

Service Overview

Speaker: Mark Falson

Sermon Series: History Makers

Message: History Makers - Hosea

Scripture Reference: Hosea 2:14-23

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Service Welcome *Speaker: Worship Team*

Good morning, everyone. Welcome to church. We are so glad to have you all here to worship with us today. Because our God is so, so great. And he is sovereign and bigger than anything else. He's bigger than the powers of sin or brokenness or anything that can hold us back from him.

The same God that is so, so big and so great is wanting to have a relationship with each of us personally. To offer us salvation through grace, through Jesus. Isn't that just amazing? Let's stand. We're going to sing some songs of worship to him.

Worship Singing

Song: This is Amazing Grace by Jeremy Riddle, Josh Farro, Paul Wickham

Song: Reign Above It All by Ethan Huise, Hannah McClure, Jess Cates, Paul McClure

Song: Great Are You Lord by David Leonard, Jason Ingram, Leslie Jordan

Post-Worship Prayer *Speaker: Reuben & Young Adult Leaders*

Reuben: Thank you. Thank you, Lord, for your love that lasts for more than a thousand generations. Lord, we give you all the glory, all the praise, all the honor and all our thanks. As you continue to work in the most mysterious and wonderful and amazing ways in our lives. Lord, we give you all the glory in Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction, Announcements & Upcoming Events *Speaker: Reuben*

Welcome everyone, it's great to see you. Welcome to our online congregation. Before the kids go out, we've got an announcement. Because some of the youth leaders will be giving this announcement, so I'm going to hand over the mic to them.

Young Adult Leaders: We'd really love to invite you along to a prayer night where we're praying for the Bedouin people. We'd love if you could come. There's a QR code on the screen if you'd like to come, please scan it. Alternatively, it's also in the church newsletter. you can click on it, and it should take you to a link to fill in a form.

So, we're praying for the Bedouin people, which are an unreached people group in the Middle East. This means that to be an unreached people group, it means that 2% of the population or less are evangelical Christians.

But for the Bedouin people, this is actually less than 0.1%. So, there's almost no Christians in this people group, but there are about 4 million people spanning across 12 countries. It's a region that really needs to hear the gospel, and really needs people to go. At our prayer night, we'll be praying for more people to rise up and also praying for a specific individual who is going to the Bedouin people in the near future.

It's at 7:30 Thursday, May 9. If you can make it, we would love to have you there. We're going to be praying in small groups. We're going to have prayer stations around the auditorium and a game with a prize.

Reuben: All right. We've got a women's event coming up on Saturday the 18th of May from 10 AM – 12 PM. It's going to be an amazing morning tea, and the theme this year, is about exploring really meaningful relationships between different generations. So, Brianna*, who's one of our young people, and Harry*, her older friend, will be sharing their experience of intergenerational friendship.

And it's really going to be interactive and fun. So, yeah, we'd would love all women and girls of all ages to join to join us. Please RSVP by Monday May 13. You can register through the newsletter, via the table in the foyer, or you can use our website. So that's something really to look forward to now.

It's been striking me a lot this morning about the generations we've been talking about. You know, the intergenerational relationship here, with having the youth band come up. We know that God's blessings and his love endures for a thousand generations.

Prayer *Speaker: Reuben*

So, I just want to pray for the kids programs that are going out. Father, we thank you for the amazing work that you are doing in transforming lives in this community. We thank you that the lost are being found, and that we are always learning new ways of freedom as you lead us by your spirit.

We pray for the generations after us. For the kids that have gone out to their programs, and even for the grown-up kids that may have walked away from you. We declare that you are good and that your love endures forever. Your generational blessings far outweigh any possible generational curses. And so, we speak the blood of Jesus that has reconciled us to you, and that you have removed all barriers so that we can know your perfect love.

We bless the kids that they will grow in the fullness of your perfect love, that they will develop an unshakable identity because they know you, Lord, protect their lives as they navigate a complex world, that they will reflect your glory. And we also pray for the leaders that are sowing life giving seeds in our kids. Give them the words and the wisdom to raise up a generation that will be history makers. we give you all the glory in Jesus' name, amen. Yeah, just really feeling that this morning.

Communion *Speaker: Reuben*

Let's prepare ourselves for communion now. So earlier this year, our church started a sermon series called 'At the Table', and we explored what it means to be sitting at the table of Jesus.

