

Dear People who believe in the Living God,

I read an article that was carried by ABC News in June 2015 where an American tourist, Katherine Chappell, was visiting an animal park in South Africa. There were wild lions roaming outside the vehicle. Apparently, she had been told to keep the window shut, but did not. The lion lunged into the car and killed her. We look at lions laying around in the zoo, we see them standing in pictures and they look tame, but as news reports remind us they are wild and extremely dangerous.

Remembering this gives us a little insight into the Lord's words in Hosea. He describes himself as a savage lion. We think of the Lord as loving God. Why would he do such a thing? The pages of Hosea reveal the Lord's heart and give us insight into the terrible trouble his people were in. We see how far his love will go to save people. We hear through Hosea, **God Tears Apart to Heal.**

1. He has reason for the pain. 5:15, 6:1

Parents can and should punish or correct their child when necessary. However, I don't think we would say that they should act like a wild lion towards their children. Based on what we just heard that sounds extreme. Yet the Lord God does not hesitate to say so to the people of his church! There is reason for the pain that is in the heart of the Lord. There is a good reason why he would inflict pain on the ones he loves.

A. Why would the Lord act like a lion toward Ephraim which is the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

1. The answer is because of his sins. When the Israelites had turned their back on the Lord, he allowed them to experience all kinds of trouble. He slowly but surely withdrew his blessings. Rather than turn back to the Lord and repent of their sins and ask for help, they turned to their idol gods and they turned to earthly alliances. (4:6, 5:13) So now the Lord is going to "tear them like a lion" which meant the Assyrians were coming to destroy their nation and take the survivors into captivity. As people suffer the loss of blessings and the destruction of their nation, the Lord is looking for a change of heart.

2. The Lord wants them to see their guilt, “**and seek my face—in their misery they will earnestly seek me.**” He is looking for them to honestly confess their sins and seek his forgiveness. Did the people repent?

B. The people’s response begins in verse one of chapter six. “**Come, let us return to the Lord. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds.**”

1. They acknowledge that the Lord has brought disaster on them. They also want to “**seek his face.**” The Lord had commanded Aaron, in Numbers 6, to pronounce the blessing that the Lord’s face would shine on his people. He would be the source of their blessings. The people seem to understand that they need the Lord.

2. However, when they return to the Lord they do not confess their guilt. They do not say, “*Lord, we were wrong. We never should have turned to other gods or earthly helpers as a substitute for you. We have sinned and ask for your forgiveness.*” That would have been right. They apparently only turn to the Lord to make him happy. They hope that he will get rid of their earthly troubles. They don’t seem to be concerned about their spiritual relationship with the Lord.

C. There is a call to repentance every week in the *Confession of Sins* and/or in the Word that is read and proclaimed. How do we respond? Do we show up at church? Do we think about the words of our confession? Do we mean it? This is vital to the Lord!

If we aren’t serious we need to repent of shallow repentance. We can all repent of that happening. Even sincere people, once in a while, might mumble the confession without thinking. This is important to the Lord.

He condemns all sin at the cross in condemning Jesus. He forgives all sin in Jesus and he wants us to receive that forgiveness. If we aren’t showing up to church, if we aren’t confessing our sins seriously, we are in danger of being lost forever. The Lord would rather tear us up and wound us, than let us wander off to our eternal death.

When King David was torn up by his sins he said, “**Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.**” (Psalm 51:8) The Lord does tear us with a purpose. He wants us to repent and seek his forgiveness. Then we find out that the Lord is just as serious about healing.

2. He refreshes us with his grace. 6:2,3

The Israelites respond to the Lord's pronouncement. They wanted his blessing. The Lord had a different idea of blessing them. He wanted to refresh them with his grace.

A. In verse 2 it says, **“After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.”**

1. If the people of the Northern Kingdom are speaking they are talking about getting relief from their political entanglements and their economic troubles. They want the Lord to fix this world for them, they aren't interested in the next world or God's Heavenly Kingdom. Most Bible scholars take the verse in this sense, because in verse 4 the Lord blasts the people for their shallow repentance. They are only sorry because they are in trouble.

2. It is possible that these words are spoken by the prophet Hosea. He was a repentant believer. Even though he did not engage in the idolatry and gross sins with the people, he knew he was a sinner. He knew that the one thing that matter was having forgiveness of sins which had been promised in the coming Savior. He knew the Savior was coming to serve and save the people. Jesus said this himself in the Gospel reading, **“the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28)** At the cross at Calvary we see how much sin pains God. He was willing to let his Son suffer and die, that we might receive forgiveness of sins. This was important to Hosea. It should be important to you and me.

B. In verse three we have a reaction to the hope of God's grace. Again it depends who is speaking.

1. In the beginning of the verse 3 the speaker says, **“Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to acknowledge him.”** If it is the unrepentant people they are saying, “Let's make sure we go to church to impress the Lord so he blesses us.” They aren't acknowledging him as the one who forgives their sins. They aren't trusting that all good blessings come through the Savior. This is what Hosea would be thinking. *“I will pray to the Lord and worship him because he is my God and Savior and not because I am trying to get something out of him.”* If you look at the religions of the world and sadly many Christian churches, they do not approach God for forgiveness of sins. This is seen in the lack of Law and Gospel preaching and in a lack of emphasis on the Sacraments. People approach God as if it was the game show *“Let's Make a Deal.”* The deal is “we will show up for an hour and we expect you God to bless us by getting rid of our earthly problems.”

Meanwhile there is no real repentance. That is not you and me as we come to church. We take sin seriously and we take God's gracious gift of salvation in Jesus seriously.

2. This thinking will color the last words that are spoken at the end of verse 3, **“As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.”** When we go to the Lord for his spiritual blessings, we have his promise that he will forgive our sins. He will grow our faith. He will someday take us to heaven. His word is good as the sun rising. The farmers in Israel could count on rainfall in the fall to soften the ground and spring rains to enlarge the crops before the summer harvest. So we can count on the Lord to give us spiritual blessings and earthly blessings as he sees fit.

If a person tries to approach God without a repentant heart, there is no sure hope. Some of the people of Israel thought they could count on the Lord, like the sun and rains, because they were his people or because they simply put in time at “church.” They thought that right up to the time when the walls of their cities torn down and the invaders came in. When a person rejects God's blessing of salvation, one loses all blessings in the end.

Conclusion: This is not a mere Sunday School lesson today. It is not enough to think of God as this big, loving guy who is here to help us. Even with our children we talk about the seriousness of sin and the need for the Savior.

Today's lesson from Hosea reminds us that we need to take God seriously as we would a Lion at the zoo. The barriers and fences that are in place are there for a reason. When the game parks in Africa and the National Parks here in the states tell you to keep your windows and doors shut in the presence of lions and bears, they do so for a reason. Yet in 2015 one young American tourist did not think that it applied to her and the wild lion killed her.

So the Lord warns us and all Americans and all people to take him seriously. He takes sin seriously and he condemns it. He condemned it at the cross and he will condemn sinners on Judgement Day. That is why he tears us up now. He tears up our hearts and he sometimes tears the fabric of our lives, so that when we are wounded we will run to him. Do so with a repentant heart. Seek his forgiveness. The Lord is also a Lion who heals. He heals us in Jesus. For that we acknowledge him as our God and Savior. Amen.