

The Believer's Restoration - Rev. Calum Macdonald (Retired)

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Preacher: Rev. Calum Macdonald

- [0:00] We can turn for a short time to the passage that we read from the Old Testament Scriptures, the book of the prophet Hosea, chapter 14, reading at the beginning of the chapter.
- Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have stumbled because of your iniquity. Take with you words and return to the Lord. Say to him, take away all iniquity. Accept what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.
- And so on. We can briefly reflect on the background to these words and then consider the command that is given by the Lord to Israel, the need for it, and how Israel are to respond. With confession, with contrition, and with sacrifice. As we see, the prophet is bringing his words to a conclusion, or this book of the prophet concludes with these words.
- And it reminds us of the fact that Israel of old at this point had been reduced to the ten tribes of the north.
- [1:46] And Judah was made up of the remaining one and a half tribes. The prophecy is directed towards a spiritually apostate Israel.
- They have gone away from the Lord, if not entirely, almost to a man.
- And they have neglected the direction that God has given to them as to how to live before him as their covenant God.
- And while they may claim to be in a relationship with God, while they may claim to have spiritual content to their life.
- And it's amazing how easy it is for us to persuade ourselves that the level at which we operate spiritually is always satisfactory.
- [3:00] And it's true for every person, whether they make a public profession of an interest in God or not. Somewhere within us, we persuade ourselves that there is spiritual content to our life that is satisfactory.
- It satisfies ourselves. We're pleased with ourselves. We're pleased with it. And whether God is pleased with it is not really something that concerns us. But because of how God looked upon them as a people, they are reminded once again that they are people that are ripe for his judgment.
- They are rebels in the sight of God. And God's laws are ignored. And furthermore, they are guilty of spiritual adultery.
- They go and pursue other gods. And maybe the best way of discovering the way God is preparing to treat his people.
- We read in chapter 8 how God sees them and how he himself is going to respond to them. In chapter 8, verses 1 to 9, set a trumpet to your lips.
- [4:40] One like a vulture is over the house of the Lord because they have transgressed my covenant and rebelled against my law. To me they cry, my God, we, Israel, know you.

Israel has spurned the good. The enemy shall pursue him. They made kings, but no, not through me. They said a princess, but I knew it not. With their silver and gold they made idols for their own destruction.

I have spurned your calf, O Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? And so on.

They are ripe for God's judgment. And God, mercifully, remind ourselves of that. When God teaches us that his judgment is something that is imminent.

He is quite able to exercise or execute that judgment without forewarning.

[5:49] Without telling anybody that he is going to do what he is going to do. Or telling anybody why he is going to do it.

It is an act of his grace and mercy to reveal that to the people who are exposed to it. And that is what the prophet Hosea brings to our attention.

That the covenant God is a God of mercy and a God of grace. He provides for them the opportunity to recognize their sin and to forsake their sin.

And return in order to avoid the judgment. The law might appear to be unyielding.

But it is a law that God has revealed in order to reveal himself. The breach of it is accompanied with threats.

[7:00] The fulfillment of it is accompanied with promise. And that is always how it has been. And yet God is patient.

He is merciful. And he is ever willing to give opportunity for those who are living their lives in frequent disobedience.

To make amends and come back to God. John L. Mackay. The late John L. Mackay in his commentary on this book.

In his introduction. He summarizes. I suppose the whole. Truth that we find contained here.

In the following way. He says this prophecy is about divine love confronting human deceitfulness and untrustworthiness.

[8:06] The prophet's ministry was to a spiritually hardened and deviant people who had turned their backs upon God.

And the fact that he sends his servant, the prophet, to them is itself an exercise of his grace.

And yet we find how that is to be accomplished. It is not something that God unilaterally deals with them with no thought of what needs to be done by them.

So the first thing we discover here is the beginning of chapter 14. The command reiterated the necessity that there is for the sinner who has gone away from God to make their return.

And it comes to them by way of, I believe, a command. It is a divine imperative uttered, even though it is uttered, mercifully.

[9:15] Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. He meets their desertion with his grace. Their love has gone cold.

Their love is no longer directed towards him. But his covenant love is the same. It is therefore something that we need to realize as they needed to realize it.

That when God summons us to himself by way of the path of repentance to return to him, there is a reason for it and there is a burning necessity.

That needs to be understood. There is, I suppose, the simplicity of it is like this. If God says, come back to me, then we need to understand that that is not something we could possibly fail to do.

Because of the person that is saying, come back to me. We might find ourselves in a situation where we issue an instruction similar to that to somebody like ourselves.