In case you missed it, I've got a summary of what we've been learning. Jesus was often at the table to the point that people called him a drunkard and a glutton, because he was always eating and drinking with sinners. He had meals a lot at the table. He broke bread with his disciples. One woman poured out perfume worth a year's wages at his feet at the table. His disciples sometimes rested on him, leaning on him at the table. So that's sitting at the table with Jesus. And he said many things that revealed who he was and how much he loves us.

When we sit at the table with Jesus, there's complete peace and rest. We belong unconditionally at the table. There are no distractions. We have his full attention. We get to see who Jesus really is and to know his perfect love for us. We are shaped by him, and he ministers to us. I'm just going to read from Luke 24:30, *"When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, he broke it, and began to give it to them. And then their eyes were opened and they recognised him, and he disappeared from their sight."*

Let's take a moment to quiet ourselves and sit as if Jesus is breaking bread in front of you at the table. Now, what would he like to tell you? And how would Jesus like to minister to you today?

Let's pray. In Jesus, we are so grateful for your sacrifice and your invitation to sit with you at the table. We open up our hearts to you to let you speak clearly and minister to us just like you revealed yourself to others, to you, to your disciples. Help us to enter your perfect rest and to know the fullness of your love. That we will be shaped by you. As we break bread together right now, in Jesus' name, amen.

--- Break as congregation partakes in communion together ---

Thank you, Lord, for your tremendous sacrifice. Thank you for the breakthrough and the victory. For the price that you paid. But Lord, we seek that reality of that breakthrough in our own lives. So we declare your goodness and the blood of the lamb that was shed for the sins of this world. Lord, we say yes to you. We just enter your embrace and your love that you make us new. You make all things new. So Lord, thank you. Thank you for your sacrifice. We love you, Lord. Amen.

Bible Reading: Hosea 2:14-23 (NSRV)

14 Therefore, I will now persuade her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her.

15 From there I will give her her vineyards, and make the Valley of Achor a door of hope. There she shall respond as in the days of her youth, as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.

16 On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, 'My husband', and no longer will you call me, 'My Baal'.^[a]

17 For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. 18 I will make for you^[b] a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish^[c] the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety. 19 And I will take you for my wife for ever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. 20 I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.

21 On that day I will answer, says the Lord, I will answer the heavens, and they shall answer the earth; 22 and the earth shall answer the grain, the wine, and the oil, and they shall answer Jezreel;^[d] 23 and I will sow him^[e] for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Lo-ruhamah,^[f] and I will say to Lo-ammi,^[g] 'You are my people'; and he shall say, 'You are my God.'

Sermon: History Makers - Hosea *Speaker: Mark Falson*

Good morning, and good morning to those on the live stream as well. Great to have you all with us as well. For those that don't know me, my name's Mark and my wife, Kate* and I have been coming along to PBC now for a little bit over 18 months. And it's my privilege this morning to be able to continue a series that we've been doing called History Makers.

This morning we're looking at one of some of the less prominent characters in Scripture, but characters in Scripture who still had an impact and still had a place in God's big story. And so this morning, we're going to take a look at the story of Hosea.

Now, I need to just share with you this morning, that as I began to prepare for this, you know, I was starting to do some reading, as you do. It's always a bit of a worry when you go to a kind of a trusted, respected commentary on your subject, and the very first words of introduction are. 'Hosea is not an easy book.' Great. Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Commentator. That's a great start. Thanks for the encouragement. He does redeem himself a little bit further on when he says, 'though Hosea is a difficult book, it's also a great book,' and that's just a little bit better for us to go on.

And I've got to say, I agree with him. So let me pray for us as we get into this. Now, Lord God, we thank you so much for the words of Scripture that lead us and guide us and show us your ways. And Lord, we pray this morning as we come to this, that Holy Spirit, you would open our ears to hear and open our eyes to see and open our hearts to know what you want to speak specifically to each one of us out of this account this morning. And we pray that in the name of Jesus, amen.

