

The Minor Prophets #11

Hosea

by: Ronald L. Dart

The whole idea behind sin offerings in the Bible, is for a man to acknowledge his sin, and to recognize that there is a price to be paid for it.

Now God didn't make a very big deal out of it, all it took was a little goat, and that little fellow had to die because you sinned and it's death would have an effect on a normal person, I would think. For the most part when we do something wrong nothing happens, at least that's what we think, and it calls to mind this passage.

Ecclesiastes, Chapter 8 Verse 11. "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong."

Isn't that the truth, I mean if people think they can get away with it, they don't seem to have any intimidation or any inhibition about doing it.

Solomon went on to say in Ecclesiastes, {12} "Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, I know it would go better with God fearing men. who are reverent before God. {13} Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow."

It's really great poetry. Now if you want to see how this works in the real world, just take a look at our society.

The Need for a Swift and Speedy Trial

Even when we know with certainty that a man, committed cold blooded murder, it takes us years to execute him.

And repeating what the Bible says, "When the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong."

Now under Biblical law, if we weren't certain he did it, we would have to let him go. If we were certain, he could be executed within the hour.

Two things, I think, would have a profound effects on our culture of death, which seems to be growing in our country.

1. If a man were hanged by the neck until dead, within 30 days of conviction, that would have an effect,
2. If the hanging were public.

I know, people seem to hate the idea and movies will often present these things to us in terms of the old west, where there were hangings in the public square on a given day of the month and everybody came to town, to picnic and rejoice about the hanging going on. They weren't really rejoicing that a man was losing his life, they were rejoicing in justice. They were rejoicing in the balancing of the books. They were rejoicing in the fact that something was being done about a man who was a vile murderer, who had taken the life of another man. Hanging you know is not cruel or unusual punishment. It is a violent death for violent men, which is as it should be, but the death from hanging is sudden and painless.

There was an interesting discussion of this, in the book, "Justice at Nuremburg," where the author talked about why the Nazis were so determined, they wanted to be shot, they didn't want to be hanged. Well, you know, being shot or being hanged, the amount of pain involved in it can't be very different. In fact if you're shot in the heart, I think you would probably feel more pain than you would from being hanged. But that wasn't it, they were trying to take cyanide to avoid the hangman's noose. It wasn't pain they were worrying about, it was the humiliation facing the judgment of just men. Hanging is a highly symbolic act. It even goes all the way back to the Bible.

It's really doubtful the way we execute the death penalty, if it has much of a deterrent effect at all. I have a feeling if we did it fast, it would.

The Sin Offering and Our Covenant With God

In a society that is in covenant with God, the sin offering, which was entirely voluntary, served as a regular reminder of the cost of sin. Sin has a price tag. Men need to remember their covenant with God and to acknowledge that they have damaged their relationship and to make amends. It's a simple concept and one that nearly everybody understands.

Do you remember Kobe Bryant? He was in a hotel and allegedly raped the woman that was there. He claimed they had consensual sex and nothing ever came of it, but with his wife, he had to make amends. As I understand it, it was with a five thousand dollar diamond ring, I figure he's probably still paying the price for that.

We need to make amends with God and with Christians also. A lamb had to die, it just wasn't a physical lamb, it was the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ. We remind ourselves of that every time we take the wine and bread at the Christian Passover, which some call communion, or the Lord's Supper. We take that bread and wine as a memorial of Christ's death.

1st John 1 and verse 8, John says this, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. {9} If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Now it isn't necessary to confess the details of your sin to another man, but it is necessary to confess them. And the taking of the bread and wine, as a memorial of Christ's death, in doing so you make a public confession, that you are a sinner.

A Problem With Religious Observance

There's a problem with religious observance. It has a way of becoming a substitute for changing your life.

Hosea wrote to the Israel of his day, God said in Hosea 8 verse 11, "Though Ephraim built many altars for sin offerings, they have become altars for sinning."

Now the whole idea of an altar was for sin offerings but their altars became places where more sinning was done and thus a total irreparable breach was made in the covenant with their God.

Now Hosea goes on to say, actually speaking for God in verse 12, "I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something alien." What's this?" they said, "Is this from another planet? {13} "They offer sacrifices given to me and they eat the meat."

