

## Saving the Ungodly

We have the sermon text before us, Hosea 7.1. And so, as I've done a few times going through the Old Testament prophets, I tie it to the work of Jesus for the Lord's Supper. And I thought it appropriate, Hosea 7.1 certainly, I think, points that way. And I'll show this to you.

And the relevant text in the New Testament, Romans 5.8, which I'll read a little bit later. Hosea 7.1, let us listen attentively to the word of God. Hosea 7.1, When I would have healed Israel.

As the Lord God, through the mouth of the prophet Hosea, gives a striking phrase here. And of course continues to describe the sins that they did instead. But the Lord God is showing through this phrase here, I hope you'll see, that He has a willing heart towards His people to forgive them.

Let us pray. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, as we read here, When I would have healed Israel. And see that it's true today for those of us, or churches and denominations, whoever God, within the kingdom of God, is persisting in sin and open rebellion.

But even for all of us, Lord, even if we're not persisting in open rebellion, whatever sins that we have, that You would have healed us. Indeed, shows and points towards a desire on Your part to continue to heal. And You would heal, and You have promised us, we will see, that it will come to pass, God, in spite of our sins, that You are greater and more faithful to the covenant than we are.

And this is an encouraging truth, Lord God, as we come before You here with the Lord's Supper, to know that You, what You have done, and not what we have done, is what counts. And may this be encouragement and strength in us, God, and purify our souls, we pray. Amen.

So the opening phrase here of Hosea 7.1 is offered in the midst of description of a sorry state of Israel. It was so bad that when the Lord of the covenant was there pleading with them through the prophet Hosea more than once. I know we read verses at a time, and we don't know exactly how much of this was done at one given time, but it's given to us in the form of a book, with the assumption, I believe, that you read through it.

And you'll see over and over again, He does indeed plead and warn them. But they continued to sin, as I preached last week. They doubled down on their sin.

It was they who turned away from the Lord, not God who turned away from them. That's the description here. When I would have healed Israel.

These are sad words, designed to express how far down the path of sin the Old Testament Jews had fallen. When I would have healed Israel. Such a sentiment only makes sense when we see behind it the depth of the Lord's love and mercy for such a wicked people of the covenant.

For He could have just simply said, No, I am done with you. And although used to bring into focus the doubling down of their collective sins, this opening phrase, When I would have healed Israel, contains the love of the covenant people of God, the love of Him for them. A love that does not sit back and wring its hands, brothers and sisters.

And it may seem that way when you read the chapter, forgetting the prior promises of the Lord God to bring His people to them with the bands of love. So this is not an impotent expression here, When I would have healed you, because we know He promises I will heal you. Rather, it's highlighting the depth of their sins here.

So I want to show us behind this plea, is a promise. We read in Hosea 2.16. Go back a few chapters. 2.16, And it shall be in that day, says the Lord, that you will call me my husband, and no longer call me my master.

For I will take from her mouth the names of Baals. The word Baals means master. But in this case, the name of the false god.

And they shall be remembered by their name no more. That's a promise of purifying and sanctifying them. And again in verse 23 of Hosea, Then I will saw her for myself in the earth, and I will have mercy on her who hath not obtained mercy.

And then I will say to those who are not my people, You are my people. And they shall say, You are my God. That's a promise.

That's not an impotent hand-wringing, but an omnipotent declaration of His intention for His people. And again in chapter 3, verse 5 of Hosea, Afterward the children of Israel shall return and seek the Lord their God and David their king. Again in chapter 6, verse 1, Come and let us return to the Lord, for He has torn, but He will heal us.

He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us, and the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. We talked about that this morning in Sunday School class, that we remain alive in Christ Jesus in Ephesians 2.5. The Lord of the Covenant, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D, there in this and many translations, Creator of heaven and earth, is not only wanting and willing to save His people, He is able and will do it.

And such a marvelous truth is fully on display in the New Testament. As we read, that's why I have it coupled with Romans 5.8, But God demonstrates His own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He saves the ungodly.

He saves us. What wonderful words. What comforting truth.

But what do they mean? They are meaningless, of course, and confusing if we do not understand the back word, if we don't understand and appreciate sin, transgressions of the law of God, that we are all sinners, people who violated the Ten Commandments in thought, word, and deed. And Hosea, of course, hammers that point over and over again. Likewise, Paul opens up the book of Romans and he spends, well, more or less three chapters explaining the need of salvation, painting this back break picture, not just of the Jews, but

the entirety of the human race, being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness.

It's chapter one of Romans, full of envy, murder, strife, and deceit, evil-mindedness. They are whippersnappers, backbiters, haters of God, violent, proud boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, undiscerning, untrustworthy, unloving, unforgiving, unmerciful. In short, ungodly people who deserve condemnation and hell.

