

God's Desire Fulfilled

2nd Sun. after Pentecost – 06/11/23 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Hosea 5:15-6:6 Pastor Keith Besel

6:6, [Yahweh says,] **“For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”**

Introduction

- ⊗ Hosea is a book of the Bible written by a prophet whose personal life God directed so that it would be a living example; an allegory of the message that God called him to proclaim to the people of his day.
 - You see, Hosea preached to a group of people who were so self-centered that even as they claimed to follow and believe in Yahweh, they completely missed the mark. They were diligent to follow the physical acts of God's laws; offering sacrifices and engaging in the ceremony of worship, for example, but when it came to actually living with others; showing love and kindness, and serving God, they refused. (8:1–2; 8:13; 10:12–13)
 - And throughout their hypocritical actions they still had the gall to claim and expect God to show them patience and kindness. They took advantage of His generosity and love by making false oaths, lying, murdering, stealing, and living in blatant adultery (4:2).
 - Imagine the challenge Hosea faced, trying to follow God's charge; issuing many rebukes and warnings in God's name to His people about their lack of trust in God and their immoral behavior. Hosea issued a constant invitation; an urging for these people to return to God in repentance and find Him with His open arms; welcoming them unto Himself as their forgiving lover.
- ⊗ In fact, so that these people would not miss how immense and unchanging God's love is, God directed and used Hosea's own personal life to display God's steadfast love in human flesh and blood. (chpts. 1–3)
 - God told Hosea in chapter 1:2, “Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking Yahweh”. So Hosea married Gomer, whose unfaithfulness to him was known by all the people. Yet Hosea remained faithful in loving Gomer all the same. In this way, Hosea gave the people a picture of God's faithfulness to them, even as they continuously turned away from Him to the enticements and desires of the world and their sin.
 - God was clear though, His unending love for the people did not mean that their sin; that Gomer's sin was “no big deal”. It was disastrous. It was despicable, still deserving of worldly consequences, which is why God commanded Hosea to name two of Gomer's children with the worst names ever. The daughter was named, “No Mercy” (1:6) and the son, “Not My People” (1:9).
- ⊗ In all of this then, Hosea preached a stern message against sin, but he also extended an intense picture of God's hurting love and desire for His children. You see, ours is not an inanimate god of wood or stone or metal; a god without feelings or thoughts. No, we worship and confess the one and only God who created us in love; who deeply desires an intimate, daily and ongoing relationship with His people. Yes, His love is such that He desires to cleanse and bind up the wounds of Israel and all of His people; to make us faithful, loyal, and pure once again.
 - I hear so many people ask the age-old question, “What does God want from me?” The answer is really quite simple according to Yahweh Himself in chapter 6:6 of our text today, “I desire steadfast love.” Really? Is that all? What about sacrifices, what about offerings, what about some other public way of proving our worth? God says, “I desire steadfast love and not

sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (6:6). That’s it! That’s all! Piece of cake! No problem!

I. First Problem: Keep the Law God desires.

✘ Except there are problems; numerous problems that come up when we hear that God’s first and greatest desire of us is that we have “steadfast love” toward Him and toward all people.

✘ Let’s first understand what is meant by this concept of “steadfast love”. In the original Hebrew the word that God uses is (חֶסֶד) “ḥesed”. When the Bible speaks of us showing “ḥesed” it includes showing kindness and mercy to others, especially to those who are lowly, needy and miserable. But it is also used to describe the loyalty and unflinching love that God expects and desires that we have toward Him.

→ And therein lies our first big problem. Since God desires that we be merciful; that our hearts and motives would always be pure, it is not only the people of Israel in Hosea’s day that are in trouble, but every last one of us as well. As He shows in verse four, He is not pleased! He tells the people, “Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.” Mankind’s love is, in fact, the opposite of steadfast and unflinching toward God and toward our neighbors.

→ We are like a little child on Christmas or on a Birthday opening up gift after gift. We’ve all seen this; we all done it. The child opens up the gift that the parents hope will give the child that over-the-top joy that the child will remember for years – the thrill of a boy’s first fishing rod; the feeling of a daughter receiving her new Raggedy Ann doll, only to have the gift barely glanced at and quickly tossed aside for the next brightly wrapped box; so quick that the forced “thank you” leaves the air of insincerity hanging there over the whole situation.

✘ Over 700 years later than Hosea, at the time of Jesus, the Pharisees had truly mastered the fine art of defining God’s Law in narrow, outward terms that made it appear as though they kept the Law. The Law says, “Do not murder”; “Do not commit adultery” and they would say, “I have not shed anyone’s blood”; “I haven’t had relations with anyone but my spouse”. I am innocent. I have kept the Law.” God says to offer sacrifices as an outward display of the inward, entire-life sacrifice of oneself before God and they would offer sacrifices at the temple and then walk away smugly saying, “See, I have kept the Law.”

→ But Jesus defines God’s Law so broadly, with such a sweeping inward standard that it is impossible for anyone to escape. He says, “If you have hated anyone in your heart, you are guilty of murder” (Mat. 5:21-22), and “everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent” has already committed adultery (Mat. 5:28). And in Psalm 51:17 we are told that “the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise”.