Okay, so let's get into it. Hosea, if you don't know, is a prophet of God. He's a prophet during the eighth century B.C. so we're going back a little way. And Hosea is speaking mainly to the northern kingdom of Israel. At this point in Israel's history, it's after King David, it's after King Solomon. The kingdom is divided, and we've got the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. And his message to them and to us today is confronting. But it's also really fascinating. And that's at least partly because Hosea, among all of the prophets, he's one he gives us a really deep and surprisingly vulnerable look into the heart of God for his people.

The Bible reading we just heard comes at the end of chapter 2. And it's God's voice, God's speaking through the words of the prophet with those amazing words of intention for Israel. *'Therefore, I'm now going to allure her. I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her.'* He's speaking to the nation there. *'I will give her back her vineyards. I'll make the valley of Achor a door of hope,'* and so on. As we just heard the rest of those words read for us. So it's a message of hope. Real hope and tender restoration coming from God to the people. But by the time we get to this end part of chapter 2, so much has already happened that really needs some explaining.

So we'll get to that in a moment. But first up, I just wanted to ask us, why did God send his prophets? Why did he send prophets like Hosea? And I'm just wanting us to get a little bit of interaction here. What were some of the reasons that God sent his prophets? What do we think about that?

--- Break as the congregation discusses the topic of why God sent prophets to His people ---

The short answer is that God sent his prophets to wake people up, primarily to show them that they're on the track or on the wrong track and to bring them to their senses. And God also sends his prophets as a warning, to let people know that if things don't change, then there's going to be some really tough consequences.

However, most of the time his people don't really listen to the prophets. The prophets jobs were pretty frustratingly fruitless at times, and God caused them to do some pretty crazy stuff to try and get people's attention to go with the words that they speak.

I don't know if you've ever spent any time down around Circular Quay, but if you have, you know it's a bit of a Mecca for street theatre of varying qualities. You've got the musicians, the buskers doing their thing, and then there's those painted human statues that sort of don't move, and then the tourists get too close to them and they freak them out totally when they move suddenly, when they get too close.

But then there's also some more edgy stuff that goes on down there as well. And I remember once, this is many years ago, but we were down there, there was this British contortionist who would finish off her show by stuffing herself into a small perspex box about that size. It wasn't much

bigger than that. And then get a volunteer to close the lid on her at the end of the show. She was up on the pole as well, like she's up on a thing so everybody could see.

This was street theatre. It grabs our attention, and it gathers a crowd if it's good. Sometimes if it's really not good, it gathers the crowd as well. As it turns out, God's prophets sometimes got into the street theatre vibe with what are called 'speech acts' or 'enacted prophecies.'

So we get the prophet Isaiah, for instance. He gets to walk around barefoot and naked for three years as a sign of the coming exile. How would you like that job? Ezekiel has to lay down on his side, in front of a small clay model of Jerusalem, under siege for a year. Yeah, he probably would have been better off if he had some Lego and some little things and everything, but it's a little clay model he has to play with. Jeremiah is told not to marry, and that's a sign. And Hosea gets to perform perhaps the most dramatic, enacted prophecy of all.

So back to the beginning of the story. Hosea 1:2, *'When the Lord began to speak through Hosea, the Lord said to him, go marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her.'* What? What did God just ask Hosea to do? It doesn't seem right. Would God ask somebody to do that? Well, apparently, yes he did. The NIV translation we're using here is actually being a little bit polite. Other translations put it something along the lines of 'Hosea, go marry a whore or a prostitute.' So what's going on here? What's God's purpose here?

Well, we get a bit of a hint of it when we read the rest of that same verse. 'Go marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her. For like an adulterous wife, this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord.' So just put yourself in that place for a moment, in Hosea's place. You can just imagine Hosea thinking, 'I don't really like where this might be heading. Lord, I don't really like the sound of this.'

This is getting pretty personal for him. But he goes ahead and he does what the Lord tells him to do. So in verse 3 we read, *'so he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son'*. So he marries Gomer. She bears him a son and then a daughter and then another son.

Now my eldest daughter and her husband have just had their third little one, nearly 11 weeks old. With all three of their daughters, they've taken great care in naming each of them their names. First names and second names have specific, special, beautiful meanings that speak over them, that speak over their lives.