That is the condition of everyone who is not saved. They are helpless to change this truth. And so, drilling into this background, we'll explain and highlight all the better, the glories of the promise of God Almighty to save His people while we were still yet sinners.

Christ died for us. Our condition, we're condemned and wicked. Negatively, that can be described as what we lack.

Romans 5, 12, we read, Therefore, just as through one man's sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned, that they are without perfection, that they are without righteousness, that they are without holiness. In other words, rebels. Romans 3, 10, there's none righteous, no, not one.

There's that negation in particular. There's none who understands. There's none who seeks after God.

A long time, they had a trend in Christian circles. They probably still do it, but under a different name. They would talk about seeker-sensitive worship and praise and presentation of the gospel under the assumption somehow that unbelievers really want Jesus.

They don't. There's none who seek after God. And any who are seeking after God want to hear the truth.

They don't want it watered down. That is, if the Spirit of God is working in them, they're being born again. One step there.

I speak as a man, of course. God knows the heart. They're going to want to hear the whole truth and nothing but the truth and not have it watered down.

It's not simply, in other words, that they are judicially unholy and found in Adam and fallen in Adam, but personally unholy. That's why I read Romans 5.12, which is a quite fascinating verse there. I won't drill into it, but again.

Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, that's how we find the condition that we find ourselves in in this world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because Adam sinned. Yes, he said that in the first part, but here he says because I've sinned. Adam sinned and I've sinned.

## **Our Condition – Condemned and Wicked**

We're born sinners. We continue to perpetuate that sin, so it's personal as well as objective in being identified in the covenant of works in Adam. But it's not just by negation that we are unrighteous, that we are without holiness, that we do not seek after God the way we should, but positively what we are.

We are wicked. We continue to do bad things. Therefore, as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all because all sinned.

In Adam's fall, we sinned all as true. We sinned in him, and we also have our own personal sins. We identify with him.

We also identify with sin. You sin, unbelievers sin, the difference being that Christ died for us. He may have died for them if they are called by his name, the point being that we are all sinners.

Like serpents born from the egg who grew up to bite, filled with venom. In fact, the venom is even worse for infant baby snakes, I've been told. So we're born in sin and grew up in sin and continue to bite in sin.

Before salvation, men and women kept choosing sin and did nothing but choose sin. It was the very air they breathed, every movement of their will. We saw that in Sunday school class a little bit in Ephesians 2 I did not read.

Ephesians 2 describes in sin we lived and moved and had our being. It's a nice little summary of that. Three major verbs there.

That's the human condition. It is so far down from holiness before God and it's perpetuated in their lives. They want to sin.

They enjoy sin. It's like a stake to them. It's like a cherry pie.

They enjoy it. They want to keep doing it. If we know intuitively, we see it around us, we ourselves, brothers and sisters, struggle with it as well.

Although we are born again by His grace. The Bible describes it this way in Romans 3.9. What then? Are we better than they? Are the Jews better than the Gentiles? Not at all, for we have previously charged both Jew and Greeks that they are all under sin. That's why you read there in Romans 5.8 that Christ died for the ungodly.

He did not come to save the righteous, He tells us in the Gospels. What He's saying there, of course, is there's nobody righteous. He's referring in a backhanded way, actually, that you Pharisees are self-righteous.

You think you're better than you really are. And that's not the case at all. Here, as I tie it more particularly to Hosea, yes, I'm describing the unbeliever, but there are unbelievers in the church.

In the Old Testament, sometimes you wonder if there are unbelievers. The way we read these texts, it's amazing how widespread wickedness was back then. But it's there in the New Testament as well.

And the Pharisees are a good example of that. Those born and raised in the covenant, self-righteous, not having the righteousness of Christ, they too are sinners. Being in the covenant, that is externally, baptized externally, going to church on Sunday, people see it, doesn't save you.

You recognize, if you are indeed born again, and in the eternal covenant, the covenant not seen with the eyes of men, but with the eyes of God, those who trust and believe in Jesus Christ in their hearts, they are saved. They are born again. They recognize that I am like the rest of the world if it wasn't for Jesus.

That's me. Look at all that I do in thought, word, and deed. So that's the problem here, right? How can sinners be accepted by a holy and pure God? How can you be saved? But it makes no sense to the world and to false religions who always bring in a little bit of man's free will and a little bit of man's work and his efforts.

There's something that you did that can appease God, that makes it all right and better again. The Lord's Supper would make absolutely no sense. In the name of the promises of the Old Testament that I read there in Hosea 2, 4, and 6, where he says, I'm going to do it.

I'm going to save my people and save others as we know. Those who are not a people will not be my people. That's the Gentiles.

