

## **“HOSEA 6 – LOVE AND JUSTICE”**

### ***Hosea 11:12 – 12:14***

A couple of weeks ago we were thinking about the idea that God really longs to show his love to us and to have a response of commitment from us. You’ll remember, I hope, that God’s love is freely given – we don’t need any prior merit to receive it – but it does require a response from us. There is a need for some sort of transformation in our lives if we are really to experience God’s blessing. And in *Hosea 12:6* we are given a very succinct summary of what that entails.

Once again, Hosea the prophet reels off a list of all the things that Israel has done which have caused God to be angry and disappointed with his people. In the first few verses of this section, there is a lot of play on the Hebrew word for “*deceit*”, especially as the name Jacob – the original name of the man Israel, who gave his name to the nation – can mean “Deceiver”. It’s made a bit more complicated by the fact that it’s only a figure of speech which is based on a phrase meaning “*he grasped the heel*”. You may remember, if you’re familiar with the stories of the Old Testament, that Jacob actually grabbed the heel of his twin brother Esau as they were actually being born (look at *Genesis 25:24-26*). If we were to translate it into a contemporary idiom, we might say that he was always pulling someone’s leg.

Anyway, the point is that Israel, the people, have been trying to deceive God (*11:12*), they have deceived their neighbours (*12:1*), and they deceive each other (*12:7*). Deceit is yet another sin to add to the long list that the people have been committing and which Hosea spends so much time condemning. And deceit is still a very widespread sin in our society today and it is easy for us to think that we can fool people around us today as well as trying to deceive God himself. So what’s the remedy? In *12:6* we read of four things that we are to do as God’s people if we are to experience his blessing.

#### **1. RETURN TO GOD**

It all begins with a transformed attitude that leads back to God. A new way of thinking, a new way of looking at the world is what is called for here. These words are obviously addressed to people who have known God’s love, but have turned away – they are called to “*return*” to God. In contemporary terms we might want to apply it to those who have become Christians at some point (however you want to describe the experience), who have shown their commitment in some way – by being baptised or confirmed or whatever – but have wandered off to do their own thing and aren’t really too interested in God’s blessing at the moment. The first thing to do, then, is to seek him again. We’ll maybe look at this a bit more closely when we deal with chapter 14 in a couple of week’s time, but the point needs to be made now before we look at the rest of the verse.

There’s one of those old “Wayside Pulpit” posters that reads, “*If God seems far away, guess who’s moved!*” And that’s very true. God never leaves us – he’s promised that – but we frequently wander away from him. It’s a message that has been coming through very strongly as we’ve been reading through this little book, and God may, indeed, be saying to you that it’s time you sorted yourself out with him and made some attempt to get back into the position which you once enjoyed. God’s calling you. God’s loving you, making the first move again – and you have to respond.

Hosea then goes on to headline three ideals for living a holy life if we really want to show God that we mean business about returning to him.

#### **2. MAINTAIN LOVE**

God’s love is a pattern for our love. The love that sent Jesus to the cross to take the punishment for our sins is for us both an example and an inspiration – both our model and our motivation. Our response to

that love is to be a love for God which shows itself in complete submission to him. But the context here makes it clear that the love we show God must also be a love for those around, our fellow Christians and our fellow human beings (not that the two don't overlap!).

As we've said already in this series, this word love embraces the concepts of compassion and self-sacrifice. We cannot call ourselves Christians, followers of Jesus Christ, and say that we love God if we do not show love to those around us. That's a point that is made very emphatically in *1 John 4:19-21*. The love of Christians for one another is the pre-eminent distinguishing mark of the Christian community, as Jesus makes clear in *John 13:35*, and if you look in *Acts 2 & 4* you'll see that it was a prominent feature of the life of the Early Church.

And it must also include love for those around us. In some ways it's easy to love other Christians who think and behave the same way as us and who have sympathy for our faith and beliefs (although I'm sure we all find exceptions!). But it's often much more difficult to love those who might taunt or ignore us at work or in our families or among our neighbours. This love which Hosea speaks of here must renew and invigorate our relationships with workmates, colleagues, friends, neighbours. And it must also be demonstrated in the wider sphere, in our love for the people and the creation which fill the world in which God has placed us – it must be shown in the way we maintain justice.

### 3. MAINTAIN JUSTICE

Justice is very prominent word and concept in the Old Testament. The idea of it runs through all the laws of the people of Israel as they were given to them by God through Moses. And as we have already seen in our reflection on Hosea's words – and their link to some of the other books of the Old Testament – justice is a major theme of the prophets. A couple of decades ago it seemed that the evangelical world was starting to get to grips with all this, that there was a real drive for justice in our dealings with the world – there was more to being a Christian, more to proclaiming the gospel than just "saving souls". But despite the interest surrounding the "Jubilee 2000" and "Make Poverty History" movements, the active campaigning of Tear Fund and Christian Aid and the call to be better stewards of the earth's resources (or God's gifts to us, if you like), we're starting to see more and more Christians becoming suspicious of any effort to change the unjust structures of the world in which we live.

