

Living Messages of the Books of The Bible

GENESIS TO MALACHI

G. Campbell Morgan, D. D.

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CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

THE MESSAGE OF HOSEA

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. A Revelation of the deepest Nature of Sin

i. Infidelity to Love.
the

God revealed as Love by His Actions.
God acting in Love towards His People.
They receiving the Gifts of Love.
They playing Traitor to the Giver.
This Sin against clearest Light.

II. A Revelation of the Inevitable Activity of Judgment

Necessary result of Sin.
Man has no right to expect Escape.
God has no Alternative when Sin is persistent.

III. A Revelation of the unconquerable Force of Love

Love's Triumph lies through Suffering.
Love is unconquerable.
Love suffers when sinned against.
Love gathers the Result of Sin and bears it.
Love expiates Sin by Suffering.
Love pardons when it is submitted to.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. Sin

The Notes of the Church's Failure those of

Failure of Israel.
i. Spiritual Adultery.
ii. The Harlotry of Worldliness.
iii. The Result.
Testimony silenced.
Name of God profaned.

II. Judgment

i. Of Moth and Rust.
Church speaks no authoritative Word.
ii. Of the young Lion.

III. Love

i. The Lord's constant Love.
ii. The Certainty of Christ's second Advent
and final Victory.

THE book of Hosea pulsates with power. The ministry of this man combined intellectual and emotional forces in a remarkable way. These forces are discoverable, acting in partnership, in all the messages he delivered. From the first chapter to the last we are conscious of them. The book thrills with emotion, and flames with light, from beginning to end.

Hosea came to clear vision through deep feeling. He passed to yet deeper feeling by reason of the clarity of his vision. He saw to the heart of the great subjects of which he treated, and he did so because in his training for the prophetic ministry his own heart was wrung with anguish. He who has much to teach must suffer much: and he alone can speak of the deepest things in the economy of God who has sooner or later entered into fellowship with the suffering of God.

Hosea passed into fellowship with that suffering through his own suffering, and out of that fellowship in suffering spoke to his age. That, I think, is the key to all that is so appealing and powerful in this wonderful prophecy.

The book has three permanent values.

They are its unveilings:

- Of sin,
- Of judgment, and
- Of love.

In these pages we have:

- First a revelation of what sin is at its deepest and its worst;
- Secondly, we have a revelation of the nature of judgment, and of its inevitable activity as the result of sin; and
- Finally, we have a revelation of the unconquerable force of love.

Hosea, while dealing incidentally and quite definitely with certain forms of sin, was yet more concerned with its deeper notes. He saw to the very heart of it, saw it at its worst, and understood the awful fact about it which makes it so appalling.

In order that we may understand this, we must remember that he was speaking to the chosen people of God.

It is often debated whether there are degrees of sin.

- In some senses, No.
- In other senses; Yes.

When a man chooses in his own life as between the little and the great in the matter of sin, he is doing that for which he has no warrant in the Scriptures of Truth. On the other hand, when we compare as between the sin of one man, and the sin of another, the sin of the one may be less than that of the other. The difference is caused by light. The measure of light creates the degree of sin.

In proportion as men have light their sin becomes the more sinful. That is the perpetual principle revealed through all the Scriptures.

We refer to it when dealing with some of the great problems of the peoples of the world, we declare that men will be judged according to the light they have had . That principle lies at the foundation of the prophesying of Hosea. His messages teach us that sin reaches its deepest and most awful activity and manifestation when it is sin against light, and when it is sin against such light as reveals the fact of love.

Sin against love is the most heinous sin of all.

The people chosen of God to be His own people, upon whom He had lavished His love, had turned their backs upon Him, and were spending the very gifts of love in lewdness; and the prophet adopted the most tragic and awful illustration, as he declared that the sin of Israel in her infidelity to love was that of spiritual adultery; and that yet more heinous sin, more terrible even than spiritual adultery, the sin of prostitution for hire.

I can quite believe that in this age when we are afraid to handle things as they ought to be handled, there are those who dislike the prophecy of Hosea. Nevertheless its message is a living one, and needs emphatic statement. He declared to the people of God that the relation existing between them and God was most perfectly symbolized in the sacred relationship of marriage; and therefore that their sin against God was that of infidelity, unfaithfulness to love.

The prophet learned the truth through the tragic and awful experience of his own domestic life.

He entered into fellowship with God when his own heart was broken, when there came to him the unutterable and most appalling sorrow that can befall the spirit of man. What the sin of Israel meant to God, Hosea learned by the tragedy in his own home and in his own heart; and with fierce, hot anger he denounced kings, priests, and people alike. Thus while he dealt with the incidental manifestations of sin, the real message of the prophet had to do with the central sin of infidelity to the covenant based upon love.