Now, the meaning of names was even more important back in Hosea's day. And yet Hosea and Gomer don't get to name these three children. God tells them what their names are to be, and this is where it gets really interesting. Are you ready for the names of these kids? Everybody's in suspense now, so first one, verse 4. *'Then the Lord said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I'll put an end to the kingdom of Israel. In that*

day I will break Israel's bow in valley of Jezreel." So Jezreel has a double meaning. It can mean sow or scatter. In this bit, it means 'God will scatter.' It's not a name of blessing. It's a name for this child that forewarns of disaster and exile for God's people, that they'll be scattered from their place.

"I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel," says God. Well, that's not such great news, but that's only kid number one. Let's try again. Surely the daughter will have a better name, right? *'Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the Lord said to Hosea, "call her Lo-Ruhamah (which means not loved.), for I will no longer show love to Israel, that I should at all forgive them."*

'Lo-Ruhamah', not loved or not pitied. Imagine having a daughter and calling her that. Imagine telling friends and family and neighbours. "Oh, she's so beautiful. You must be so happy. What have you called her?" "Well, she's Lo-Ruhamah, not loved." That might kill a few conversations. Might stop the neighbours coming around, which might be a good thing. Or a bad thing. Depends, I guess. But again, it's so shocking, isn't it, to call a child that. 'My people will be scattered into exile.' Jezreel. And they are Lo-Ruhamah, 'not loved, not pitied.'

Well, there's a third child. By now we might be getting a little bit nervous. Right? *'After she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, Gomer had another son. Then the Lord said, "call him Lo-Ammi, which means not my people. For you are not my people, and I am not your God."* One commentator reckons that this is the most radical of all the threats found in all the prophets.

And that's because it cuts at the heart of the covenant that God had made with them way back with Abram. Abram, who becomes Abraham, is the father of this people. He'd been promised descendants more numerous than the grains of sand on a beach, or the stars in the sky. A people through whom God would bless all peoples on earth. That was the covenant promise of God. And here God's saying, "that's all over. I'm done with you lot. I'm done with you. You are not my people, and I'm not your God."

That's a super confronting message for the people of God, right? So what's going on here? Why these terrible words of judgment through the kids of Hosea, through his family? What's going on to bring that about?

Well, it's a version of what's happened through all parts of human history since the fall in the garden in Genesis 3. Bottom line is, it's sin. And in this case, God puts Israel's sin in the very graphic terms of promiscuity and unfaithfulness and adultery. God positions himself as the faithful lover who's provided all sorts of good things for his people, the one who's done everything to woo them and to love them, and to keep his side of the covenant was made over centuries.

And what have they done? They've regularly and consistently gone off with other lovers. They've left their husband, God, behind and gone off with others. In Israel's case, at this time in history, it's mainly Baal that they've turned to. Baal's kind of the pseudo god of choice back in the day. And

they're all mixed up with fertility cults and shrine prostitutes, and the whole Baal worshipping thing was kind of the whole kit and caboodle.

And the other thing is that when the people are in danger, when the nation is in danger, do they turn to God for help? As the prophets had reminded them, God was the one that delivered them from Egypt, etc. Did they go to God? No. They run off to this country for an alliance, they go to that country for help, and Hosea talks about it like the people are a silly bird or a silly dove. His flock is fluttering one way and then fluttering another way and can't make up its mind where to go to.

Even worse than that, they credit all their provision, their food, any good fortune and prosperity they might enjoy, all the good stuff, to Baal, instead of God, who actually has provided it all for them. We read in Hosea 2:8, *'She has not acknowledged that I was the one who gave her the grain, the new wine and oil, who lavished on her the silver and gold which they used for Baal.'*

They get the stuff from God and then lavish it on Baal. So can we understand in why God might be a little peeved at his unfaithful people? And so, in this first part of chapter 2, and in many places through these 14 chapters in Hosea, much of it God is railing against them about their constant unfaithfulness and their complete lack of acknowledgment or gratefulness towards him. So we read just the first couple of verses of chapter 4, *'Here the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land. "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There's only cursing and lying and murder, stealing and adultery, they break all bounds,"* etc. etc.

It's like this adulterous love affair that they're having with other gods and other things. It's basically spiritual prostitution in the terms that Hosea puts it in. It's a culture that has gone astray. And their God, the real God, is left behind. He's betrayed. He's forgotten by his own people.