That's what you do with covenants?

"But the LORD is not pleased with them. Now he will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins. They will return to Egypt. {14} Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces, Judah has fortified many towns." all over the place, "But I will send a fire upon their cities that will consume their fortresses."

So what can I learn from this? Going thru the motions of a religious service is not good enough. You have to walk in covenant with God, being attentive to the way you are supposed to live your life. It's not good enough to ask, "What would Jesus do?" We should ask, "What did Jesus say I should do?" And then, we have to live it.

Now let me put this clearly, if you go to church every Sunday morning and you carry out all your religious duties, meanwhile you are sleeping with your neighbor's wife, you are precisely in the same place as the people Hosea was preaching to.

Continuing now in Hosea Chapter 9, "Do not rejoice O Israel, don't be jubilant like the other nations, stop celebrating. You have been unfaithful to your God. You love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor."

Now this is painful because it harkens back to the reasons why Hosea was chosen, how he was commissioned and how he was sent on his way. The imagery here is about a woman who goes about during harvest time, goes around the threshing floors, and she provides sexual services for the men that works there.

This is apparently the sort of thing that Hosea's wife did. And God says to Israel, "You are just like that woman, you just love the wages of a prostitute at every threshing floor."

Continuing in verse 2, "Threshing floors and wine presses will not feed the people, and the new wine will fail them. {3} They shall not remain in the LORD'S land." Who owned it? God did. "Ephraim will go back to Egypt and eat unclean food in Assyria. {4} They will not pour out their wine offerings to the LORD, nor will their sacrifices please him. 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 will not come into the Temple of the LORD." And why on earth should it?

Holy Days of God, The Festivals of Jehovah

Hosea Chapter 9 Verse 5, God says: "What will you do on the day of your appointed feasts, on the festival days of Jehovah?"

Now this is where some idea of the history and the culture of the times comes into play. There is a set of festivals in the Bible and they are outlined in the 23rd Chapter of Leviticus, that are called the "Appointed Times of Jehovah." This is one of the reasons why I subtitled my book, "The appointed times of God and His appointments with history." The title of my book is "The Thread."

There are a set of holy days throughout the year. You have heard of Passover, you've heard of the Jewish New Year and you've heard of the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur as it is called.

But when Jeroboam the 1st came to power in the House of Israel, he changed all that. He moved the location of the holy day festivals from the Temple in Jerusalem to two towns, Bethel and Dan, in his own kingdom in the north and he changed the dates. He probably changed the dates of all of the festivals

So when you encounter remarks in Hosea like this, in chapter 2 verse 11, "I will stop all her celebrations, her early festivals, her New Moons, her Sabbath days, and all her appointed feasts."

I think God is talking about their festivals, not His. One source even suggested he changed the Sabbath while he was at it and it wouldn't surprise me at all.

God continues in Hosea 9 verse 6, "Even if they escape from destruction, Egypt will gather them, and Memphis will bury them. Their treasures of silver will be taken over by briars, and

thorns will overrun their tents. {7} The days of punishment are coming, the days of reckoning are at hand."

Man that day of reckoning is a sobering thing because what it talks about is, when we total up all the accounts and balance them out. You may have gotten away with your sin this far, you may think you have gotten away with it completely, but there is still a day of reckoning.

I was seriously surprised when I got to Germany and found that the check you get at the end of dinner, when you wave to the waiter and say bring the check, it is called, "de reckoning."

Our Social Structure Is Permeated With Hostility

Continuing in verse 7 of Hosea 9, "Let Israel know this, because your sins are so many, and your hostility so great, the prophet is considered a fool, the inspired man is now a maniac."

You know, that last verse is daunting for someone like me. I make no claim to be a prophet but I certainly can and do read the prophets on the air.

Our social structure right now is so permeated with hostility, and if you stand up and tell people they're wrong, you're considered a fool or worse, not only that, when you really start getting close to the bone, people will attempt to silence you. There is a funny thing about this, as long as you're way off the mark, you can be ridiculed, you can be tossed aside, nobody pays any attention to you, and nobody worries much about you. It's when you start telling the truth and when you really start unearthing their guilt that men want to shut you up.