This book, therefore, brings us to the consciousness that the deepest and most awful thing in the realm of sin, is that of doing despite to love.

Then as to judgment.

The prophet with determined insistence emphasized the fact that judgment is the necessary result of sin. He declared that judgment must fall upon the sinning people in awful force and completeness, and positively affirmed that they had no right to expect pardon.

In the last section of the prophecy, dealing with the love of the Lord, the movement declaring that love falls into three parts:

- The love of the Lord in the light of past love;
- The love of the Lord in the light of present and continued love; and
- The love of the Lord in the light of future love.

In our analysis we show how that great love-song of the Lord is interrupted by the prophet's

interpolations.

We speak of them as constituting a minor obligato accompaniment. In those interpolations the prophet traced the history of the people downward, and the last word of them was one in which he declared there was no hope. That is to say, the prophet looked on the sin, and saw it inevitably working out to judgment; and he wrote his message in letters of fire, as undoubtedly he delivered it in words that burned the men who listened.

Such sin has no right to expect mercy.

The man who sees most deeply into the heart of sin, and knows it at its worst, is the man who sees most clearly how inevitable judgment is; and how, therefore, man has no right to expect anything other than judgment.

Yet the greatest revelation of the book is that of love.

In the midst of his own overwhelming sorrow, God called Hosea, and commanded him to seek again the sinning Gomer, and to bring her back into the wilderness of seclusion for a while, but ultimately into the place of love and privilege at his own side.

As through her infidelity Hosea entered into understanding of the sinfulness of sin; so by God's command to him and his obedience thereto, he entered into understanding of how God loves even in spite of sin.

These, then, are the three matters which stand out upon the page of this prophecy.

- It reveals sin as to what it is;
- It reveals judgment as inevitable and necessary; and
- It reveals love amazingly.

These essential principles have present application, and constitute the living message of the book.

I am profoundly convinced that we need that these words should be rediscovered and respoken in every successive age. The common consciousness of the Christian Church to-day is weak on all these fundamental matters. It is weak concerning the love of God, because it has failed to understand the meaning of its own sin, and the consequent necessity for, and inevitability of judgment.

I repeat, we supremely need that the message of this book concerning sin, judgment, and love, should be reconsidered.

Hosea teaches us that the most heinous and damnable sin of which man is capable is that of infidelity to love.

This is the sin of all such as have been brought into right relationship with God; and then,

violating love's covenant, have committed - let us use the word which we fain would not use, which is yet stamped upon the pages of this prophecy - spiritual adultery.

Compared with that, the animalism and brutality, and consequent corruption of heathen nations is as nothing. Hosea's message concerning sin leaves no conclusion other than that it were infinitely better never to have had the light, never to have known love, than having had the light to disobey it, and having known love to wound it by infidelity.

Such sinning generates the form of judgment which follows it.

If this book teaches one thing clearly on the subject of judgment, it is that judgment is never the stroke of God inflicted upon man apart from man's sin. It is the outworking of the seed of sin to harvest. Judgment lies potentially in the act of sin. Infidelity to love can lead nowhere save to the unutterable darkness of pollution. No surface repentance, which is a device to escape punishment, can be acceptable to God.

“O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? O Judah, what shall I do unto thee? for your goodness is as a morning cloud.”

The penalties of apostasy are as irrevocable as are the laws of purity. If a man walk in the ways of purity, the harvest of blessing must follow; but if a man shall sin against love, the penalty must fall.

Yet the permanent message is of love.

Though the pathway of love's triumph lies through suffering, of which no man can ever know the measure; though the cost of the restoration of the faithless lover be that of the bearing of judgment by the faithful lover, still love moves right onward, singing ever the song of the victory that is to be.

We must never forget how this book of Hosea ends. Ephraim says at last, **“What have I to do any more with idols?”**

When that word is uttered, the victory of love is won. The process of judgment was certain, and so clear was Hosea about this, that he declared without any hesitation that the generation to which he spoke would never come to ultimate triumph; but beyond the process, indeed through it, he saw the ultimate triumph of love.

These, as I understand them, constitute the living message of the book. To emphasize either of the thoughts apart from the rest is to minimize the value of the whole. Each must be pondered, and so far as the book has a message to our age, it is one concerning sin, judgment, and love.

I maintain that this message of Hosea cannot be applied to the nation, to our own nation for instance, because it is so peculiarly a message delivered to men and women who had the perfect light, that is, to the people of God.

Moreover, this message was not delivered to any one tribe. Although Ephraim is often referred to, it is as the dominant tribe, and the whole nation is involved. It is a message, therefore, to the peculiar people of God. Consequently no application of its teaching can be fair except an application to Christendom, I might say an application of its teaching to the Church, if by the Church we mean all that organization of Christianity which exists in the world to-day.

