

Prayer

Lord God, the beauty of Your world astounds me and the cruelty of humanity shocks me. Show me to how live according to Your Word, and demonstrate the eternal power of faith, hope and love. Give me the strength to stand against all that is evil and morally corrupt, and maintain the cause of the Gospel and the Church within the fiercest of life's battles. And by Your grace, may I make a difference. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Make a list of what you ought to do today, then pray about it, and act upon what the Lord says to you.

On-going prayers

- **Pray for pioneering scientists.** *Pray that their work will be understood and used well, and not exploited solely for the benefit of the rich*
- *Pray for those who live in fear of other family members*
- *Give thanks for the work of security forces that keep us safe*

Meditation

Be comforted, you who have felt the power of sin,
There is One who has the victory over Satan's evil sway.

Be strengthened, you who know cruel oppression,
There is One who has the courage to bring you freedom.

Be heartened, you who struggle with your burdens,
There is One who takes the weight you suffer on Himself.

Be encouraged, you who need to hear good news,
There is One who broke through death to bring you love.

Be enlightened, you who have the heart to understand,
There is One who taught the way of life, and lived it perfectly.

Be enthused, you who are willing to speak your faith,
There is One who works through you in authority and power!

Be blessed, you who have walked in hope and joy,
There is One you know who has a place for you in heaven!

Bible passage – Hosea 4:1-6

¹ Hear the word of the LORD,
O people of Israel;
for the LORD has an dispute
with the inhabitants of the land.
There is no faithfulness or loyalty,
and no knowledge of God in the land.

² Swearing, lying, murder,
stealing and adultery are breaking out;
bloodshed upon bloodshed.

³ Therefore the land mourns,
and all who live in it waste away;
along with wild animals and the birds,
even the fish of the sea are perishing!

⁴ Now, let no one find fault, and none reprove,
for my dispute is with you, O priest.

⁵ You shall stumble by day and night;
Even the prophets will stumble with you,
and I will destroy your mother.

⁶ My people are destroyed from lack of
knowledge;
because you have rejected knowledge,
I will reject you as a priest to me.
And since you have forgotten the law of your
God,
I also will forget your children.

Bible Study

Review

After the amazing story of Hosea's life and his extraordinary personal call to prophecy (Hosea 1-3), we are now plunged into the beginning of Hosea's classic prophecies. There is no doubt that our reading today is a powerful and significant prophecy with profound implications, and we will look at it closely to see how it applies both to the life of God's people in Hosea's day and our own day. However, we must not lose sight of the powerful motivating force behind Hosea's words and his personal understanding of the love and justice of God as a Husband and Father. In this passage, we do not read much about God's love, though as we read the whole of Hosea, we will find that he always balances God's absolute justice with a conviction that God will never cease to love, and also act upon that love with both 'justice and mercy'.

Hosea begins these prophecies with a call to the people of Israel to listen; '*hear the word of the Lord, O people of Israel ...*' (4:1). The Lord has a '*dispute*' with His people that must be resolved, and in verse 1, God addresses Israel as His people, but also '*inhabitants of the land*'; and this is not just poetry. There is a reason why the prophecy refers to the land and those who live in it. We are talking, of course, about Canaan, the Promised Land given to Israel after their eviction from Egypt. Before they entered the land, the people agreed freely to the conditions of God's gift (see Deut. 26 to 31). These chapters constitute a 'covenant agreement', in which God promised to bless the people within the land if they remained obedient, and the people accepted that if they did not, they would be cursed.

The details of God's complaint are set out in verses 1 and 2; but first, notice that the result of the people's disobedience is the mourning of '*the land*'. It '*wastes away*' (4:2) to the extent that it affects the animals and birds, and in a remarkable and unique phrase, Hosea prophesies '*even the fish of the sea are perishing!*' It may be only a small point, but Hosea tells us here that the prophecies of Moses about the rebellion of Israel and its negative effect on the land have been fulfilled (see Deut 29:22f.)!

Hosea states God's case against His people in a succinct manner; they have failed to demonstrate faithfulness and loyalty, and given up on their '*knowledge of God*' (4:1). All these words are important. Faithfulness and loyalty are words that describe God Himself. His people are supposed to demonstrate these qualities to the world, but the fact that they have lost them says plainly that they have wandered from Him. '*Knowledge of God*' appears to us to be something to do with learning and perhaps detailed knowledge of Scripture, but this is wrong. For in the Old Testament, to 'know' God means to have a relationship with Him; so when Hosea says that Israel had no 'knowledge' of God, this means they had no relationship with God at all. Instead, the world's values had taken over, and centuries before Paul wrote lists of sins in his letters (see Gal 5:19f. the '*works of the flesh*'), Hosea wrote down this list; '*swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery*' (4:2), reflecting the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17)!

The consequences of this deliberate rejection of God are dire. Worship has been compromised, according to Hosea's comment, '*my dispute is with you, O priest*' (4:4). It was the priest's job not just to perform the religious rituals but to maintain the people's relationship with the Lord, and they had failed to do this. Hosea even says, '*the prophets will stumble with you ...*' (4:5), which may cause us some surprise. We have to remember that Hosea was an exceptional prophet, and here, he was speaking of the official paid court prophets of the day who held that title yet merely told the kings of Israel what they wished to hear. All had '*forgotten the Law of your God*' (4:6), destroyed for '*lack of knowledge*' of God.

Here in Hosea's first major prophecy, he tells us that the relationship between God and His people had broken down. We will have to wait to see whether it can be mended, but despite the stern words of this prophecy, we must bear Hosea's personal experience, so fresh from our reading of Hosea 1-3, in mind. God is in control, despite the people's faithlessness.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What does this prophecy tell us about the people of God in Hosea's day, and how does it connect with what we read in Hosea 2?

2. Why does Hosea describe the consequences of Israel's sin as having an effect upon the land and life on land, sea and air?
3. What does this passage tell us about God's people today and how can we learn from this passage today?

Topics covered by this text

- *The meaning of 'knowledge' of the Lord*
- *The connection of the people of God with the land*
- *The faults of the priesthood*

Personal comments by author

This is an astonishing prophecy, but it is too easy for a preacher today to take what they want from it without respecting the nature of the prophecy. For example, if we say that Hosea was speaking about the need for priests to teach the people so that they would have a better knowledge of God, then we have slightly missed the point. To know the Lord meant to have a relationship with Him, not to have more knowledge. Hosea speaks about God as we tend to do today, in terms of relationships, not knowledge.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *What do you believe the faults of the church to be today, and do these coincide with what Hosea says here? You may find some coincidence, or perhaps not. However, we must to exercise discernment in this way in order to find out how the text applies to us today.*
- *What does it mean to you to have a relationship with God, and how does this show in your life? Answer this question to yourself with Hosea 4:1-6 in mind.*

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus, speak to me when I do not know where to turn; when I am scared of what is happening to me and find it hard to explain or pray about things. Send Your Holy Spirit to comfort me and give me peace, so that I am able to hand over all my problems to You and deal with them in faith and peace. All thanks be to You, Lord Jesus Christ: AMEN