That's us. God cannot ignore his justice or, on the other way of looking at it, he cannot ignore our injustice. That's why salvation is so wonderful and true.

How can, in other words, a just God accept ungodly people without compromising his law? If they're ungodly and God justifies them, is he not ignoring his holiness? If God is just and justifies the ungodly, is he just anymore? Of course not. Why would you ever want to trust such a God? Would we accept an earthly judge who declared Charles Manson justified and innocent? You'd be like, what? I don't think so. No.

What kind of a judge is that? And so there's, therefore, a two-fold resolution to this problem. As only God can do it, he can save us from ourselves. Judicial, wiping away our record, wiping it clean, and giving us a record of perfection.

He has the gavel. I declare you perfect and righteous as one who had obeyed the entirety of the law, although you hadn't done that personally. And then, of course, personal salvation in the sense of purifying your souls and making you more righteous.

That is justification and sanctification, one objective and external and one internal and ongoing. So the solution is God's solution, God's promise, God's good news, not man, whether men in the covenant or men outside the covenant. That is the external covenant of being in the church.

## God's Solution - Justification

Justification, to the second point here, God's solution. Justification is an act of God's free grace wherein he pardons our sins and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us and received by faith alone. And that is a mouthful, to be sure.

To put it this way, it's a judicial act of God, subjective declaration of the judge that Christ's righteousness is imputed to you, declared as yours. And as such, it's objective and external, d'un front, once and for all. And there's two parts to this justification, wherein God pardons our sins and his righteousness is imputed to us.

So Christ is our condemnation and Christ is our righteousness. 2 Corinthians 5.21. In 2 Corinthians 5.21 we read, For he made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him. He takes our sin, our condemnation, to what end? That we might become the righteousness of God in him.

And elsewhere, Paul describes that, especially in Romans 4, as imputed righteousness. It's not enough that Christ died for us and died on the cross, it took our sins. I heard that a lot growing up.

And that's good news. But it's only half the good news. That he suffered in our sin, that he's a divine substitute, the second Adam.

But he did more. He obeyed the law in our stead as the God-man, as the second Adam, did what Adam could not do, did not do, and would not do, and gave us his righteousness as a public figure, as though we had done it, although we know we have not. That's the idea of judicial imputation, a declaration.

That's the good news. Now I don't have to obey enough to get to heaven anymore. I don't have to be righteous enough.

In studies or classes, we talk about sanctification, and sanctification isn't just a feeling. It isn't just about doing whatever else it does in the church. Hopefully they're doing good things, so that might work out for you.

But doing what God wants you to do, following his will and his commandments in your life, not just externally but internally in your hearts, to level with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. But you know you can't, you're going to fall short. You feel like the Jews of the Old Testament sometimes reading some of these passages.

That's me. That's the things I struggle with in my heart. But justification is not a feeling.

It's not your actions. It's the actions of Christ applied to you by faith and faith alone. Him taking our just condemnation and judgment and punishment and giving us instead his perfection in heaven.

It is our warrant for heaven. Romans 4, 5, But to him who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly. That grates on the people's ears sometimes.

How can you justify someone who should not be justified, who's wicked and ungodly, and a trespasser of God's holy law? But God demonstrates his own love towards us. That while we were sinners, Christ died for us. In spite of your sins, God says, I will save you.

I will save you my way. I will send my son, Jesus Christ. And he will take your place as Adam had taken your place.

So if you don't have the covenant of works, which I preached on a few weeks ago, right? Hosea 4, 6. 6, 4. I always get too confused. Then the whole business of salvation falls apart. Because then you can't have Jesus represent you.

That's Paul's argument in Romans 5. Adam did this, Christ did that. Adam did this, Christ did the other thing. He is perfection.

He is obedience. His righteousness is now given to us. Or what Luther calls an alien righteousness.

It's foreign. It's not ours. It's Christ's imputed to us by faith and faith alone.

Not through feelings. Not even from repentance as such. Although you must repent.

That is, hate your sin. Flee from your sin. And embrace Christ.

But it's actually the instrumental cause that is the instrument of the empty hand of faith and faith alone that gives us, apprehends for us the work of Christ Jesus. And so when Satan whispers condemnation in your ears that you're not good enough. That you're like these Jews in the Old Testament. You say, okay. But Jesus is good enough. Jesus did what I could never do. That's justification.

## **God's Other Solution - Sanctification**

God's other solution is sanctification. And that's winding us and turning us towards the Lord's Supper.

Because taking the Lord's Supper, brothers and sisters, is not your justification before God. It's not your declarative righteousness. It falls under the rubric of sanctification.

