

What REALLY is important to me?

Introduction

- Good morning everyone! Today I would like to share with you a difficult truth that God has put on my heart to share, especially because throughout writing this sermon, I have been challenged to reevaluate my own life and my own priorities. This passage that I'm going to be talking about is a fairly unique Scripture that many of you may have not heard before, but I personally see as some of the most powerful and convicting verses in the Bible. I will warn you that there is a word used a few times in these verses we're about to read that I would not say outside of quoting Scripture and apologize in advance if you are sensitive to it. With that being said, let us open up our Bibles and begin reading from the prophet Hosea, chapter 1, verses 2-11.

Context

- These are such deep and impactful words in such a short chapter. When reading this, it is important to understand this metaphor that is being written about. **Hosea is living in a time where God's people (the Israelites) are living among pagans.** God has warned them in His Word multiple times to not be like these pagans, especially in their worship. **However, God's people, in an attempt to adapt to the society they lived in, decided their best course of action was to cover their bases and to worship both their God but also the false gods of the pagans,** specifically those named Ba'al and Asherah. They did this because the pagan people living among them had convinced them that these gods provided them with good crop yields and they would be happy and wealthy if these false gods accepted their worship.
- Also, **before metaphors like this became known to the Israelites, it was common that they would consider God an emotionally distant being,** as most of the pagan false gods were emotionally distant. They saw God as controlling, more like a king or emperor, and willing to bless His people as long as they submitted to Him in worship. Therefore, in their minds, there was nothing wrong with worshipping the pagan gods as long as they were worshipping the Israelite God as well.

God Hurts

- Verses 2 and 3 show the Israelites that they are wrong! The true God is so much different than the pagan gods and is not just a deity that acts like a vending machine where prayers and worship are put in a slot to receive a blessing in return. **OUR GOD IS A PERSONAL GOD THAT DESIRES A RELATIONSHIP WITH US!** It is unacceptable that anything else be given the worship that God alone deserves. This is equated in this metaphor with adultery. **This comparison not only shows how horrible this sin truly is, but explains the kind of hurt that God feels when His people do not worship Him alone.**
- I want to take a few minutes now to see what this looks like in our lives now. Obviously most of us don't head over to the pagan temples to worship other false deities after church on Sunday's, but we all are guilty of this principle in other ways. First, we must understand that **the word, "worship," itself comes from the meaning of giving worth.** Therefore, it is possible that we can actually worship just about anything.
- So, for this first part, I'm going to need a bit of your participation on a quick survey. I want everyone to be honest, and I also want everyone to recognize that what we're talking about is a truth for just about every Christian. I'd like for everyone to raise your hands if the statement I say applies to you on an average day.
 - I spend more than 8 hours per day sleeping
 - I spend more than 8 hours per day at work or school (including work done at home)
 - I spend more than 2 hours per day watching TV / Netflix / Movies
 - I spend more than 2 hours per day on my phone, or on social media
 - I spend more than 2 hours per day spending quality time with my friends and family
 - I spend more than 1 hour per day exercising
 - I spend more than 1 hour per day doing household work / chores
 - I spend more than 1 hour per day focusing on growing in my faith through Bible studies, devotions, church programs, prayer, or other spiritual development activities

- If you are anything like me or most of the people I know, your time is like a battlefield. Each activity in your life is fighting with all its got to get ahead, to claim your time and energy, and to be the most important part of your daily life. I'm sure most of us would say we would like to see God being the #1 priority in our lives, but many of these things we cannot cut out to give more time to spiritual growth. We can't just stop sleeping or working! We need to spend time with our family! While these things are important, what is actually important is whether they are truly the priority in our lives and whether they are pressing competition against God like the Israelites were doing with pagan gods.
- How many football fans do we have here today? If you know me well at all, you know I am a fan of the New England Patriots (at least when the Browns aren't playing). I even have here a Tom Brady jersey that I've had since 6th grade. I considered wearing it for this sermon, but decided that would be pretty distracting! Tom Brady is arguably one of the best quarterbacks in the NFL, past and present. Now I want you to imagine for this metaphor that Tom Brady represents God's presence in your life and your spiritual development. However, I want to make it ABUNDANTLY clear that I am in no way saying that Tom Brady himself is God! He is far from it haha! Now, imagine Tom Brady is playing a football game with a group of 10 year old pee wee football players. He's going to stand out! He's going to be extremely successful over each player on that field and there will be no doubt that he is so much higher up and more skilled than them. Now, let's take a moment to look at this past years Super Bowl. Tom Brady was competed against. It was DIFFICULT for him to stand out over everyone else. He struggled a lot, and just barely was able to come back for a win. Imagine that every other player we've mentioned are different activities or priorities that demand your time, energy, and attention. Which field does your life look like? Does your time with God stand out as a main priority or is it competing against many other players? Does your field look like the pee wee game, but another obligation is playing Tom Brady? Is God so small in your life that He is actually one of the 10 year old players just barely pushing their way into the game? It is obviously important to God in this Scripture that He is NOT competed against in the lives of His people.

