

“Judge & Redeemer”

<u>Occasion</u>	Morning Service at Therfield Chapel
<u>Day, Date & Time</u>	Sunday 17 December 2006 at 10:30
<u>Basis</u>	Hosea 13:1 – 14:9
<u>Reading</u>	Hosea 13:1-6, 10-14b, 14:1-9
<u>Songs</u>	from Bethlehem Carol sheet: 13, 4, 23, 10, 16
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Do you like history?

Or was it one of your worst subjects at school?

When I was at school, I hated it. -

learning all those dates, and Kings and Queens,

It seemed to me the ultimate boredom,

though I do remember a couple of dates,

such as 1066 for the Battle of Hastings

and 1666 for the Great Fire of London.

I also remember significant details of the Feudal System,

instigated, we were taught, by William the Conqueror,

though I believe this view is now in dispute.

In my youth, history seemed irrelevant and of little consequence.

Yet as I have grown older,

I have come to see that history

can not only explain and illuminate our current situation,

but it is a great teacher.

Yet few, if any of us, actually ever learn from history

and change our lives accordingly.

It seems to me that the profundity of the statement:

“You are what you have been becoming”

not only applies to individuals,

but to nations too.

We are what our history makes us.

That does not of course excuse us from any responsibility for our present state,
rather the very opposite,

but it does help us to see why we are where we are today

and it can provide us with the insights to effect change for the better.

As I look back across my short life,
I can observe some of the changes that have taken place
and am able to suggest reasons why we are where we are.

For instance,
I well remember the sixties,
with its free love,
flower power,
and rejection of restraint and authority at all levels,
though admittedly,
I was somewhat cocooned by my strictly conservative Christian upbringing.

It was the age when Freud’s ideas became popularised,
children were no longer disciplined or trained by their parents
and free expression became the order of the day.

About the same time the age of industrialism went into decline,
to be replaced by the age of technology.
As the richer nations of the world began to re-build themselves after the
second world war,
the world of business and industry began to change.

World competition began to be felt as never before
and in response, the whole concept behind business began to change.
The idea that business was a tool to support industry and trade
was turned on its head
such that industry and trade were seen as merely the supporters of business
and the term ‘Cash is King’ was coined.

In my view,
this shift in thinking has, together with the loss of the Christian consensus,
led to the dehumanisation of the work-force
that many experience in the work-place today.

And over-riding all of this,
the Christian values on which this nation was built
were thrown away almost overnight
as the older generation passed away.

From all of this has grown a secularised,
money obsessed,
self-centred society,
in which crime is on the increase,
prison populations are exploding,
people are exploiting others
and being exploited by others through greed,
more and more people are suffering depression,
families are breaking up as fast as they are being created,
and society seems to have lost its way.

I don’t ask you to agree with my analysis,
but what I do ask is that you think seriously about your role

in this ever-changing dysfunctional society.

Hosea was a prophet in the northern state of Israel around seven hundred and fifty years before the birth of Christ,
and this morning we are looking at the final words of his book
which has been translated and preserved for us down the ages.

Israel had a history,
a history which is vitally important if we are to understand what the prophet has to say,
and I want to take a quick look at that history
and put these two chapters in the context of the book as a whole.

All of you will have heard the story of David and Goliath
and most will know that David became Israel’s greatest King,
ruling a significant area on the western bank of the Mediterranean sea
in an area which we now call the Middle East.

He ruled all of what is now Israel and Palestine,
from the borders of Egypt in the south right up to include modern day
Lebanon in the north
and substantial slices of both Jordan and Syria.

David was a good king
and though he failed like all men,
he followed and worshipped God all of his life,
and succeeded in uniting the twelve tribes of Israel into one nation.

Solomon his son was also a good king in parts
and is still famous for his wisdom
and the visit of the Queen of Sheba to his court.

He enlarged his empire and became one of the richest kings of his time,
but at considerable cost.

The harsh regime he imposed on his own people
and the huge tribute he extracted from his vassal states
caused much suffering among the people
so that when he died,
rebellion was in the air.

Furthermore,
he married foreign women and created a huge harem of seven hundred wives
and three hundred concubines
and these wives caused him to worship other gods (idols)
in addition to the One True God,
which, as you know, was strictly forbidden by God.

Solomon was succeeded by his son Rehoboam.

But when Rehoboam went up for his coronation,
an old enemy of his Father’s,
a man called Jeroboam,

pleaded for an easier life for the people of Israel,
and that the harsh regime of his father be softened.

But Rehoboam, influenced by the young men of his court,
rejected their plea
and promised them even harsher treatment than they had had before.

As a result,
Jeroboam led a revolt of the ten northern tribes
and only Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Solomon’s son.
And so the Kingdom was split
and the northern tribes became known as ‘Israel’
and the southern tribes as ‘Judah’.