I'll tell you, the level of free flowing hostility in our society today is awesome to behold. If you want to see it in action, the most obvious and the easiest place is in the political wars that rage back and forth between the right and left in this country. Men seem no longer able to disagree with civility and with grace. A person can't simply make his argument, and maybe show what he thinks is wrong with the other gentleman's argument and debate things in a civil manner, it just doesn't happen. It has and I know what you might say, it's always been that way in politics, hasn't it? The answer is yes. Men have even fought duels over it in the past and I think if we allowed dueling today we would probably be seeing one a week between politicians.

Everybody Loves A Train Wreck

Viciousness seems to permeate our society more in these days of 24/7 news. When you have three big cable news channels out there broadcasting news 24 hours a day and seven days a week, they have to talk about something. If they're going to keep the audience together, they have to keep a good fight going on. Some of it comes from there, but really it comes from us, because if we didn't allow it, didn't want it, didn't enjoy it and if we didn't come back to it, they wouldn't do it.

I once wondered about that and why that sort of thing happens, and a friend said, "Everybody loves a train wreck. They hate to see people get hurt but they just love to see the crash." Don't make the mistake of thinking that in politics is the only place to see it. We're like fish, they swim in the ocean and are utterly oblivious to water. We swim in this ocean and we don't recognize what's going on around us. We don't smell the stench or hear the noise, we're just use to it.

Hostility is in the air that we breathe so why should we be surprised when it breaks through in shootings and killings? You know I never honk at people who cut me off in traffic, especially since they started shooting at each other in Los Angeles, although I haven't heard of anything like that recently. The point that worries me, anything I would do like that might be considered as hostility and it would be returned in kind, and it could even get me shot, so I don't do that.

Watchman

Let's continue in Hosea 9 verse 8, Hosea says, "The prophet, along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim."

I want to stop and explain something to you. Ezekiel develops this theme quite thoroughly when he said, "If the people of a land set a man on a wall to be a watchman," his job is to keep his eyeballs peeled. If he sees the enemy coming he is to blow the trumpet and warn the town the enemy is coming. Now if no one listens to him and they all get killed, their blood will be on their own heads, but if the watchman goes to sleep or doesn't see, or sees and doesn't warn, and the city falls, everyone's blood will be on his head.

Now he went on to say, {8} "The prophet along with my God, is the watchman over Ephraim, yet snares await him on all of his paths, and hostilities in the house of his God."

Now you need to know this, more than one of the old prophets was killed for his message, others were humiliated, others were disgraced, and Jeremiah was thrown in a cesspool and sunk up to his armpits and left there to die, and would have, if someone hadn't come along and drug him out. That's what these people do to people who tell them the truth.

And ironically Hosea says in verse 9, "They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah."

God will remember their wickedness and will punish them for their sins.

'The Days of Gibeah'

Now what does this reference to the days of Gibeah mean? This is another example where, if you don't know the history behind some of the remarks in the Bible, you may miss an important part of the story.

The story of Gibeah can serve as a good object lesson of what can happen if we continue to tolerate the hostility in our own society. There was a bloody civil war there, around Gibeah, between tribe of Benjamin and the other Israelites tribes. It broke out when the men of Gibeah raped a traveling Levite's concubine.

The story is found in, Judges chapter 19 verse 16, "An old man from the hill country of Ephraim, who was living in Gibeah (the men of the place were Benjamites). He came in from work in the fields one day. {17} When he looked and saw a traveler in the city square," and it looked like the guy was setting up for the night there, which people apparently could do, "and the old man said, "Where are you going? Where did you come from? {18} He answered, "Well we're on our way from Bethlehem in Judah to a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim where I live. I've been to Bethlehem in Judah and I'm on my way to the house of the LORD. No one has taken me in for the night" so I am just going to sleep out here in the street. It's OK, {19} "We have straw and fodder for our donkeys and some bread and wine for ourselves, me, my maid servant and the young man with us, we don't need anything.."