Well, of course, the thing to ask is, what about the priests and leaders? Aren't they kind of telling which way to go and all of that sort of stuff? Now Hosea tells us they're the worst of them. They're leading the people astray. So the whole people are stuck in this completely mixed up, godless mess of their own making. And so God has no choice but to bring this to an end. It has to stop.

Hosea's message is designed to shock them to the core. It's designed to offend them and perhaps us as well as we read it. It's designed to make them think and wake up to what they've become.

Because the naming of Hosea's kids is not the worst of it for poor old Hosea. For evidently at some point, as the story goes, Gomer, his wife, demonstrates just such unfaithfulness towards her own husband Hosea. She goes off with other lovers or perhaps becomes a Baal temple prostitute. We're not really sure exactly, but she leaves Hosea and her children behind, betrayed and abandoned. And it's an unfaithfulness that mirrors what Israel has shown toward their husband, God himself.

But then, unexpectedly, in amongst the message of judgment and destruction, we come across the message from the end of chapter 2, which was part of our reading, which had such a different flavour to it. Remember some of those words. *"I'm going to allure her to the wilderness and speak tenderly to her. I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you in righteousness and justice, in love and compassion. I'll betroth you in faithfulness and you will acknowledge the Lord. "In that day. I will respond," declares the Lord. "I will respond to the skies, and they will respond to the earth, and the earth will respond to the grain, the new wine and the olive oil, and they will respond to Jezreel."*

There's that name. *'I will plant her for myself in the land sowing rather than scattering.'* Now the name of Jezreel turns into a blessing. And listen to this, *'I will show my love to the one I called 'not my loved one.'* *I will say to those called 'not my people' 'you are my people', and they will say, "you are my God."* So this name Jezreel is turned around on its double meaning, so rather than 'not loved,' now becomes 'loved.' 'Not my people' becomes 'my people.' Those terrible names of judgment have been reversed.

And this friends is yet another surprise from the book of Hosea. Two completely different sides to God's response get interplayed with each other again and again throughout the book. This one a response of love and grace and of mercy, that even now, despite everything, if you would just turn back to me, it can be a very, very different for you.

Which leads us nicely to the short, sharp chapter 3 for a Hosea family update. We ready for an update? I think we need an update. *'The Lord said to me, "Go, show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another man and is an adulteress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods and love the sacred raisin cakes."* These were special raisin cakes used in worship for whatever, not just that they enjoyed a feed.

'So I bought her for 15 shekels of silver, and about a homer and a lethek of barley.' That's another tough call for Hosea, right? This guy doesn't get it easy. He not only has to go and get Gomer from wherever she's now living, he has to pay to get her back. She was the one who left. She was the one who went off with other lovers while Hosea remained. And yet he pays to get her back.

Do you notice what's going on here? Did you notice what Hosea is doing to bring Gomer back to his household? He redeems her. Whatever it was her situation had become, and she may at this point actually be in slavery of some sort. And though she was in the wrong, he pays a price for her and it's costly. It's not loose change. 15 shekels is about 16oz of silver, and it's a big bunch of barley, maybe 200kg of barley. It's not loose change.

As I said, despite the cost, Hosea does this. The Lord tells him to. He pays the price and he redeems her from that situation she's stuck in, where she's powerless to change it herself. Now, does that perhaps remind us of anything? Does that remind us of anyone, perhaps in the New Testament? Isn't that an echo of what God has done for us in Jesus?

It foreshadows, the story of Hosea, this redemption of the unfaithful wife. It foreshadows the amazing thing God will do around 700 or so years later in redeeming us. It's remarkable. So much of this book, if you do go home and read it, and just a warning, it's not for the faint hearted. Probably a parental warning there, probably don't read it to your nine year olds, I would think.

But the heart of the message of Hosea is it's almost like God can't help himself. It's like he's torn between two things. Two responses. On the one hand, there's the very real need to deal with sin. It has to be taken seriously and it has to be dealt with, or he knows it will destroy them. It will destroy us. But on the other hand, there's God's passionate, never-ending tendency towards faithfulness and never-failing love. Reuben alluded to it earlier. God's never-failing life goes on for countless generations. His relentless desire to forgive, redeem and restore, his determination to win people back from their self-centred and destructive ways to rescue us. Like Hosea with Gomer from the places we each find ourselves in, the places we are stuck in, the places we can't find a way to get out of.

