mouths in verse three? We won't put up idols, but there's something before that.

We're not going to ask Assyria to save us. We're not going to ask some mighty power to save us. Now again, remember, this is right down at the end of the Israelite kingdom.

They have made deals with Assyria, then they've broken that and tried to make a deal with Egypt, and now they're trying to make a deal with Assyria again. And Assyria is going to have had enough of it, and they're going to take them. So, we're going to repent, we're going to confess, and the result of that will be what? Trust.

Trust. We're going to trust not Assyria but you. We're going to trust not the work of our hands but you.

And here again, I think this is where it is so significant for us today. No, I don't have any idols. I don't make idols.

I don't even believe in other gods, or God either. What do I trust? I trust the works of my hands. What is that bank account? It's the works of my hands.

What is that big house? It's the result of my work. So, that description of idols is very significant. I'm trusting what I have accomplished.

I'm trusting what I have done. Now, again, God doesn't say, okay, just sit on your hands and let me drop it on you. No.

But there's a very, very big difference between saying to him, I am trusting you to accomplish through my hands what you want to accomplish in my life. So, it starts with where is my focus on trust. Is it in God, or is it in myself? But now, look at the last part of verse 3. We had a sort of unusual close to verse 2 and noticed it's causative. Assyria can't save us.

We won't say to our gods because in you, the fatherless find compassion. So, the cause is, in you, the fatherless find compassion, and the effect is, we're not going to

trust Assyria and the works of our hands anymore. How does that work? Okay, they were fatherless, that's what you think? All right, as a result of their sin, they were fatherless.

All right, all right. Yeah, because in you, the fatherless find compassion. I'm not going to trust Assyria, and I'm not going to trust the works of my hands. I think what we have here is a statement of the character of God.

What kind of a God are you? You're incredibly gracious. You're incredibly compassionate. You are for the outcast.

Oh my, I think maybe I could trust a God like that. The Assyrians don't care about the fatherless, and my idols don't care about the fatherless, but you do. You care, and now think about this: who are God's special favorites? Widows, orphans, and immigrants.

What do they all have in common? They're all non-contributors. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. We don't let freeloaders in our society.

We value producers. We value contributors. God doesn't value people because they contribute or because they produce.

God values people because they are. Yeah, yeah. He is a father to the fatherless and a husband to the widow.

This is why God says, you profane my name when you treat these kinds of people badly. You drag my name in the mud. You make it look like I'm one of the gods who value the beautiful people and the jet set.

I'm extremely happy to be a Christian every morning, and I look in the mirror and remember God loves ugly people. You know, I think it's amazing that you used the word outcast rather than just fatherless because that includes all the children born to prostitutes who have no clue who their father is. Yes, yes.

Absolutely, absolutely, absolutely. And, of course, this is an epidemic in our society. As recently as 2009, five percent of babies in the United States were fatherless.

Now, it's 50 percent. 2022. And every study, every study there is, shows that the one predictor of delinquency is fatherlessness.

It's not economics, it's not race, it's not any of the things you might think of. It is fatherlessness. And we are promoting it as fast as we can.

It sounds like Hosea. So, God responds, verse 4. What will he do? He'll heal what? Their waywardness. And love them.

He's going to deal with that spirit of prostitution. Praise his name. Now, hear me.

I'm going to be edgy here. I will heal what they did and forgive it. What's the difference between that and what the text says? Yes.

It's going to heal them, not what they did. And heal them in what sense? He's going to deal with the cause. He's going to deal with the cause.

Yes. And that's what so much of modern evangelicalism has simply forgotten. Oh, I'm going to forgive you and take you to heaven.

And in the meantime, you can live like hell. No. No.

Yes, I'm going to forgive you. Yes, I'm going to receive you graciously. And I'm going to heal your waywardness.

Yes. Yes. Yes.

Yes. So, and as someone has said, I'm going to love them freely, for my anger has turned away. The word love there is the word for affection.

It's not hesed. It's ahav. So, it's, you're my friends.

As Daryl said in the sermon yesterday, God likes us. I've said this before, but you've forgotten. God gets angry.

He is love. Now, when you have come, you've turned back to me, you've confessed, you brought the words, the fruit of your lips. Now, what I am is able to triumph over what I felt.

Yes. Yes. Yes. There's no cause for anger anymore. So, yes. Yes.

I think there is significance in the way it's tied there. Remember Hebrew poetry in which you're saying one thing and you're saying it in two different, synonymous ways. I love them freely.

My anger has turned away. So, it's two sides of a coin. And that's significant.

Okay. Well, I thought we were going to be done about 7:30. So, what do we see in verses 5, 6, and 7? Yeah. Yeah.