[10 : 43] And in truth, while a position of authority might mean that there is an obligation on their part to respond and come as we have instructed.

But we are never in the same position as God. We are never with the same power and authority that requires the one who issues the command to be responded to instantly.

And when we think of the Christian life, very often we focus, as we should, on the passion of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are commanded to trust in him. To have faith and to put that faith into practice.

To look to him as he has revealed to us in the gospel. And trust that what he has done could only be done by himself.

[12 : 10] And without him doing it, we would continue in a lost condition. But accompanying that requirement and command from God to put our trust through the gospel in Jesus Christ, there is also an accompanying requirement that we forsake our sin in order to return to God.

We can't return to God except by way of Jesus Christ. But we can't remain where we are in our sin, in our life of deceit, in our life of neglect of the things of God.

We cannot remain as we are and at the same time believe that we are embracing Christ in the gospel. And the shorter catechism, when it describes to us, summarizes the biblical teaching concerning repentance.

There is these two parts to repentance. We must forsake all to return to him. We must go away from our sin.

We must go away from all manner of wrongdoing. And we must go to him. We must go to the God who is a holy God.

[13 : 49] We must go to the passion of Jesus Christ that he has provided as a saviour to sinners. The two elements are there and without them being there, I can't understand the professing Christian who refuses to give any place to the thought of sin because they're done with it according to themselves.

They want no more to do with it according to themselves. And they want to focus rather on the passion and the glory and the love that Christ displays.

And that for them is what a Christian is. Forget sin and remember Christ. Forget all the deceit that is in the heart and think of the passion who is of an unblemished character and whose obedience to God was perfect and whose sacrifice was so loving and so necessary because of who he was and what he thought of his people.

But how can you love Christ with the love that he deserves if you don't appreciate what you are being saved from?

If you don't appreciate the need to be saved from what you are being saved from? If you don't understand the wickedness that is in the heart of man that requires something greater than anything mere man can do in order to remedy it.

[15 : 44] You can't go on in your sin and love Christ. You can't have a cheap understanding of what sin is and appreciate the expense involved in deliverance from sin.

And that's why the Catechism insists that faith in Jesus Christ is a prerequisite for salvation.

But it must be and always is accompanied with the return of repentance. The departure from a life given over to sinful behavior and the embracing of Jesus Christ in the gospel and the grace that is required in order to live on in the life of the believer applying, seeking with God's help to have that awareness of what sin is and what sin does is essential.

So here the prophet is saying, return to the Lord your God. And the reason for the return, he goes on to explain.

He says, you have stumbled because of your iniquity. The reason that you're required to return to God is that you have gone away from God.

[17:21] How do I know that you've gone away from God? Your sin tells me that you've gone away from God. Your iniquity is there for all to see. The word stumble, I was trying to think, well, if I was going to describe the nature of sin that requires repentance, I would possibly have used some other stronger word if I could think of one.

To stumble suggests something minor, something less impactful, less dangerous.

We can stumble and let not fall. And yet, if you search the use of the word in Hebrew that is translated stumble here, someone has pointed to the word being used in the experience of Samson.

Samson, who fell from his relationship with God by betraying the covenant relationship that he had with him.

He gave his heart lustily to a woman who wanted his mastery over him.

[18:50] And the result, as far as he was concerned, he was this mighty man, a powerful man of God that God used as an instrument.

He was enfeebled. It's a pathetic picture you have in the book of Judges when Samson's enemies are allowed to tie him.

And he's tied between two pillars in the temple. And his eyes are plucked out. And he's such a poor spectacle.

And he is without power, without the ability. And yet, God in his mercy restores his strength to him.

But before that happens, the word that would apply to him is this word here. He has stumbled. His iniquity, his departure from God has left him powerless, without the ability to do anything that God would be pleased with.

[20:01] And is that not the case where sin reigns? Even temporarily in the life of a believer, I believe that every believer who has a genuine relationship with God are only once redeemed.

They are redeemed from their sin, finally, when they close in with Christ Jesus by faith. It's not something that needs to be repeated.

They are once and for all, they are united by faith to him. They are not going to be separated from him. But that does not mean that their life will not at times display characteristics that has allowed sin, that shows that they have allowed sin to dominate them and to dull their affection for Christ and to take their attention from Christ.

And when the believer, even then the believer, he knows he must return, she must return to God.

And the fact of the matter is, as this passage reveals to us, we can never make our own way back. We can never make our own way to God except in response to God's command to us to return, whoever we are.

