

Sunday School Lesson



By Bessie Wilbon

INTRODUCTION

It may seem strange to go back 700 years to the time of the prophet Hosea after being lifted by the glorious message of the resurrection. This was a gloomy time for the prophet of God, a time of rampant evil and dark foreboding. "The Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land."

How is that dark time connected with the glory of the resurrection? The link is love, the infinite love of the Heavenly Father.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Hosea related his messages from God. His teaching must have continued for at least 30 years; maybe twice that long. Since Hosea's message was mostly to the Northern Kingdom, it may seem strange that he dated it by the reigns of the Kings of Judah, the Southern Kingdom. The reason for this may be that the government of the Northern Kingdom had become too weak and changeable to be used in establishing dates. It was about 721 BC when the Northern Kingdom came to its end. In the years before that end, Hosea portrayed the love of God and His sorrow over the coming disaster.

THE LESSON

"When the Lord first spoke to Israel through Hosea, he said to Hosea, 'Go and get married, your wife will be unfaithful, and your children will be just like her. In the same way my people have left me and become unfaithful.' So Hosea married a woman named Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. After the birth of their first child, a son, the Lord said to Hosea, 'Name him 'Jezreel,' because it will not be long before I punish the King of Israel for the murders that his ancestor Jehu committed at Jezreel. I am going to put an end to Jehu's dynasty. And in Jezreel Valley I will at that time destroy Israel's military power.' Gomer had a second child - this time it was a girl. The Lord said to Hosea, 'Name her 'Unloved,' because I will no longer show love to the people of Israel or forgive them. But to the people of Judah I will show love. I the Lord their God, will save them, but I will not do it by war -- with swords or bows and arrows or with horses and horsemen.' After Gomer had weaned her daughter, she became pregnant again and had another son. The Lord said to Hosea, 'Name him 'Not-My-People,' because the people of Israel are not my people, and I am not their God. The people of Israel will become like the sand of the sea, more than can be counted or measured. Now God says to them, 'You are not my people,' but the day is coming when he will say to them, 'You are the children of a living God!' The people of Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited. They will choose for themselves a single leader, and once again they will grow and prosper in their land. Yes, the day of Jezreel will be a great day,' (Hosea 1:2-11).

Jezreel was a town in Israel, and its name was given also to an adjacent valley. The first part of that strange name is a form of the Hebrew verb that means scatter. Usually it is used of scattering seed, so it is properly translated sow or plant. The ending of the name is El, which means God. Thus the name God sows, God plants, or God scatters. Perhaps it was given to Jezreel, a pleasant mountain town, to indicate that God had planted it there.

"Go and get married; your wife will be unfaithful, and your children will be just like her." The demands have long puzzled many and there are several ways of understanding it.

First, some take it to mean that Hosea was ordered to marry a prostitute and take for his own the children who had resulted from her prostitution. This union would represent the relationship between God and Israel. Israel is pictured as married to God. All her departing from Him, all her idolatry is adultery.

Second, some suggest that Hosea's wife was pure when he married her, but that she later became an adulteress and a prostitute.

Third, some think a wife of whoredom is to be taken figuratively, meaning that the woman was a worshipper of idols, a spiritual prostitute, but physically pure. But if God would not let His prophet marry a woman who was physically defiled, would He tell him to marry one who was spiritually defiled?

Whatever the meaning, this verse does tell us that the land had sinned greatly in turning away from God.

Prophets of God had a hard time in decadent Israel. Sin was everywhere, and the prophets had to declare God's displeasure. But the people had refused to listen; or worse, they punished the prophets for telling the truth. Hosea's warning came straight from God. The doom he foretold was sure, and it was coming in "a little while." Still the people received the warning much as people of our day receive the many warnings they hear. They listened with a laugh, or a sneer, or with no reaction at all.

The story of Hosea and his family is ancient, but that is not all it is. (Read the book of Hosea.)