I gave you a number of places to look up that talk about the barrenness, the deadness, the dying of the produce, and now we've reversed that. And as Gary has said, I think the first phrase is significant. Verse 5, what does it say? What's the pronoun? He will be the dew.

It's not just, well, everything's going to be fine now. It's I. I will be this precious influence in your life. I will be the source of, through the summer months, the dry season.

Dew is terribly important in Israel. It's the one thing that sort of keeps the plants a little bit moist as they're coming to the point of finally, especially the grapes and the olives. I'll be like a dew to Israel.

He'll blossom like a lily, like a cedar of Lebanon. He'll send down his roots. His young shoots will grow.

His splendor will be like an olive tree. His fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. People will again dwell in his shade.

So, here's the other side. God will be the dew. They will be this, and the result will be people are going to get blessed.

That's a paradigm for your life and mine. Is he the dew in my life? Is he the precious, precious hint of life that is then being played out in my life with the result that other people are blessed? I think that's the pattern of the Christian life. He's the source, we're the field, and they get to eat.

All right, verse 8. What do you make of that opening sentence? That strikes you a little strange? What have I to do with idols? Well, you're God. You don't have anything to do with them. That's their fallback.

Yes, if you're going to be in a relationship with me, this relationship where the dew of my presence is watering you, you don't need idols. One commentator suggests God is saying, I don't need to talk to you about idols anymore. I'm done with that discussion, because you've gotten the point.

You've come down off the slave block. You've let me woo you into the desert. Remember that from chapter 3? So, I don't need to talk about idols anymore.

And I suspect probably that's the direction to go. But again, there's the possibility of a textual issue. The Hebrew says, O Ephraim, what to me? And then idols.

Well, again, a little Hebrew. Here's what the L looks like. And here's what the E looks like.

The Septuagint says, O Ephraim, what to him is idols anymore? Do you know what he looks like? That's a Y and that's a W. And if you see handwritten Hebrew texts, boy oh boy, sometimes this one gets a little long, and this one gets a little short. Exactly. So, this would be, as I say, li, to me, and this one would be lo, to him.

So, either way, the point is clear. We're done with idols. I don't need them anymore, and Ephraim doesn't need them anymore.

Oh, what a good place to be. What a good place to be. I'm done with trusting the works of my hands.

I'm done, and I'm going to trust God. Amen. Exactly, exactly, exactly.

If you can trust God, you have the luxury of being a trustworthy person. You don't have to be a grasper. You don't have to be a grabber.

Your life is in His hands and you can trust Him and therefore people can trust you. What a place to live. What a place to be.

Now, this is speculation. You have to be a little careful. I find it very interesting that there is no hint of Isaac fighting Abraham when Abraham puts him on the altar.

Now, it's a very condensed story, but if you are a person, a parent, who trusts God, your children will be able to trust you. Yes, yes. I know my dad is not going to take advantage of me.

I know my dad is not going to abuse me. I know my dad would lay down his life for me. I can trust him.

I was talking with someone last night who's dealing with college students, and she was saying, you just have no idea how anxious these kids are. They're just riddled with anxiety over everything. Well, yes.

First of all, today I was really stunned as I finished this study on this. I looked at Hosea and remembered how consistent God had been all the way through with this thing of idolatry. Psalm 115, where He said, all who make them become like them. Yes, yes.

And then there's a three-fold call to trust and a three-fold promise of blessing. Yes. Yes.

Oh, yes. Oh, yes. If we trust the works of our hands, then we become untrustworthy people because we're grasping and grabbing all the time.

We're trying to manipulate the world to make it work. And it doesn't work. So that all the difference in the world between the well-off person who doesn't trust God and the well-off person who does trust God, it's a watershed.

Where does it come from? Who gave it to me? Oh, God did. God did. I did.

And you better get out of my way. So, I will answer him and care for him. I'm like a flourishing juniper.

Your fruitfulness comes from me. Yes. Yes.

Oh, oh, to be able to live a life of gratitude. Thank you, Lord. I didn't deserve anything from you except the back of your hand.

And you've given me all this. Thank you. And again, I don't want to be overly simplistic, but why is it that America has been the most altruistic nation on the face of the globe? Who knows? Well, maybe it's a sociological hogwash.

It's not sociological. It's a result of two centuries of Christianity that have said, hey, God has given me what I have. I can give it away.

Your fruitfulness comes from me. And now we're living on momentum. Momentum runs down.

All right. Let me do a couple more things here. That last verse is strange, isn't it? Who is wise? Let them realize these things.