But it was what Jeroboam did next which caused the decline of Israel,
into which Hosea prophesied.

Fearful that the people would still go up to Jerusalem to worship God,
Jeroboam made false gods, golden calves (idols),
and set them in the cities of Bethel and Dan as objects of worship.

Read: [I Kings 12:28-31 and 13:34](#)

And it was this sin, which set Israel on the road to destruction.
Jeroboam was succeeded by nineteen kings over two hundred years, (approximately),
and not one of them ever succeeded in reversing this great sin of
Jeroboam I.

And so it is this history of rebellion against God that the prophet Hosea addresses.

In the first 3 chapters,
Hosea acts out
in his own domestic and family life
a parable which shows us
and the people of his time
how God sees it.

Under God’s instruction,
Hosea marries a prostitute,
by the name of Gomer.
She bears him three children,
but later is unfaithful and goes off with another man.
Then God tells Hosea to love her again
and buy her back,
which he does!

This real-life story is a cameo of the unfaithfulness of the people of God.
Initially,
God had taken his rebellious people under his wing and blessed them.
They had known the security and prosperity
that accompanied a walk with God.

But since Jeroboam’s sin
the people had been unfaithful to God

and worshipped other gods
who were artificial gods.
And God sees this as spiritual adultery.
She, Israel, had left her true husband, God,
and flirted and gone after other gods,
who were not her real husband.

I think it is worth saying here that adultery is repugnant to God.
In the beginning he decreed
that a man should leave his father & mother
and cleave to his wife.
In the Ten Commandments, he said, “Thou shalt not commit adultery”
The idea that the sacred marriage bond is betrayed by one of the partners
transferring their love and commitment to another,
is abhorrent to God.
Yet in our present society it is commonplace.

And so God sees the defection of his people to other gods
in the same way.
Yet God loved his people so much
that he was prepared to pay the price of their restoration.
And, of course, we see that finally fulfilled in Christ.

The next eight chapters of Hosea’s prophesy comprise repeated accusations,
repeated calls for repentance
and repeated offers of mercy by God
if only they will turn from their false gods and serve Him again.

But it seems that the message is unheeded.

So when we get to today’s portion we find that the die is cast.
Chapter 12 has spelled out Israel’s sins
and Chapter 13 will spell out God’s judgement.

Often when we read the New Testament,
we are so absorbed in Jesus’ miracles,
his death and resurrection
and the growth of the church,
that we miss Jesus’ anger at sin.
But read the Old Testament
and the wrath of God becomes apparent.

Then when we read the New Testament again,
we read it with fresh eyes:
We *see* Jesus’ anger with the sinfulness of the people;
We hear his scathing attacks on the sinful,
but self righteous Pharisees;
We feel his sorrow that they still refuse to believe.
Down the centuries they had failed to heed the warnings of the prophets,
and even when God sent his own Son,
they rejected him and killed him.

So here in Hosea, God spells out his condemnation of his people.

Look at the opening verses of Chapter 13. **(Read 13:1-3)**

Because of their repeated sin, and because they refused his call to repentance, they would disappear.

They had asked for a king,
and God had given them kings,
but where were they now? **(Hosea 13:9-11)**
They had had six kings in the last 25 years,
most of them assassinated by power-hungry upstarts.
But none of them had led them back to God.

The powerful nations round about them were ready to pounce on them
and devour them **(Hosea 13:14c-16)**

Yet look again at verse 14: **(Read Hosea 13:14 a-b)**
God is always ready to forgive and save.
And what a prophecy?
Clearly looking forward to the time when the Son of God himself
would pay the ransom price
for all those who turn to God and repent.

And this is the substance of verse 2 of chapter 14. **(Read Hosea 14:2)**

God wills them to come to their senses.
To ask for forgiveness.
To admit that their reliance on foreign alliances will not work.
To see that their home-made gods cannot save them.

And in return, He says, “I will heal their waywardness and love them freely” **(Hosea 14:4)**
Once again,
their ‘splendour will be like an olive tree’ **(Hosea 14:6)**
and they will ‘blossom like a vine’. **(Hosea 14:7)**

And so the prophet closes his oracle with some searching questions,
And some profound observations. **(Read Hosea 14:9)**

So who is wise?
The one who is wise will look at the evidence,
look at the history,
will use his judgement and sound sense
and see that to rebel against God is the way to ruin.
To put some other object of worship in his place
is to invite his wrath and lose his favour.

And the one who is discerning will look at the history

As we continue to remember the birth of Jesus
and celebrate Christmas over the next few days,
may each of us pay homage to the One who grew to be our Saviour,
and worship at his feet.

Amen.

Paul Rydon –
17 December 2006 >