When this does happen, there is a break in the relationship between God and His people. There are real consequences to this betrayal.

- When moving to verses 3-9, we begin to see the metaphor develop with the prophecy of what is happening to the relationship between God and the Israelites. Hosea and Gomer begin to have children which represent this. The first child, Jezreel, represents that God will eventually bring an end to the Northern kingdom of Israel (which eventually happens through the military power of Assyria). The second child named Lo-Ruhamah, which means no mercy, represents that God is no longer offering mercy to this adulteress people of Israel, and would give them over to Assyria. Verse 7 is interesting, Judah was a distinct nation, the southern kingdom, but they were still Israelites. Because Judah had not betrayed God like this, they would be spared, but it's important to see that God emphasizes that it is not of their own power that they will be spared, but only of God's. This is something the northern kingdom failed to understand. Finally, the last child born is Lo-Ammi, which means not my people. God is now emphatically emphasizing how great the disconnect is between the Israelites and Himself because of their sin.
- God had made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17 that says so long as Abraham's descendants stay set apart for God alone, they will be favored, blessed, be given land and children, and would be God's people. This is the moment where God is telling Israel that this covenant had been broken by them, so they are no longer given the land they live in, they are no longer favored, and most importantly, they are no longer His people.
- These are real consequences that happened to the Israelites. There are real consequences when we put other things in our lives above God. Our relationship with God is hurt, sometimes broken, and when this becomes an epidemic in the Church, the resulting disconnect becomes obvious.
- Think of how the idea of what a Christian is in our society has been progressively distorted. Roughly 75% of Americans would consider themselves Christians, but are 75% of Americans living out Christian values? The ideals of being a Christian has dissipated into what our society tells you should be important. Society says other things like work, relationships, and friends should take priority in our lives and you can call yourself a Christian

if you try to make it to church on Christmas Eve and Easter. Many of those who call themselves followers of God have allowed our culture redefine what that means to them, and it is why the Church can look so broken, especially from the outside. **We are not meant to adapt our faith to what is comfortable to society, but Romans 12:2 tells us to not be conformed by the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.** Our society is doing everything it can to force Christians to conform to them and their way of thinking, but if we are to be devoted to God as Hosea commands that we be, we cannot allow society to change our priorities.

However, the good news is that there is hope!

- When you continue to read on to verse 10 and 11 we see a very sudden 180 degree turn of what's going on. **This prophecy of destruction and judgment suddenly turns to prophecy of restoration and hope.** God says that eventually, Israel will once again regain this covenant of having many descendants that will be once again the people of God, and will also be united as one people. This can give us hope both individually and as Christians throughout the world united together. We can have hope that even if there is this brokenness because of misguided priorities now, there is an opportunity to repent for that sin and to come back to God.
- I want to quickly read through Hosea chapter 3, which is only 5 verses. In this chapter, Gomer leaves Hosea to go to other men, but Hosea is now called to not only bring Gomer back to him, but to sacrificially buy back Gomer to be his wife again. It's important to notice here that **Gomer's character here, which represents God's people, takes no role in the healing of this relationship, but only takes the responsibility of responding with loyalty to Hosea who sacrificed of himself to be with her.** This is such an incredible thing to me, that when I have failed, and I break this bond between God and myself, God is willing to sacrifice in order to bring me back to Him. **And now we know that God paid far more than Hosea did to bring us back, He paid His only Son on the Cross to mend our broken relationship.**

Conclusion

- So I would challenge you to take a real look at your lives and where your priorities are. Once again, I understand there are things that you are incapable of freeing up your time, but my first response to that is that I'm sure there are other places you are able to free up and make time for spiritual development and growth. My second response is that even in our work, our time with friends and family, and even on our time in social media, we have plenty of opportunities to make that time honoring to God and beneficial to His Kingdom. We can grow spiritually through conversations with those around us and the entertainment we choose to enjoy. We can show love to someone who needs it when we see their posts on Facebook, or we can show Christ to others through our positive attitudes at work. Like I said at the beginning of this sermon, this is a topic that strongly convicts me, and challenges me to set more time apart for God and for spiritual growth, but also to find places in my time that I must spend elsewhere, to build the Kingdom of God. Please, do not let a busy schedule cause you to forget and stray away from what should be the most important part of your schedule which is time growing in your relationship with God who is always available to spend time with you. As harmless as it might seem to you, especially because it has become normal in our society to be busy and have other priorities, it really does hurt God, and He desires to have a relationship with you where He is not competing for you.