That is our personal growth and the power of the spirit within us in which we try to become more and more like Jesus. It is imperfect. It has sin within it mixed with the best of our works unlike justification, which is objective.

None of it changes. And it's absolute perfection given to your eternal account. Sanctification, nevertheless, is real.

Sanctification is a work of God's free grace, we read in the Catechism, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness. So there you have putting off mortification, putting on vivification, or as it says, you're dying unto sin and living unto righteousness. That's sanctification in our life.

Justification is instantaneous. Sanctification is progressive. Justification is objective.

Sanctification is subjective. It comes and goes and changes in our life. Justification is external.

Sanctification is internal. We are both justified and sanctified all the days of our life. But it isn't.

The domain of sanctification in which we are alive unto righteousness by the power of the spirit within us in fighting against sin. It is first enacted by regeneration of our soul. This is being born again, as we read in John, where he tells him, the leader in Israel, don't you know what it means? You're supposed to be born again.

You think you have to go back into your mom? No, that's ridiculous. You're a leader in Israel. You don't know these things, Nicodemus? What's going on with you? Being born again means having new desires, new thoughts, and a renewed will.

And growing in obedience thereby from that. Being saved is not about being free to do your own thing, as we read in Ephesians 2.10. Your workmanship for good works created in Christ Jesus. For good works, that we should walk in them.

We have a new nature, a renewed nature. Loving God, loving his church when the world mocks us. Obeying him and seeking to honor him in all that we do.

It includes many feelings and struggles, to be sure. That's the difficulty of sanctification. Justification has no difficulty.

You either believe or you don't. The struggle you have as a believer in your assurance is in the domain of sanctification. You keep looking at yourself and forgetting about Jesus and what he has done, what? Our justification for us.

But sometimes you need to be reminded he's also working in your sanctification. Don't you love the Lord? Yes. Don't you hate your sin? Yes.

There you go. It is a struggle, to be sure. It is the sin within us and the sin around us that we fight against in our sanctification and in our growth.

To be remade and renewed in the image of Jesus Christ is indeed a daily act and a struggle, to be sure. But it's always by the power of the Spirit within us. By faith.

Faith is still there. That is trusting in him, relying upon him. Not only in the work of Christ 2,000 years ago, but Christ's work in you.

As we read in Ephesians. Not only Christ for you, but Christ in you by the power of the Spirit. Romans 8. Both these things are true.

In our sanctification, we continue to trust in him. Your trust is weak, I know. It ebbs and flows.

It's hard, but not impossible, brothers and sisters. One of the tools he has given us is the Word of God. A very important tool which we learn to see beyond ourselves and our feelings to read the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He saves the ungodly. He died for the wicked. But he's also given us other tools to strengthen our weak faith, our struggles, to equip us, to encourage us, the fellowship of the saints, prayers for one another.

That's why we have prayer time on Sunday mornings and we have the email we send out in particular so we know we're not alone in our battle, in our struggle with the world, the flesh, and the devil. But he also gave us the Lord's Supper. The sign and seal of the covenant of grace.

It is objective in the sense of here it is outside of you. But it's also subjective in the sense of God knows that we are weak and he's given us something that we can taste and smell and see and handle because we are fleshly. We have this body and that's what we specialize in, the five senses.

And God said, well, I know you're weak. I'm going to give you something that you can use your senses so that you know that I love you, that I care for you, that I am for you and not against you. And that's why he gave us the Lord's Supper, brothers and sisters.

Not so that you can somehow give something to the Lord that, hey, look at me, look what I've done. But rather what he has done. That's why the minister gives it to you.

You are receiving in that symbolism because clearly it's an outward symbolism. The sign is sealed. The sign is not just what you see here.

You see the bread. You see the wine. But also in the act in which the minister representing Jesus Christ is giving you his grace.

That's the symbolism. There's God working on you. And so in Hosea 7-1 where he says, when I would have called them and drawn them, the implication, of course, is at that time he does eventually do it because they will repent.

They did change, some of them, and we know in the future we change as well by the power of God as only he can. The Eucharist here, the celebration of the death of Christ Jesus is a reminder that Christ's death in your stead, his death was for our justification, but his death is also for our renewal and our sanctification, brothers and sisters. And we have the Spirit of God within us so that we can grow as Christians and we can draw nigh unto Christ.

And this is why he has given us the supper here as a sign and a seal to strengthen your faith. As the Holy Spirit puts across your mind that seal of truth, this is real. God is for you and God is in you.

Let us pray. Gracious God Almighty, our Lord and Savior, may the truth of our sins be real, but may the truth of Jesus Christ saving sinners, Lord, dying for the ungodly be even more real in our hearts and mind. But God demonstrates his own love toward us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Amen and amen.