

How Long Will I Struggle With This Sin?

Advent #1 | Hosea 8

November 29, 2020

Pre-Sermon Remarks

- Advent means “arrival” | Christians use this time to reflect on anticipation and longing
 - Also use it to remember Jesus’ 1st and 2nd comings
- Advent series: “How long, o Lord?” | common phrase in the prophets
 - Small-to-big, individual-to-cosmic
 - Personal: how long will I struggle with this sin?
 - Society: how long will there be injustice?
 - Church: how long will the church struggle?
 - Cosmic: how long until Jesus returns?

PRAYER

Introduction

How many of you have ever said the following...

- *Why did I do that? I didn't want to do that!*
- *What is going on with me? I don't understand myself.*
- *Why does this keep happening? I should be better/more mature by now.*
- *What was I thinking? Why did I act so irrationally in that situation?*

One of the great challenges of being a follower of Jesus is living with the reality of ongoing sin in our lives. Saved by grace, cleansed from sin, but...still struggling? It's particularly hard when you come across verses like this:

- **1 John 3** ⁸ The one who commits sin is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God was revealed for this purpose: to destroy the devil's works. ⁹ Everyone who has been born of God does not sin, because his seed remains in him; he is not able to sin, because he has been born of God.
- **1 Corinthians 15** ³⁴ Come to your senses, and stop sinning; for some people are ignorant about God. I say this to your shame.
- **Matthew 5** ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Question: How does Christmas and the birth of Jesus help us come to terms with this problem?

- Before the coming of the Messiah...the Prophets!

Context | Hosea

- Prophet in the northern tribes (Israel, Ephraim) approx. 200 years after the division
- Both Judah and Israel were bad, but Israel was really, really bad
- Conquered by Assyria, exiled, but also re-populated (Samaritans)
- Hosea's warnings (ch. 4-14) in prophetic poetry
- Hosea's unique story (ch. 1-3) : marrying an unfaithful wife

Main Problem: Idolatry

Hosea 8 ⁴They have installed kings, but not through me. They have appointed leaders, but without my approval. They make their silver and gold into idols for themselves for their own destruction. ⁵Your calf-idol is rejected, Samaria. My anger burns against them. How long will they be incapable of innocence? ⁶For this thing is from Israel—a craftsman made it, and it is not God. The calf of Samaria will be smashed to bits!

Really, Idols?

- Our imagination of bowing down to little statues | seems particularly foreign
- **Ezekiel 14** ³...these men have set up idols in their hearts.

Tim Keller The biblical concept of idolatry is an extremely sophisticated idea, integrating intellectual, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual categories...The old pagans were not fanciful when they depicted virtually everything as a god. They had sex gods, work gods, war gods, money gods, nation gods—for the simple fact that anything can be a god that rules and serves as a deity in the heart of a person or in the life of a people.

- Personal: romance, family, money, power, accomplishment, social standing, health, beauty
- Societal: military power, economic prosperity, hard work, duty, liberty, self-discovery
- Vocations: engineer idol of accuracy, artist idol of self-expression

Important to recognize: virtually all idols are good things in themselves, but they are twisted, or they take too large of a place in our hearts.

- Primary idol in this passage is political power | ⁴They have installed kings, but not through me. They have appointed leaders, but without my approval.
- Principles of idolatry can apply across a wide spectrum of sins

Idolatry is Infidelity

² Israel cries out to me, “My God, we know you!”...⁹ For they have gone up to Assyria like a wild donkey going off on its own. Ephraim has paid for love. ¹⁰ Even though they hire lovers among the nations, I will now round them up, and they will begin to decrease in number under the burden of the king and leaders.

- Context: the story of Hosea
- Know: deeper, covenantal knowledge, not mere information
- God’s anger: analogy of a spurned lover

Idolatry is Folly

⁶For this thing is from Israel—a craftsman made it, and it is not God. The calf of Samaria will be smashed to bits!

