

Undiscovered Losses

Hosea 7:8-11 -- "Ephraim, he hath mixed himself among the people; Ephraim is a cake not turned." "Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." "And the pride of Israel testifieth to his face: and they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him for all this." "Ephraim also is like a silly dove without heart: they call to Egypt, they go to Assyria."

I. THE AREA OF THE TEXT

-Our text comes from the book of Hosea. He was subjected to perhaps the greatest humiliation of all the prophets except for maybe Jeremiah. He had to love a woman who was wayward. A woman who served as a mirror for the nation to look to. Her actions, her delving into harlotry, served as a mirror to the Israelites who had pursued other gods.

-Israel was now beginning to grow old. She had started out great. The ten tribes to the north which was the fairest part of the land of Palestine. She had been inspired by the voices of Elijah and Elisha. But now her youthfulness was fleeing from her.

-Hosea was a man who lived ahead of his times. He had a very clear perception that Israel was adrift and heading for the rocks. Yet, regardless of the tone of his message, his words went unheeded.

-Hosea had the ability to use words to paint pictures. Just within the first few verses of chapter seven consider the pictures that Hosea uses:

- 1 -- A troop of robbers
- 4 -- An oven heated by the baker
- 4 -- The kneaded dough
- 6 -- The heart is like an oven
- 6 -- Sleeping bakers
- 7 -- Devoured judges and fallen kings
- 8 -- An unturned cake.

-But when we get to verse nine of chapter seven, Hosea illustrates the predicament: The dream is dying and her possibilities are becoming limited. Yet the worst of all is that her losses are undiscovered. She had no idea that there was something missing.

Hosea 7:9 -- *"Strangers have devoured his strength, and he knoweth it not: yea, gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not."*

-There are some losses that will reveal themselves at once. There losses will affect us immediately. However, there are some losses that only the test of time will reveal their absence. It is when the temptation comes calling to us that we soon realize those undiscovered losses.

-Time is a great healer *and* a great eroder. It dilutes commitment, blurs vision, undermines values, and destroys virtues.

-Gray hair comes over time. At the onset, there is no growth and there is no decay. Things are static. No progress, no regress.

- Life has reached a plateau.
- One lives in comfortable silence.
- No accomplishments but also no failures.
- Her strength had departed but she had not understood the reality of it yet.

-Consider what the Psalmist specifically wrote of the tribe of Ephraim:

Psalm 78:9-11 -- *"The children of Ephraim, being armed, and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle." "They kept not the covenant of God, and refused to walk in his law;" "And forgot his works, and his wonders that he had shewed them."*

-Armed and ready for the fight, yet when the fight came to them, they turned back in the day of battle. They forget the works of God in their lives.

II. LOST THINGS

-In the Book, there are a myriad of illustrations that give to us the essence of things that are lost and the effect that they had on the individuals.

A. The Immediate Loss

-In the Old Testament, the story of Samson illustrates the penalty of immediate loss. He dabbled with the Philistines and finally fell to the hand of Delilah. His great strength was an enigma to them. He could carry off gates, kill lions, destroy their fields with fire, but he could not control his own passions.

-The Spirit moved on him and great strength came. But the key to his strength was his Nazarite vow. A vow that kept him from strong drink and from cutting his hair. Yet, when Delilah weaseled the secret out of him, his loss was immediate.

***Judges 16:18-21** -- "And when Delilah saw that he had told her all his heart, she sent and called for the lords of the Philistines, saying, Come up this once, for he hath shewed me all his heart. Then the lords of the Philistines came up unto her, and brought money in their hand." "And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head; and she began to afflict him, and his strength went from him." "And she said, The Philistines be upon thee, Samson. And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him." "But the Philistines took him, and put out his eyes, and brought him down to Gaza, and bound him with fetters of brass; and he did grind in the prison house."*

-When the time to fight came, he could not do so because of the departure of his strength. The element of power had forsaken him in his greatest hour of need. He lost his eyes, he was bound in chains, and was sent to grind corn.

-All was lost. . . *"And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him." (Judges 16:20).*

-Perhaps some of the saddest words in Scripture, it was an immediate loss. His sleep had robbed him of the capacity to comprehend his own weakness.

-No man, regardless of his status in the Kingdom of God is invincible. There has to be that continual striving with God through prayer and fasting and through personal devotion.

B. The Gradual Loss

-There are some losses that are only understood over the course of time. That is the great test of every man, we must stand the test of time. God's great method of testing is not trial or tribulation but rather it is time. If I can just be faithful over time, then all will be well with my soul.

-Such is the case with Mary and Joseph.

***Luke 2:41-46** -- "Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover." "And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast." "And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." "But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance." "And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him." "And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions."*

-It took a day's journey for them to discover that Jesus was not with them. There are some things that only come to light under the duress of trial. When the trials began to weigh in on our lives, oftentimes it is then that we find out that deterioration has occurred.

- Love has been replaced by anger.
- Joy has been substituted with grief.
- Peace has lost out to discontentment.
- Mercy has been replaced by swift justice.
- Faith has opted for doubt.
- Temperance has given way to self-will.

-Yet none of this was known until the circumstances of the trial had been embraced.

-There are a number of spiritual activities that we often attempt to accomplish without the presence of an abiding Christ. We use organizational skills, personal talent, or even the new methods of technology to gain a foothold toward revival. It is then that after all of the labor, we discover that the Christ is not with us.