And it's why he allows them to the wilderness. It's going to be exile. It's not just a fun walk in the wilderness, but even their punishment is a path to restoration. The wilderness will be for them a time of renewal and refining and waking up and coming to their senses, bringing them back to God. And so then we come to the tender heart, I guess, of Hosea in the words of chapter 11.

"When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. But the more they were called, the more they went away from me. They sacrificed to the Baals and they burned incense to images. It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, taking them by the arms, but they did not realize it was I who healed them. I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love. To them I was like one who lifts a little child to the cheek, and I bent down to feed them."

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboyim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I devastate Ephraim again. For I am God and not a man, the Holy One among you. I will not come against their cities."

"They will follow the Lord; he will roar like a lion. When he roars, his children will come trembling from the west. They'll come back from Egypt, trembling like sparrows, from Assyria, fluttering like doves. I will settle them in their homes," declares the Lord."

That's our God. That's his response to us getting it so, so wrong. So what do we do with that, you and I, with that very quick thumbnail sketch of Hosea and his message? What do we do with this powerful message from our God?

Well, here's what I really don't want us to do today. I don't want us to go home thinking, "the Israelites sure needed a kick in the backside, didn't they? And they were way off track because of all the stuff they were into." If that's all we get out of the message today, then I've failed in my task.

So let's just take a few minutes to make it real for us today. What is the spirit wanting to say to us? What is the spirit wanting to say to you out of this today? The spirit might already be speaking to you, but here's a few thoughts that I want to add to that. Firstly, and I don't want us to miss this bit, if you're sitting here this morning in any way unconvinced of God's love for you.

You've heard Ruben's words this morning. We've been singing these songs together about his love, but deep down, you just don't know if he could possibly really love you after what you've done or the mistakes that you've made or the way that you lived, or some of the thoughts that go through your head.

If that's you, then hear God's mercy and love speaking over you through the prophet Hosea. Hear those tender words from chapter 11. Reflect on them later if you need to, but you are beloved by God. God loves you fiercely. He loves you passionately, and he loves you relentlessly. He goes after us.

Secondly, guard your heart. In Proverbs 4, we read, *'above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.'* A heart is so important to God, and they mentioned so often in Hosea. As we said, he speaks like no other prophet into the internal spiritual reality of people's condition. He speaks right into our hearts.

He's saying, 'don't play games with God. Give your whole heart to him. Don't play around with any kind of spiritual adultery, pursuing other idols, dabbling here, dabbling there, or whatever. Don't allow your heart to be captured or stolen by other stuff. How will we be faithful to the one who so loves us when we return to the one who longs to welcome us back, who redeems us?'

Guard your heart. Keep it well. And that one leads readily and easily into the next one because they're connected. Because thirdly, wise and watch your culture, the culture we live in. Beware of spiritual blindness. And I reckon this one is such a big one for us. We are by nature so immersed and caught up in the culture that we live in. We've grown up in it. It's just the water we swim in. So, there's all sorts of blind spots for us, things we don't even notice, things we don't even question.

And so just going back to this story for a minute, do you think those ancient people of Israel, all caught up in the false gods and religions, do you reckon they even noticed how far they drifted from God? Probably not. The priests and leaders, as we said, were the worst of them. They're leading the people astray. There's nobody to lead them on the right path except when a prophet comes along.

So here's the thing. It probably all would have felt pretty normal to them. Just like us, just in our culture, you know, it's like you can just imagine, 'oh, honey, I'm just popping down to the shrine prostitutes and Harry from next door's going as well.'

Like, it's just what they did. It's just what they live in. It's just what they would have done. And so they likely wondered what Hosea was on about. 'Just chill. Hosea. Just chill. You worked up over nothing. It's just how we live. It's not that bad. And for heaven's sake, give your kids better names. Come on.'

But you know, that can be us as well. We live in this culture. It's a little bit like the story of the frog in the in the kettle. I've never tried this experiment, and I don't suggest you try it at home. Would be very cruel. But apparently if a frog is in a saucepan or a kettle or whatever, I don't know how they got there, but if the heat turned up slowly, the frog doesn't even notice and it stays there until it meets a nasty ending.