I am, however, increasingly inclined to differentiate between Christendom and the Church, increasingly inclined to believe that the Church of God consists of those known only to God, rather than of that of which we speak as the Churches or the Church. A great many people who seem to be outside all Churches are in the Church of God. Consequently the message of this book is a message to Christendom.

The first note has to do with sin. The causes of the Church's failure are those of the failure of Israel of old, spiritual adultery, spiritual harlotry, and that self-centered life which is their outcome.

These are the sins which lie at the root of the Church's weakness at the present hour.

Spiritual adultery is evidenced by the paganism which has become admixed with the things of God.

It is supremely manifest in the Roman Church and the Greek Church, but is found in all other communities in the degree in which they are of the habit and spirit of these churches. The things which result from the Church's alliance with the world demonstrate her adultery, and are due to her infidelity to love; her failure to remember that she is espoused to the Lord Christ as His bride, and ought to be devoted to Him and to Him alone. The harlotry of worldliness is manifest in every direction.

Thousands who name the name of Christ are taking possessions which have been bestowed by God, and are spending them in the pursuit of unworthy ambitions and pleasures. Those by covenant related to Christ are inflaming themselves with carnality under every green tree. Through these things the testimony of light and love which the Church should bear to the nation is failing, and the name of God is being profaned among the heathen. The judgment of God is already upon the guilty, upon whom His love is set.

Hosea dealing with judgment made use of three figures:

- He spoke of the judgment of the moth,
- Then of that of the young lion, and
- Finally of that most fearful form, the withdrawal of God from His people, so that they are left desolate, without testimony and without power.

The judgment of the moth and rottenness is that of the insidious weakening of the strength of His people. That judgment is evidently upon us to-day. It is manifested in the failure of the hosts of God.

The Church of God as a whole is unable to speak any authoritative word in the councils of the nations. Indeed the judgment of the moth and rotteness is so prevalent, that often, instead of helping the nation, the Church hinders it. The Church is mourning the dearth of conversions within her own borders, wondering at the depletion in her theological schools, and lamenting the indifference of the world to her testimony.

Like Ephraim she turns to Egypt and to Assyria for help, adopts worldly methods for raising money, desecrates the temples of God with bazaars, and attempts to attract the indifferent multitude by sensational methods and spectacular displays. The judgment of God is upon us. It is not coming, it is here.

It is first manifest in the weakening of the spiritual forces of the Church, and in her inability to fulfill her mission in the world.

Let us remember, and quite solemnly, that beyond the method of the moth and rotteness is the method of the young lion, the fiercer anger of God; and beyond the method of the young lion is that of the withdrawal of God from His own people.

It is just as certain that God will cast off the organized Church, as that He cast off Israel, unless she return to Him through the penitence of the wilderness, to the fullness of the fellowship of His love. I am not now dealing with eternal issues. Israel will yet be restored, and God will surely accomplish His purpose in and through the Church. But so far as we are concerned, unless we repent in dust and ashes of our harlotry and adultery, we shall be abandoned from service, the solemn word will surely be uttered, "**Thou mayest be no longer steward.**"

Yet it is ours to make application of the last of these great truths.

Over all the failure, heartbreaking and desolating though it be, there still sounds the music of the love of the Lord . Though Ephraim be a cake not turned, flaccid as dough on one side, and burned to a cinder on the other, utterly useless and contemptible, we may still hear the great cry out of the heart of God, "**How shall I give thee up, Ephraim?**"

The only comfort that comes to the heart in the days of the failure of the Church is that the music of the love of the Lord is still sounding, and the soul is filled with the assurance that He has not exhausted all His methods. Another crisis is coming.

The present dispensation was ushered in by the crisis of the first Advent, and a new dispensation will be ushered in by the crisis of the second Advent; and beyond that, and through it He will realize the triumph of love. "**I will redeem them from death.**"

At the coming of Christ, love will triumph through judgment, and over judgment. Love must at last accomplish its purpose. But Hosea had to tell the men and women to whom he spoke that the triumph was postponed, and that they could never share in its ultimate fulfillment, save in the case of such individuals as by return to God would discover the real meaning of His love for them.

I am not prepared to make that declaration.

I do not know that it is so. Of times and seasons I have no right to speak; they are not within my knowledge or understanding. I do say that the Church needs supremely to remember that the highest, most wonderful, and most inspiring figure of her relationship to God is that which declares she is the bride of Christ. If that be once recognized, the sinfulness of spiritual adultery and harlotry with the forces which are opposed to Him will be realized.

We need to remember that when the Church is guilty of these sins it is inevitable that the judgment of God should rest upon her.

We may also remember that He loves her yet; and as the members of His body, His flesh, His bones, turn back to Him in loyalty of spirit, He will receive them in the fullness of His love, and the great word may be spoken of all such, **“I will heal their backsliding.”**

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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