[21:35] We might think that when we are disinclined to follow the path that we are on, when we've spent our energy and we've found that the broken cisterns are what they are, poisoned by this world, that we can abandon them at will.

Or even when we succumb to the temptations that this world sets before us. And when we're drawn to the poisonous wells that this world sets in abundance before the heart and the mind of all who are in the world.

And even the Lord's people may find themselves thinking that there's an attraction there which is harmless. But we cannot without God's help, without God's word coming to us.

As the word of God came to Elijah of old, what doest thou here, Elijah? Where are you spiritually? Why are you where you are spiritually?

And it is God that takes the initiative and makes that known to us. And here God is saying to Israel, this is why you must return.

[22:53] You must return because you have stumbled. You have lost your power, if you ever had that power, because of your iniquity.

And you remind yourself of when Jesus spoke to some. He had to correct the misinformation that they had been brought to believe in, perhaps conjured up in their own heart.

And there were many. And you find the Lord having to rebuke them more than once because of their fault finding with others, because of the thought that took a hold of them, that they were in some way immune from backsliding, or that they were in some way superior to others who had backslidden.

And Jesus spoke to them again and again. And his warning to all was this, unless you repent, you will also likewise perish.

You will, unless you repent, and not unless they repent. His business was with the individual. Even the individual who thought himself to be holier than thou.

[24:24] Even the individual who looked down his nose at those who had tripped or fallen, and who had fallen so badly that others had taken the view concerning them that they were not of the Lord's people.

But the opportunity to return is there because God has given it. And the command is to all, wherever they are tonight, if you are one of God's people, and if you are away from God, even without anyone knowing where you are.

I believe that some of our churches have people sitting in them. And to all intents and purposes, they're where they're supposed to be. They're in church.

And the relationship with God is as it should be. And the relationship with the people of God is as it should be. But in their heart of hearts, they've allowed themselves to grow cold.

They've allowed themselves to be under the sway of the world in whatever way that can happen. or they have lost their appetite for the things of God.

[25:36] They have lost their appetite for the Word of God. They have lost their appetite for the truth of God as it is meant to speak into our lives. And Christ says to that person, you must repent.

You must turn from where you are. You must come back to me. You must do that. And if you don't, you are in danger of perishing. And there is no one who is outside that word.

And we have to remind ourselves of it. But I want us to notice how we are to return. He says to us here, take with you words, he says.

Take with you words and return to the Lord. And say to him, take away all iniquity. And it's a strange statement, is it not?

Take with you words. What else are you going to do if you're going to come to God? You're going to speak to God? But I think that the sense of this statement is that when you return to God, you're not just going to confront them with platitudes or with statements that suggest that I understand this and understand where you're coming from.

[27:01] I understand the theology. I understand the practicalities of it. There is a need for us to understand that it is not just words that God wants to hear.

He wants words that reflect where we are in reality or where we have realized that we have found ourselves in.

Not just a statement, as it were, a blanket statement that says, like we do when we confess our sin. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God, we are told.

And if I point the finger here tonight and I say to you, all of you are sinners, if not one of you would dare say no, you're quite content, you're safe enough because you're within this all.

All of us are sinners. And I point the finger at my own breast and say that. All of us, without exception. But there's a safety, is there not, inside that confession.

[28:12] because you're with fellow sinners. Everybody hears the same. And there's a safety in the anonymity of your sin.

There's a safety in a confession of sin that inquires, requires office simply to state the fact. But when you appear before God with words, your words are reflecting how you know where you are and what you are needing to repent of.

The attitude required is one where they are not just dealing with the generality of sin as belongs to mankind, but your personal sin.

your own personal relationship with God. What has tainted it? What has caused your relation to be sullied? What has caused you to walk in a way that shows that your walk is not consistent?

You know, there are many people tonight that are unconverted and they are theologians. You don't have to be a convert to be a theologian.

[29:34] I've met many people and they've got more grey matter between their ears than I could ever hope to muster. And they expend their energy gleaning the words of the theologians and they understand much of the theology to that degree anyway.

As far as head knowledge is concerned, they're not wanting. God is not wanting to hear our theology. He wants to hear our confession of sin as we shall see.

Genuine repentance would have us understand that we are not where we should be. whatever it is that marks the place where we stand or where we sit or where we lie, whatever it is that God has marked out for us that requires us to return to Him is where we need to address the situation, where we need to deal with the situation that we have found ourselves in.

One of the commentators says that God requires more than a simple dead orthodoxy.

Ask yourself the question, are you happy with a dead orthodoxy? As long as you mind your peace and cues, as long as you toe the line outwardly, as long as you're not seen to be outside of where God would have you to be, you're content.