Who's discerning? Let them understand. The ways of the Lord are right—the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

Looks to me like somebody else's comment. I don't think this is Hosea here, but it's somebody saying what Hosea has said is really, really wise. Now, let me talk about wisdom here for a minute.

In the rest of the ancient world, wisdom has nothing to do with the gods. Nothing. It is all the result of human experience.

Okay. Young man, you've been invited to join the king's court. All right.

When he invites you to a meal, do not sit in the seat next to the king. Sit down at the end of the table. If you sit next to the king, it's very possible he's going to say, who in the world are you? Get out of there.

On the other hand, maybe if you sit down at the end of the table, he'll say, what are you doing clear down there? Come up here about halfway. What is that? That's just simply human observation. We've observed how things work.

Sleep all day and be hungry next week. It is not necessarily right or wrong. It just works.

It's wholly utilitarian and pragmatic. Kid, I've lived a long, long time, and I've learned some things. Let me tell you, this works and that doesn't.

Now, what about biblical wisdom? Why does it work? It works because it's right. And it doesn't work because it's wicked. It's right to be humble.

It's wrong to be arrogant. So, you have that amazing verse in Proverbs 1, verse 7. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. What is the fear of the Lord? The fear of the Lord is, as we've talked about before, basically two things.

Number one, there is a God. And number two, he's not you. That's the fear of the Lord.

And you conduct your life on the basis of that knowledge. So, right and wrong is not merely what works and what doesn't work. It's what is in the nature of the creation.

It's the way God made the world. God has shown us what is right and wrong. It's not merely a matter of observation.

And some of the things that are right, in fact, by observation, might not look right, but they're right. And that's what Psalm 1 does. Don't walk with the sinner.

Don't sit with the wicked. Excuse me, don't stand with the wicked. Don't sit with the scoffer.

But, his delight is in the Torah of God. He meditates on it day and night. There's the wise man.

There's the wise man. And who is the ultimate fool? The one who says there is no God. So, it's in that light that we have statements like these.

Who is wise? Let them realize these things that have been revealed through Hosea. Who is discerning? Let him understand. The ways of the Lord are right.

Not just what seems to work. Not just what seems to be pragmatically useful, it's the ways of the Lord that are wise beneath what simple human observation might bring us to believe.

The right walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them. Now, if you look back at chapter 14, verse 1, your iniquities have made you stumble—the rebellious stumble over God's right ways.

Alright, I was going to let you talk, but I'm not. Let's talk about God's ways. What are these ways of the Lord that are right according to the book of Hosea? Number one, Yahweh is absolutely trustworthy.

You can put your weight down on Him. You can trust Him in the dark. You can trust Him when everything's falling in on you.

You can trust Him when it seems like He's forgotten you. You can trust Him. He is self-giving love.

And we could reverse those two. I wrestled with that a little bit. Because He's self-giving love, He can be trusted.

He's not out for Himself. So, you can turn those, they go together. That's what Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount.

He gives rain to the unjust. Would you? No, I'd shut off the water. I've said this: He gets angry, but He is love.

He allows the consequences of our bad choices, especially the choice of trusting the works of our hands and minds. He will restore if we turn back. He will.

His continuing desire is to bless. From Genesis 1 to Revelation 21, His desire is to bless. But, but, don't absolutize the metaphors.

You know, the king's kids are always rich and healthy. I mean, look at the Bible. Blessing is, first of all, a state of mind and a condition of the heart.

Some of the most blessed people in the world are some of the poorest. It's one of the things that mission trips do to Americans. We go over to these places, and we meet Christians who have nothing and are happy.

What in the world? I had that experience in Romania in the winter of 1993. Ceausescu had been killed in December. This was March.

It was cold, snow everywhere. They don't have snow plows there. I was in a church that held. They told me 750, and they estimated that for the service there were somewhere between 850 and 900 people in the service, standing room only.

And when they prayed, everybody prayed at once, out loud. I thought the roof was going to come down. They were dressed in little more than rags.

Many of them had walked a long way in 10-degree temperatures. And I sat there on the platform. I wasn't praying.

I was looking at them, praying. And it struck me. They are happy.

They are happy. How can that be? And because they knew that they had made the right choice. If you were a Christian, you were shut out of the professions.

You want to be a dish digger? Go ahead and be a Christian. They were happy. They were blessed.

Don't absolutize the metaphors. He desires godly behavior, and he rewards it disproportionately. He said, well, Oswald, why don't you just give us this the first night? We wouldn't have to come back for another 14.

Well, I was tricking you. The ways of the Lord are right—the righteous walk in them, but the rebellious stumble in them.

Yeah. Don't make me go where I don't want to go. Don't make me do what I don't want to do.

All right. Thank you for your patience. I've kept you long.