→ So we see clearly that every one of us has a problem meeting God’s desire for us every day.

II. Second problem: Distinctions in the Law.

✘ The second problem we face is when we understand how God’s Law shows us what is good and what is the best way to live.

→ When Jesus said that hating our brother makes us guilty of the sin of murder, we need to be clear. He is not saying that hating someone in your heart has the same earthly consequences as if we were to actually wring his neck. But neither is He saying that the Law is unimportant since we know that Jesus has paid for all sin on the cross. He is not even saying that all sins have the same effect or pose the same danger for our faith.

→ Here on earth some sins are worse than others. Some sins, such as physical murder and adultery, are more destructive in our lives and vocations than other sins. They are certainly worse if they are acted out than if they are merely felt in our hearts. Some sins, particularly sins

against the first three commandments, are more destructive and dangerous to faith because those are sins directed specifically toward God.

→ But even though that is the case, all sins, whether we've carried them out or not, still make us guilty before God. And every single sin, no matter the earthly consequences, have the same eternal consequence, for Romans 3:23 declares, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

→ That means that all sinners deserve damnation. Jesus' point is not that there is no distinction among sins, but that all men and women are guilty. We cannot escape. Even if we have kept the Law in an outward manner, we have all broken it in our hearts. He desires "hesed", steadfast love, not sacrifice. Jesus is abundantly clear in Matthew 5:48, "You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

- ✘ And we see this expectation even with the Law's distinctions in Jesus' parable of the man with a log in his eye who tries to remove a speck from his brother's eye. No one should dare to think that he has kept the Law and is without sin. But neither does Jesus allow us to ignore any specks in the eyes of our brothers. All sins – big and small – are problematic. Jesus told the Pharisees and us in our Gospel Reading today, "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. (Mat. 9:13). Clearly, He calls us Christians to a higher standard.

III. Third problem: The Law's frustration.

- ✘ Which leads us to the third problem: The Law is impossible. We cannot meet it! And in some ways, we are not even meant to meet it. Hosea preaches the Law to God's people not simply to show us what is good or what God wants, but also to show us our need; to show us that we cannot save ourselves; that we are all in desperate need of a Savior

→ That's what God says in chapter 5:15, "I will return again to My place" (i.e. heaven), "until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face, and in their distress earnestly seek Me."

→ This is what Hosea wants you and me to see as well, friends. That not only are we all guilty of sin, but equally – and maybe even more importantly, because of our guilt, we can never, ever meet God's desire for us on our own.

- ✘ Which means our salvation; our rescue; our ability to meet God's desire for us must come from outside of ourselves – 100%! If we are to be saved and have a steadfast love toward God, then we need a Savior.

IV. Solution: Jesus fulfills the Law for us.

- ✘ Thankfully, although we've identified many problems for us here, there is one and only one solution; a solution where God meets His own desire in Jesus, the Messiah.

- ✘ We talked about the Hebrew word "hesed" in the Bible when it applies to mankind as we see it in verse six where God says, "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice."

→ But "hesed" is used in Scripture far more often in connection to God; to describe His outlook toward us. When it is used with God, everything is ramped up exponentially, as it refers to His unconditional lovingkindness and mercy toward us as hopeless sinners in such a way that it emphasizes His unfailing; His unchanging love for us so that the hopelessness of our sin is now actually seen to be filled with great hope after all.

→ For example, Psalm 138:8 says, "Yahweh will fulfill His purpose for me; Your steadfast love ("hesed"), O Yahweh, endures forever."

→ And in Psalm 89:29-36, God speaks of His promises to King David saying, "I will establish his offspring forever and his throne as the days of the heavens."³⁰ If his children forsake my law and

do not walk according to my rules, ³¹ if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, ³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with stripes, ³³ but I will not remove from him My steadfast love (“hesed”) or be false to My faithfulness. ³⁴ I will not violate My covenant or alter the word that went forth from My lips. ³⁵ Once for all I have sworn by My holiness; I will not lie to David. ³⁶ His offspring shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before Me.”

✘ God’s promise right there tells us that Yahweh’s desire of steadfast love (“hesed”) from us is both promised and fully met in Jesus and Jesus alone!

→ For Jesus has kept the Law without fail in our place. Where we hate, He has not. Neither did He lust, lie, cheat, misuse God’s name, dishonor authority, steal or covet ... not once! He kept God’s Law externally and internally to perfection. His “steadfast love” (“hesed”) toward the Father has now been given to us as our own.

→ And because of that, God through Jesus, is unfailing and unchanging in His lovingkindness (“hesed”) to us so that He does not hold our sins against us. He forgives us because Jesus’ death on the cross has taken our sins and cast them into the deepest “depths of the sea” (Micah 7:19).

Conclusion

✘ Our problem is real. Our problem is damning. But thanks be to God, our problem is solved. His desire of us is “steadfast love” and Jesus our Savior has delivered it to perfection in His “steadfast love” for us on the cross, which means He has delivered us from eternal wrath into Paradise, where God “showers” us with His “steadfast love” forevermore. Amen.