[31:19] But in reality, it may well be that there are things that must change. There is a heart that needs to change. There is an attitude about your relationship to God that needs to be remedied.

That's why we come to these words where confession is followed by contrition and conviction. The Scots divine Thomas Boston said of the nature of repentance that it requires sorrow, shame and self-loathing.

Sorrow, shame and self-loathing. Well, there are several hundred years since Boston was administered. And there are modern psychologists who would probably take issue with him.

And certainly, they would not countenance the thought of anyone living with self-loathing or with shame. It's something that we could all do without.

but I think what Boston is getting to really lies at the heart of our understanding of sin and what sin results in and where sin has taken us and where we stand with regard to God because of our sin.

[32 : 56] And God alone knows that without him dealing with us as sinners, by way of the remedy that he himself has provided, then our sins will master us rather than us master our sin.

He alone is the one who can remove sin. Is that not the case? And is that not what we need to trust in? He says to us here, return, take with you words, return again, take away all iniquity, except what is good, and we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips.

That's a complicated statement, I think, but I think it simply means this, that at the heart of the confession that is sought from this person who comes to God confessing their need to repent is an understanding that the only way by which the reason for our need to repent can be dealt with is by way of sacrifice, by way of what God has provided for us.

The means by which sin is removed is the sacrifice of his son, Jesus Christ. All sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed towards what Christ did on the cross.

We are taught again and again that his sacrifice for sin is not a temporary arrangement, it is a permanent reality where every sin that is confessed and every child of God who has faith in what Jesus has done by way of sacrifice.

[34 : 56] Their sins without exception are covered, blotted out. Remember the words of Isaiah? I love these words, words that tell me about my sin and what God has done with them.

Though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.

I'm sure your television will show you that there are many remedies for all kinds of domestic disaster where you can put your hand on the shelf and take to you something that will remove some stain or other, whether it's on the carpet or on the floor or whatever.

well, they're puny in comparison to the cleansing agency that God has provided in the passion of his son and the prophet here is directing us to that.

He understands we will pay with bulls the vows of our lips. He's looking towards God's answer to sin in the passion of Jesus Christ.

[36 : 22] And only Christ, you understand that, only Christ can deal with your sin. The person who knows this to be true, they come with the sacrifice of praise.

Is that not right? They come with words that are stirred up within them thankful that God has not left it to you and God has not left it to me and God has not left it to some priest or high priest through their actions and through their activities but the great high priest Jesus Christ and when God received his sacrifice when God acknowledged that what he had done just as surely as he acknowledged his own handiwork when he created the world and he said he had done all things good he was just as pleased with the sacrifice of sin of his son Jesus and considered it acceptable and he receives the offerings of praise of his people all who have come to him through the path of confession of contrition of acknowledgement of the need that there is for repentance that the person who does that realizes that God is willing to receive them and receive them only because not of anything that's true of them but of their Lord and their

Savior Jesus Christ you know that I would hope this Christ is your your Savior this Christ is the one way of access to God and you come to God through him and you come to God forsaking your sins and you come to God seeking cleansing from the sins that were through of you and you seek his help to go on in your life in this world without these sins once again having mastery over you may God allow you to enjoy such a life let us pray ever blessed God we give thanks that you do commend to us the grace of repentance and you command us to repent of our sins to flee from them to Christ and to to trust that what he has done on behalf of his people is sufficient and that no other is required hear our prayers and petitions cleanse us from every sin we ask in Jesus name amen our closing psalm is psalm 130 and we're singing from the Scottish

Psalter we'll sing the whole psalm a psalm that is a penitential psalm a psalm that speaks to us of the child of God returning and confessing and receiving forgiveness and knowing where to be found Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear and to my supplications voice give an attentive ear Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord shouldst mark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness is that feared thou mayst be Psalm 130 from the Scottish Psalter the whole psalm Lord from the depths to thee I cried Lord from the depths to thee I cried my voice Lord do thou hear unto my supplications voice give an attentive ear

Lord who shall stand if thou O Lord should spark iniquity but yet with thee forgiveness forgiveness is not fear thou mayst be I wait for God my soul doth wait!

[41 : 46] hope is in his word more than they love for morning what my soul waits for the Lord I say more than lay thou to watch the morning light to see let Israel open the Lord for with him mercies be

I glad he of redemption is ever found with him and from all his iniquities he Israel shall redeem now may grace mercy and peace from God the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit rest and abide with you all now and always Amen