What do we learn from Hosea and his children with the strange names?

A) We learn that sinners are without excuse, but not necessarily without hope.

B) We learn that sinners who ignore God and persist in sin can expect sure punishment.

C) We learn that God loves His sinful people and is reluctant to give them up.

1.) He gives them ample warning.

2.) He gives them time to change.

3.) He will take them back if they change.

D) We know that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son. Don't we love Him enough to give up the pleasures of sin?

Lord, may we be wise enough to see our sins and humble enough to confess them, that we may leave them behind and rejoice in Your gracious forgiveness through Jesus. Amen.

The Church Reaching Out To Youth

By Dr. William Lee Jr.

You have often heard it said regarding the youth of our churches: "They are the church of tomorrow." But I contend that they have a place in church today.

At a time when the church is losing so many youth to the streets and other religious movements, it is time for the traditional church to take a good look at this problem and to seek a solution to the problem.

It is a fact that many of our youth tend to stop attending Church Sunday School after they reach a certain age and are no longer under the demands of the parents - who, over the years, have seen to it that they were in the back seat on the way to church with them every Sunday morning.

Many times when our youth finish high school and go off to college, a lot of them look at the church where they grew up and can no longer relate; therefore, they never return to their childhood love to return a helping hand to aid the church in becoming better and especially to lend a helping hand to the youth who are still struggling for a place of recognition that will make them feel that they belong.

At a time when there are more fine, young, black men in the prison system of North Carolina between the ages of 18-24 than are in all of the colleges and universities of the state and more of our young black teenage females are having babies and getting on welfare - it is time that the church put forth a special effort to find a solution that will address these problems.

I feel that if our youth commit themselves to the membership of the church and can fit into the school system, then they ought to be given as much attention in the church as possible. There are youth in our schools in the National Honor Society filled with talents from singing, playing musical instruments, good speaking, and have unique abilities for playing sports, etc. The church needs to take notice and seek to involve them in church activities that will give them a place of honor where their spiritual needs can be met.

Out of the many young people who have left our Charlotte-Mecklenburg communities and made well in sports and other fields, I have yet to hear one say what the church did in helping them to achieve.

When our youth are in search of what they consider to be the mis-

VIEW FROM THE PULPIT



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ing link, it is time that the church seek in helping them to find it. The way they are going about the search and the solution to their emptiness in life will only end up in disorder, for they seek to find it through drugs, sex and crime -- and this is not the solution.

The church not only should give the youth a special space and role in the Sunday School, Worship, programs and means of improvements, but people of all ages within the church ought to form a network of counseling. So often older people have concluded that they can no longer relate to the young. They feel that the generation gap has divided them so badly that they can no longer speak the language, walk the walk or talk the talk. We must note the fact today that so many of our youth are reaching out and crying out for help and they are willing to listen and to take part in that which will give some lasting hope and satisfaction. Church Consultant Lyle Schaller reported recently that a pastor asked his youth group members to imagine the face of an adult at their high school whom they felt most comfortable telling their problems to: 11 kids named people in their 30s, eight in their 40s, two in their 20s, three in their 50s, and five in their 60s.

In most churches you will find that the people selected to work with the youth are usually in their 20s, but from the above survey we see that youth will trust, listen and relate to all ages. Those in the 20s are still closer to their teenage days and can better understand teenagers regarding fads, music preference, thought patterns, language and the things that turn them on. When this age group deals with the youth they should strive to model a christian attitude toward common interests, but not



Rev. William Lee

to go overboard. Whatever age you may be dealing with the teen, you must become "just one of the kids". It is important to reflect the age difference and how that affects your perspective.

The thrilling 30s seem to be the age group that teenagers tend to talk with the most. They feel that this age group is still young enough to be like them in many

ways, yet at the same time they see a maturity that gives them a sense of trust and confidence. Usually, this age group has things together. They have laid the foundation for the future and many times if the foundation is good and well laid -- teenagers would like to follow their method in achieving.