"Well," the old man said, {20} "You are welcome at my house, and let me supply whatever you need, just don't spend the night in the public square." {21} So he took him into his house, fed his donkeys." This was really good ole Middle East hospitality, "And after they had washed their feet and they had something to eat and drink, {22} While they were sitting there enjoying themselves, some of the wicked men of the city surrounded the house. Pounding on the door, shouting at the old man who owned the house, "Bring out the man that came into the house so we can have sex with him."

They intended, it seems, homosexual rape. It happens.

Verse 23, "The owner of the house went outside and said, "No, my friends, don't be so vile, this man is my guest don't do this disgraceful thing.""

Then he did something which to me is just as disgraceful and I do not understand.

He said, {24} "Look here is my virgin daughter, and his concubine. I'll bring them out to you now and you can use them and do to them whatever you wish. But to this man don't do such a disgraceful thing."

I don't understand it. It's clear enough though, that this man considered homosexual rape a more serious matter than heterosexual rape, because he was willing to turn over his own daughter over to them for it. Just to give you an idea of what kind of people they were, they wouldn't listen to him. And this is something you have to keep in mind. This type of conduct has nothing to do with sex, it have everything to do with violence and domination.

Continuing in verse 25, "The man took his concubine and sent her outside to them, and they raped her and abused her throughout the night, and at dawn they let her go. {26} At

daybreak the woman went back to the house where her master was staying, and fell down at the door and laid there until daylight. {27} When her master got up in the morning and opened the door of the house and stepped out to continue on his way, there lay his concubine, fallen in the doorway of the house, with her hands on the threshold." {28} This callus man said, "'Get up, let's go.'" But she didn't answer," because she was dead. "The man put her on his donkey and set out for home."

I would gather, from the story, that her carcass must have shown signs of abuse on every square inch of her body.

"When he got home," {29} "he took a knife and, cut her up, limb by limb, into 12 parts and sent them to all the areas of Israel. {30} Everyone who saw it, said, nothing like this has ever been seen or done since the day we came up here out of Egypt. Think about it! Considerate it! Tell us what to do!"

They realized that a society can't continue if you let people get away with this kind of thing. It was a vile thing what these men had done, but it came to that because no one had dealt with it before. And this was not the first occasion where something bad like this had happened. These men didn't come to this out of the clear blue sky. This morning they are law abiding citizens, this morning they are going to work. They kiss their wife, pat their children on their heads, go off to the office and come back at night and eat their dinner. No, No, No, No! This is not what this society was like. It was a violent society already. Now the question is, what are you going to do?

Judges chapter 20: "So all the men of Israel," got together and united as one man and assembled before the LORD in Mizpah. Then the Israelites said, "Tell us how this awful thing happened?" {12} "The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin saying, "What about this awful crime that was committed among you?" {13} Now surrender these wicked men of Gibeah so that we may put them to death and purge the evil from Israel." But the Benjamites wouldn't listen to their fellow Israelites. {14} From their towns they came together at Gibeah to fight against the Israelites."

What a story, they just wouldn't deliver these men up. Why? Well, probably because they saw their own self in these men. They had tolerated it, they had gotten use to it and it was the way things were in Benjamin in those days.

On that day they went to war, Tens of Thousands of Israelites and Benjamites died, only 600 Benjamite swordsmen survived out of tens of thousands (Judges 20:47). They were nearly wiped out as a tribe.

So this is what Hosea was driving at when he said in Hosea chapter 9 verse 9, "These people have sunk deep into corruption as in the days of Gibeah, God will remember their wickedness and He will punish them for their sins."

If they, the people of Hosea's day, are to be compared to the days of Gibeah, their defining sins were violence, murder and rape. And of course don't we all know by now, that rape is a matter of violence and dominance and has little to do with sex, per se. It was a part of their society.

Hosea goes on in Hosea 9 verse 10, with God reminiscing about better times. "When I found Israel, he said, it was like finding grapes in the desert, when I saw your fathers, it was like seeing early fruit on the fig tree, and it was a delight, but when they came to Baalpeor, they consecrated themselves to that shameful idol and became as vile as the thing they loved."

What was so vile? Baal worship often involved human sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of a first born child.

Until next time.

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