-A sad day. . . . Rushing toward the battle, initiating contact with the enemy only to discover that a important factor of the heart, courage, was missing.

III. WHAT JESUS HAD TO SAY ABOUT LOST THINGS

-When we began to look to the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, He told us about lost things:

- Lost sheep -- Matt. 10:6; 15:24
- Lost coins -- Luke 15:9
- Lost men -- Luke 15:24

-Yet there is one thing that He spoke of that illustrates exactly the deterioration of the soul.

Matthew 5:13 -- *"Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men."*

-Jesus spoke of the salt that had lost its savor.

- It had the same weight.
- It had the same character.
- It had the same appearance.
- But the taste was gone.

-Such salt is good for nothing. Our lives are often the same way. We look the same, we walk the same, we act the same, but the fire has left our eyes. Our great hopes of doing something for God have vanished. Disappointment has robbed us of our intensity. Disillusionment has caused us to build walls.

-Yet the gray hair does not appear overnight. It is a gradual day by day occurrence. We go gradually down the path.

C. S. Lewis -- *The safest road to hell is the gradual one--the gentle slope, the soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.*

A. How Does the Salt Lose It's Savor?

-There are things that contribute to our deteriorations.

1. An increasing association with the world.

-When we began to associate with the world our failures about but steps away. There is Scripture that we cannot get around.

1 John 2:15-17 -- *"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." "And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."*

2 Corinthians 6:16-17 -- *"And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you,"*

2. A Toleration of Partial Views of Doctrine

-One must understand that Acts 2:38 is not to debate rather it is to save. Yet there comes the great crossroads in the life of one who will waffle concerning New Testament salvation. The fulfillment of John 3:3-5 came on the Day of Pentecost.

-There is but one way to be saved and that is by the obedience to Acts 2:38. The Holy Ghost is not a second work of grace but rather it is the way to heaven.

3. Inattention To Our Own Spiritual Condition

-Apostasy begins in the place of prayer. When a man starts neglecting his place of prayer, he is straying from the white light that reveals the secret faults. When he gets out of that place that God can examine the soul, again there is a nail that is coming loose.

IV. CONCLUSION – MY KINGDOM FOR A HORSE

William Shakespeare immortalized the Battle of Bosworth with the words, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

King Richard the Third was preparing for the fight of his life. An army led by Henry, Earl of Richmond, was marching against him. The contest would determine who would rule England.

The morning of the battle, Richard sent a groom to make sure his favorite horse was ready.

"Shoe him quickly," the groom told the blacksmith. "The king wishes to ride at the head of his troops."

"You'll have to wait," the blacksmith answered. "I've shod the king's whole army the last few days, and now I've got to get more iron."

"I can't wait," the groom shouted impatiently. "The king's enemies are advancing right now and we must meet them on the field. Make do with what you have."

So the blacksmith bent to the task. From a bar of iron he made four horseshoes. He hammered and shaped them and fitted them to the horse's feet. Then he began to nail them on. But after he had fastened three shoes, he found he did not have enough nails for the fourth.

"I need one or two more nails," he said, "and it will take some time to hammer them out."

"I told you I can't wait," the groom said impatiently. "I hear the trumpets now. Can't you just use what you've got?"

"I can put a shoe on, but it won't be as secure as the others."

"Will it hold?" asked the groom. "It should," answered the blacksmith, "but I can't be certain."

"Well, then, just nail it on," the groom cried. "And hurry, or King Richard will be angry with us both."

The armies clashed, and King Richard was in the thick of the battle. He rode up and down the field, cheering his men and fighting his foes. "Press forward! Press forward!" he yelled, urging his troops toward Henry's lines.

Far away, at the other side of the field, he saw some of his men falling back. If the others saw them, they too might retreat. So Richard spurred his horse and galloped toward the broken line, calling on his soldiers to turn and fight.

He was barely across the field when one of the horse's shoes flew off. The horse stumbled and fell, and King Richard was thrown to the ground. Before the King could grab the reins, the frightened animal rose and galloped away. Richard looked around him. He saw that his troops were turning and running, and Henry's troops were closing around him. He waved his sword in the air. "A horse! A horse!" he shouted. "A horse! My kingdom for a horse!"

But there was no horse for him. His army had fallen to pieces, and his troops were busy trying to save themselves. A moment later, Henry's soldiers were upon Richard, and the battle was over.

-The theme of this story is that little duties neglected bring great downfalls. The undiscovered losses in the end will cause a man's soul to fall.

-In the Song of Solomon (2:15), Solomon informs us that it is the little foxes that spoil the vine. It is those small things that destroy the life.

-The large foxes will go after the fruit that is on the vine, but the little foxes destroy the vine. Though some damage may be done by the big fox, one may still have an opportunity to bear fruit. But the damage that is done by the little foxes ruins any opportunity of a future crop.

-The little foxes:

- A critical spirit.
- An offended spirit.
- A discouraged spirit.
- A spirit of jealousy and envy.
- A spirit of worldliness.

-Little foxes hide behind the vines. You can see the big foxes but it is the small ones that destroy.

-In this room, there are:

- Saints who have lost their fire.
- Young people who have drifted from commitments.
- New converts who are beginning to feel the shifting sands under their feet.
- Even preachers who have lost their inspiration.

-There are areas in your life that have been found wanting for quite some time. The devil loves to have you in the position. Because when you are in that region, you will never be what God wants you to be.