Hosea says, 'wake up, the water's nearly boiling. Open your eyes see things for how they are.' And so that means we need to ask some hard questions about our culture, and not just kind of go along with the flow. We need to ask questions about who are we listening to most, what are we watching? What apps or social media stuff are we most addicted to? Is that helpful? It might be, but it might not be. We just need to ask the questions. What are you reading? What are you streaming? What's the stuff most occupying your free time in life? In this culture? Because, you know, we've got to know that the things that we spend most of our time on is the stuff that ends up discipling us. This is the stuff that is most shaping us. We need to be aware of that.

Hosea says, 'don't just blindly accept what seems normal around you.' So how do we do that? Well, first of all, we keep our eyes on Jesus and the ways of Jesus. We also have the spirit. We listen to the whispers of the spirit, to ask God to show us our blind spots.

But here's one other thing I want to add to that. We also need to learn to effectively critique our culture. And that is stuff about asking the hard questions about all the stuff that just flows over us constantly. Just remembering that our version of other gods just aren't called Baal. They go by different names and different forms, but the battle for our hearts and minds is still the same.

So be determined to effectively critique the culture that we live in, use, and enjoy what's good out of it, but also be aware of the influence it has over us and keep God at the centre. Lean into him. So beware of spiritual blindness. Watch your culture really quickly.

Finally, we've spoken about this one before, I think Steve mentioned in a message quite recently actually, is to give thanks to God. He's the bringer of love and grace and sweetness in life. He's the one who provides, so have gratitude for that. Give thanks. Always giving him the glory inclines our

hearts towards him, and it helps us not to leave him beside us or behind us, but in the centre, and it helps us not to forget him.

So yes, Hosea is a difficult book, but it is also a great book. It's a big wakeup call for the people that it was originally spoken to, but for us also as the people of God. So as you reflect on this story and God's words through this prophecy, remember these things. God loves you and he's redeemed you.

Your heart so important. Wise up and watch your culture. Learn to critique it well and give thanks always to the one who provides and the one who one day will welcome us home to be with him. We're going to leave the very last words to Hosea today in chapter 14. He says, *'who is wise? Let them realise these things, who is discerning, let them understand.'*

And then these final words from Hosea 10. 'Sow righteousness for yourselves. Reap the fruit of unfaithful love, and break up your unploughed ground, for it is time to seek the Lord until he comes and showers his righteousness on you.'

Post-Sermon Prayer *Speaker: Mark Falson*

It's time to seek the Lord. Let me pray for us as the band comes up and joins us again.

Now, Lord God, we thank you for the power of the words that you have inspired in Scripture specifically today. The words through the prophet Hosea. And Lord, my prayer is this morning that if you have stirred something in any of our hearts this morning, that we won't let that go. But that would follow that thread through and allow you to speak into that space, perhaps the space that we need to wake up in, perhaps a space where we need to kind of just have a look at the culture in perhaps a space where we need to allow your love to deeply impact us.

Lord, whatever it is for each one of us this morning, let us pray, Holy Spirit, that you continue to work in each of our hearts and our lives, and that we might be inclined to you to seek you and to follow you, Lord Jesus, in the way that you showed us. In Jesus name, we pray, amen.

Worship Singing

Song: Love On The Line by Aryel Murphy, Brooke Ligertwood, Scott Ligertwood

Conclusion *Speaker: Reuben*

If God's been talking to you, and really prompting something in your heart, I just really want to invite you to. come up and stand with someone as your response. So we're going to have the prayer team up front, they're the guys with the lanyards.

And this week, I felt that the gods that I inadvertently worship were busyness and stress, and I just felt like I've been sucked under the treadmill that I've been running on, and that really spoke to me.

So, yeah, if God's knocking at your heart, please come up and just stand in agreement with someone. We just want to really bless you. And so yeah, thanks everyone. Have a have a great week ahead. and we'll see you soon.

Online Outro *Speaker: Kathy Bates*

Hey, thank you for joining us online today. We pray that you have been blessed and encouraged. And if there is something from today that you would like us to pray into with you, don't hesitate to let us know.

If we haven't met you, we'd love to hear from you. And you also welcome to come and join us in person as well. To know more about our church, please go to our church website and you can also find more details about who we are through our newsletter. And you can subscribe to that through our website as well.

God bless you and may you have a great week.

**Names have been changed to protect privacy.*