Those in the 30s tend to show maturity, but never demand the same maturity from the teens. Adults in their 40s establish easy friendships with teens and can often relate to them better than their own parents. Teens recognize those in their 50s as a strong arm to lean on because these adults have seen their own children grow, may be raising grandchildren, and now have the hind sight of having been parents and teenagers. Finally, there are the teenagers who just love those in their 60s. This age group cannot only be a blessing to the young, but the association for the young with them can be very rewarding.

The church can and should play a major role in giving the youth a place in the ongoing church program now - not tomorrow.

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Prophet's Column

Grace In The Spring

By J. M. Little

As the saying goes: "SPRING HAS SPRUNG." The trees, flowers, grasses, etc., that were killed in the winter by the cold, wintry blasts are being resurrected now. And how beautiful is the handiwork of the Lord, in His resurrection of His earthy creation. The coming and passing of the seasons also testify of the faithfulness of God. God promised Noah that there would be the coming and passing of the seasons, (Gen. 8:22). Spring testifies of the resurrection of Christ, and also the resurrection of a dead sinner. Yes, every sinner by nature is dead in trespasses and sins, (Eph. 2:1).

Man is a trinity: body, soul, and spirit. In the fall, man died, spiritually. Adam stood for us all, so when he died spiritually there in the Garden of Eden, we all died, (Rom. 5:12). Man did not evolve as the infidel scientists teach; man desolved. Every sinner is dead and polluted in his own blood, but God in His great love sends the Holy Spirit to breathe on that dead sinner and He says, "Live." And that sinner is made alive in Christ, (Ez. 16:6, Aph. 2:1).

Now the question I am asking you is "Have you been made alive in Christ?" Just as the warm winds of spring blew across the fields and made the plants spring up, new buds are seen, then the blossoms, and new blades of grass spring forth. So it is in grace. The blessed Holy Spirit breathes on dead sinners, awakening them to their lost condition. And then you see yourself in the face of the glory of God, that is, you are far from God, condemned to die and justly so. I am talking about the resurrection of a dead sinner under Holy Spirit conviction, (John 16:7-11).

You may have lived in religion and in your church all your life. You thought you were saved, now under the awakening power of the Holy Spirit, you see that you are lost. You were lost all the days of your religious profession; but didn't know it. I remember one time when I was under conviction I made this statement to a godly

soul: "It seems the gulf becomes wider." And she replied, "It has been there all the time but you didn't know it." My friends, I realize that it is not a pleasant thing to be awakened to your lost condition, seeing that you are out of Christ. But let me hasten to say this: it is a blessed and most gracious thing to be awakened to your lost condition now in time. What if you had gone out into eternity thinking that you were saved and you were not? It would have been the loss of your poor soul in Hell.

As in nature, some flowers and grasses spring up immediately, so it is in grace. Some sinners are awakened and have a greater knowledge of their awful, ruined condition than others. Some are very slothful, as was Lot in leaving Sodom, (Gen. 19). Some are hungering more after Christ, while others who say they are lost are dilly-dallying by the wayside with the thought: "If I belong to the Lord He is going to get me, so I'll go and on enjoy myself, now." What a tragedy!

I know of such a soul who took that attitude several years ago; she is still lost today. Some of you here told me several years ago that you knew you were lost. And after all these years you all are still not saved! What is the trouble, my friends? You said you knew you were lost, but you have gone away backwards. To what? What was there for you to turn back to?

You were warned not to trifle with your convictions, and I know some of you had impressions, but now you are hardened.

A sinner's resurrection to new life in Christ begins with Christ, (Eph. 2:4-5). The Lord Jesus Christ always takes the initiative for a sinner's salvation. You have heard all your life, "If you make one step, God makes two." There is no such doctrine as that taught in God's Word! I know I'm cutting across your grain!

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