- Reminds me of Isaiah 44: half of the wood I burned to cook dinner, the other half an idol
- It is madness, follow to seek satisfaction, security, peace anywhere besides the LORD
- **Analogy (from Erin Lynn):** a cheap, quick fix or home repair that makes the problem worse

Idolatry Always Grows

⁷ Indeed, they sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. There is no standing grain; what sprouts fails to yield flour. Even if they did, foreigners would swallow it up.

- How easy is it to say about sin, “what’s the big deal?”
- Slippery slope arguments often get pooh-poohed, but here is a very real warning

Charles Spurgeon We are all sowing, brethren—we cannot help it. You sisters, too, are sowing. Perhaps but a little garden plot, or possibly a broader acreage in public life, but you are all sowing...As we are all sowing, the great question we have to consider is, “What will the harvest be?” Every wise man will ask himself that question...what have I sown and what shall I reap? What sheaves shall I gather into the garner? Sheaves of fire that shall burn into my soul forever, or sheaves of glory that I shall bring with rejoicing in the last great day?

Religious Behavior Won’t Fix It

¹¹ When Ephraim multiplied his altars for sin, they became his altars for sinning. ¹² Though I were to write out for him ten thousand points of my instruction, they would be regarded as something strange.

- Altars: the very thing meant to take away sin. Heartless worship won’t fix it.
- 10k instruction: you can’t just say “stop worshipping idols!” | So hard to truly grasp!
- You don’t believe me! In America, we think “if you put your mind to it, you can do anything.”
- **Romans 7** ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

So what is the solution?

God’s Great Compassion

Hosea 11 ¹ When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. ² Israel called to the Egyptians even as Israel was leaving them. They kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols...⁷ My people are bent on turning from me. Though they call to him on high, he will not exalt them at all. ⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I surrender you, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? I have had a change of heart; my compassion is stirred! ⁹ I will not vent the full fury of my anger; I will not turn back to destroy Ephraim. For I am God and not man, the Holy One among you; I will not come in rage.

- Character of God: slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and mercy
- Son of God: “out of Egypt I called my son” | Israel is the Son of God, but they failed

Matthew 2 | Summary

- Angel appears to Mary and Joseph | birth of a child who will be a deliverer
- Magi come from the east, nations streaming to the light of the Messiah
- Wicked King Herod tries to kill this rival king, so the family flees
- **Matthew 2** ¹⁴ So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night, and escaped to Egypt. ¹⁵ He stayed there until Herod’s death, so that what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled: Out of Egypt I called my Son.

- **GOSPEL: Jesus the full expression of God's love and the perfect Son | Christmas**

Whoever is united to this Son by faith, well, now we actually have a chance to change.

- Jesus died to sin, but by doing that, he put sin to death
- If we're united to him, we now live out that same process daily

Fueled By the Gospel

2 Corinthians 7 ¹ So then, dear friends, since we have these promises, let us cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.

- It has to be fueled by the gospel. Remember: out of Egypt I called my Son.

Walking It Out

**The Mortification of Sin in Believers by John Owen | Something like 85 points!*

1 John 5 ²¹ Little children, guard yourselves from idols.

1. Serious attitude
2. Messiah focus
3. Spirit reliance
4. Lifetime resolve
5. Steady progress
6. Transparent community
7. Quick responses

Closing Prayer | Psalm 19

Leader: ¹² Who perceives his unintentional sins?

All: Cleanse me from my hidden faults.

Leader: ¹³ Moreover, keep your servant from willful sins;

All: do not let them rule me.

Leader: Then I will be blameless and cleansed from blatant rebellion.

All: ¹⁴ May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer.

Benediction | Based on Romans 10:5-15

Leader:

How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news—the good news of God's victory, of peace and forgiveness available to all who believe! Go from here to share that good news with all you meet.

All:

And may the blessing of God, the love of Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit be among you and within you. Amen.