If we are placed here on God's earth as God's people to live lives which are holy and point people towards God, we cannot simply ignore the poverty, disease, filth and depravity which surround us. We cannot afford to keep quiet about those people who are oppressed and manipulated. We cannot allow our own Christian freedoms to be eroded. We cannot stand by and watch as our western society profligately gorges itself on the limited resources of this planet. And, much as I believe in the power of prayer and the spiritual warfare in which we are engaged, marching around singing choruses or meeting in concerned little groups is not in itself going to cause any great shift in public morality, any more than signing petitions alone is going to relieve the plight of African coffee workers whose situation we exploit to keep our Nescafé products as cheap as possible.

I remember being stopped once by one of those people with clipboards employed by the opinion pollsters and she asked me what I thought was the single most pressing problem in our nation at the moment. I could see a long list of possible responses on her paper – economic mismanagement, education, unions, healthcare, etc., etc. When I replied "Moral decline", she was rather taken aback and looked at me as if I was a bit of a weirdo – as do many people, of course. But later in the interview, when she showed me a list of actions that I might have taken within that last few months and asked me to tell her what I'd done – written to a Minister, spoken to my MP, addressed a public meeting, made donations – her attitude changed. You can't rabbit on about how awful the world is if you're not prepared to do anything about it, if you're not prepared to stand up and be counted. That's basically what James is saying in those words we looked at a couple of weeks ago (*James 2:14-17*): justice is love with actions.

If we are really to live in the way that our God wants us to, we must not reject him, nor the men and women who share his image. Jesus' words in the synagogue at Nazareth, recorded in *Luke 4:18,19* are not some kind of spiritual abstraction, but a call to holy living based on action and activity here and now in this world. Now, we mustn't kid ourselves into thinking that we can bring in God's kingdom ourselves, but nor must we assume that because we can't do it all, we should do nothing.

#### 4. WAIT ON GOD CONTINUALLY

Our holy lives, lives that have returned to God, can never succeed if we rely on our own resources and our own strength. We need constantly to be waiting "*on God*" – praying to him, listening to him, responding to him. We're a bit like the ladies-in-waiting who attend to the every wish of royalty, ready at all times to do their mistresses' bidding. At times that may seem tough; God may appear to have forgotten us. Two different versions bring out in their own translations particular aspects of this "*waiting*" that are important for us to grasp.

**J B Phillips** has "*put your trust continually in your God!*" God will never let you down at all. We need always to be trusting him for the strength and the guidance to do his will and maintain love and justice as he calls us to.

**Good News Bible** has "*wait patiently for your God to act*". God isn't going to forget you – given his love towards you, why should he? Just be patient – he's done it before, he'll do it again. Keep reading your Bible, keep praying, keep seeking fellowship – and God *will* show himself. Now that's not just pie-in-the-sky helplessness, waiting around doing nothing. It's waiting patiently **while** you get involved in love and justice.

The transformed Christian is the one who has allowed his attitudes to be shaped by God in such a way that she or he is able to show love to those around them, to act in a way that demonstrates a desire for justice, and to live so closely to God that he or she is constantly aware of his will.

*(Housegroup notes on next page)*

**STUDIES IN HOSEA**  
**6. Love & Justice**  
***Hosea 11:12 – 12:14***

Hosea once again outlines the ways in which the people of Israel (or Ephraim) have been sinning against God. This time the root of the problem is deceit. The prophet makes a play of the fact that the man Israel, after whom the nation is named, was originally named Jacob, which means “deceiver” (or “someone who pulls your leg”! – look at *Genesis 25:21-26*).

The people of Israel are now guilty of deceit in three ways:

Against God – *Hosea 11:12*

Against their neighbour states – *Hosea 12:1*

Against each other – *Hosea 12:7*

They even try to deceive themselves (*Hosea 12:8*)

Hosea calls on the people to allow a transformation to take place in their lives, and in *Hosea 12:6* he outlines what they need to do.

1. **Return to God** – The people of Israel have known God’s love and have been committed to him in the past, but they have wandered off to follow other gods and their won sinful desires. Hosea calls on them to turn back to God, just as we are constantly called on to turn back when we wander off from God.
2. **Maintain love** – Of course, love for God is a basic part of the commitment of his people, but it needs to be shown in the love we have for each other. That is one of the identifying marks of the Christian community, as Jesus tells his disciples in *John 13:35*.
3. **Maintain justice** – Love needs to be shown in action to those who are oppressed and disadvantaged. We must not forget that we are called to speak out and to act in support of those who are not able to do so themselves. All men and women are made in God’s image, so should be objects of our love, as they arte of God’s love.
4. **Wait on God continually** – We must always be ready to do what God asks us to do and we need to have trust and patience as we wait for God to speak to us and act in our lives.

**Questions for discussion**

1. In what ways do we see deceit practised in our society? Think of it on an individual level and on a wider scale. Why do you think we are so prone to deceit?
2. It’s easy to *talk* about Christians showing love for one another, but how should it be put into practice? What are the practical implications for us as a church?
3. Our society is very complicated socially and economically (far more so than the society of Hosea’s time), so it’s very difficult to show justice in action. Discuss some of the ways in which it *is* possible.
4. What does “*waiting on God*” really mean? Is it something you are aware of doing as a Christian?
5. Is there anything in tonight’s passage that has particularly struck you?