

“Eating Our Fill”: Series: Hosea
Hosea 4
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Once when my girls were little, I was at the playground with my two younger daughters, pushing them on the swings, when a mom pushing her daughter right next to me called out to her older daughter, “Maranatha!” she said. “Come here!” Maranatha?! Maranatha! What a wonderful name for a child. Every time she says her daughter’s name is a prayer – Come, Lord Jesus! Every time she whispers good night to her daughter, she whispers some of the last words of Scripture... ‘Come, Lord Jesus’...

This chapter of Hosea... Well, Maranatha, it’s a doozy. This chapter bears witness to the brokenness of our world and our obsession with the brokenness which creates more brokenness. The brokenness that God points to particularly through his prophet Hosea, is the brokenness of the failure to acknowledge God. We can almost see it in Gomer’s turn away from Hosea here... the Israelite people failing to acknowledge God. We see it in several verses: 1, 6, 11, 14.

There is a difference between a failure to know something – and a failure to acknowledge something. Cavell – a philosopher - wrote a book on the difference between the two. “A ‘failure to know’ might just mean a piece of ignorance, an absence of something, a blank. A ‘failure to acknowledge’ is the presence of something, a confusion, an indifference, a callousness, an exhaustion, a coldness. Spiritual emptiness is not a blank” (Cavell, ‘Knowing and Acknowledging’, p. 264). We cannot be held accountable for what we do not know. But if we know God and then fail to ACKNOWLEDGE God, then we must be held accountable. If we know God’s law of love and then ignore that knowledge, then we must be held accountable.

Certainly Hosea 4 was in the back of Paul’s mind as he opened his letter to the Christians in Rome. ¹⁸ “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, ¹⁹ since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. ²⁰ For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly

seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.²¹ For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him.”

Now, Paul seems to have been talking about Gentiles here... They had no excuses because God has revealed himself enough (in creation, and through the seed of religion in their hearts) ... But even more so the Israelites in Hosea’s day – the people of God –who do not have only God’s general revelation of himself in nature –not only the common experience of God’s grace... but also the special revelation and the particular grace of God’s words and favor. They have even fewer excuses. And how much more so you and I – who have the fullest embodiment of God in the face of Jesus Christ ... the clearest articulation of the law in the command to love God and to love our neighbour... and the complete picture of his grace in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We have even fewer excuses! And yet we suppress our knowledge of God and our knowledge of the Law of Love. We know God without acknowledging him with our words and with our actions and with our lives.

So our problem is not that we don’t know, it’s that we don’t *live* according to what we know. It’s not a problem of cognition, it’s a problem of volition. We know what we should do, but we suppress that knowledge... And what happens? What’s the result?

There are four results that Hosea shows us here... first of all, there is an increase in moral depravity (verse 2 – calling curses down on people, lying, murder, stealing, adultery, breaking of integrity, and bloodshed). There is a falling apart of the environment (verse 3) – the land mourns! All creation groans. Third – there is a debasement of leadership... (vv. 6-9) the people are corrupt and the priests are corrupt. And finally, there is an emptiness – a personal emptiness – a futility to all we do... Engage in prostitution and never increase... All pleasure; no produce... We eat and are never satisfied.

A curious phrase – there in verse 8– they feed on the sins of my people and relish their wickedness. Feeding on the sins of the people... Hosea is alluding here to “the *sacrifices brought for sin*. The priests had to eat the flesh of the animals offered as sacrifices – literally, feed on the sacrifice brought for sin. Hosea did not accuse the priests of eating the *sacrifices* which the people brought because of their sins – for there was nothing wrong with that. He accused them instead of *feeding on sin*” (Herman Veldkamp, *Love’s Complaint*, p. 78). ... And

this isn't just the priests – like priests, like people. .. And really, we're all priests... We all deserve each other. We sit around feeding on the sins of others.

How do we feed on sin? "The same kind of spiritual delight in the sins of others is present on many a Sunday evening when Christians get together to drink coffee and talk. As they drink their coffee, they simply 'eat up' the sins of their 'brothers and sisters.' They do not eat quietly, as mice invariably do, but lick their lips and chew noisily. They gobble up the whole thing, like a man at a fish market who puts a whole herring in his mouth. They delight in the stories about others. They feast on them and devour them. The sins of the people become a banquet for them..." (Veldkamp, p. 79).

What kinds of banquets are you having lately? What kinds of banquets am I having lately? We know we shouldn't... we know that we shouldn't live on the food of the juicy morsels of others sins. But we do it anyway... it is the path of least resistance – it comes tumbling out of us so easily and we can justify it so easily.

The truth of God and of his way for us is to grieve sin – our sins and the sins of others through confession – to do justice via the proper channels and movements of justice – and to love and feast on righteousness and to walk humbly with our God. And walking humbly with our God doesn't always mean taking the path of least resistance. It's a hard road to walk humbly with God. Henri Nouwen says that Jesus had a vision of mature discipleship – and that is this: to be willing to be led where you would rather not go. You know where to go – you even know how to get there – the problem is not with your knowledge... the problem is with your will. The problem is with my will.

So, that's the problem – what's the solution? Some might say that the solution is to acknowledge God... to live the way he wants us to live... not just to know him, but to live that knowledge of him. You bet – that's a great solution and those who accomplish this have a great reward. Luke 12:8 - "I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God." Christ ascended into the heavenly realms and those who acknowledge him, he is acknowledging.

But that can't be the whole solution, because we do not and cannot and will not ever acknowledge God with our lives the way that we are to do so, and therefore – we need not a

human-powered solution, but a God-powered grace. We need our God who pastures us like lambs in a meadow... God knows us – he knows his sheep – he knows us and calls us by name... He knows our sin.

What does he do with that knowledge? Delight in it? No! Eat it! No! Excuse it? Ignore it? Suppress it? No! No - he acknowledges it on the cross. He becomes it. He who knew no sin BECAME sin for us. He dies for it. And he rose for our life. And he ascended... and he will return the same way that he left, but in the mean time, he has given us a different food to eat. He takes away the banquet of sin and he gives us himself. IN John 6, Jesus declared, "I am the **bread of life**. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty." ... Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me" (John 6:35, 54-57).

Maranatha is most often translated – Come, Lord! But it can also be translated, Our Lord has come. So, let's live in that... that anticipation of what's to come – that prayer for him to rescue us from the depravity of the world and the depravity of ourselves... Maranatha! And also let's live in the Maranatha – the creed – the confession – that our Lord has come... Maranatha – our Lord has come. Our Lord is here... the kingdom of God is among us. 1 Corinthians 13:12 "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known."