

The House of God

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[0:00] We are back in the book of Hosea, chapter 10, verses 5 through 8 will be the text that I'm going to read.

But this sermon is going to be in two parts. The first part this Sunday, next part, God willing, next Sunday. And actually the sermon is based on one word that doesn't really even truly show up in the text, but I think you'll see as we go along.

So if you have your Bible, why don't you stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together. And again, I'll be reading Hosea, chapter 10, verses 5 through 8. The inhabitants of Samaria tremble for the calf of Beth-Avon.

Its people mourn for it, and so do its idolatrous priests. Those who rejoiced over it and over its glory, for it has departed from them. The thing itself shall be carried away to Assyria as tribute to the great king.

Ephraim shall be put to shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol. Samaria's king shall perish like a twig on the face of the waters. The high places of Avon, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.

[1:29] Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills fall on us. May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated?

No doubt if you've spent a long enough time in church, you've probably heard this phrase uttered before.

That the church isn't a building. Or something like it. That the church is more than a building. And I don't disagree with either of those statements. If something was to happen to this building, and we could no longer meet in this place, we would still be a church.

Whether we met in a school, or whether we met in some gym, or in some parking lot, or in some park, or in someone's house, someone's backyard, wherever we met, we would still be gathered together as Highland Park Baptist Church.

And I think that we all understand that. That this building isn't what makes us a church. That we don't need a building to be called a church.

[2:40] To be the church. These phrases do good to emphasize to us what it means to be a church, and what it means to belong to a church.

However, I think that they can unfortunately de-emphasize the importance of the place where we meet as a church.

Yeah, we can meet anywhere and be the church, but where we choose to meet, and what happens there when we meet, are very important to God.

If you remember, Jesus, during His earthly ministry, was not impressed by the physical structure of the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was a magnificent structure, filled with magnificent things. And as those around Jesus were commenting and marveling over the beauty of the temple and all that was in it, Jesus let them know that this temple one day would be destroyed.

[3:48] And that is what happened. It was plundered and destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D. However, Jesus spent a lot of time in the temple.

Luke records the only story that we have of Jesus' childhood. When He was 12 years old, He went with His family to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. Unbeknownst to them, His parents, Jesus stayed behind while they left to go back home.

And they were without Him, searching for Him for three days. Finally, you remember the story?

They found Him, and guess where He was? He was in the temple. And what was He doing there?

It says He was sitting among the teachers. He was listening to them. He was asking them questions. And all who heard this 12-year-old Son of God and what He had to say and what He had

to ask, they were amazed by Him.

Amazed at His understanding. Amazed at the answers that He was able to give. And you remember when Mary and Joseph, they see Him there in the temple. They go to Him and they say, Hey, we were looking for you.

[4:53] And Jesus says to them, Why were you looking for Me? Did you not know that I must be in My Father's house?

Jesus spent a lot of time later on preaching in the temple. Especially in that final week before He was crucified. The Bible says that in that final week, He spent every day leading up to His crucifixion in the temple where He would preach.

Where He would teach the people before He would go back to the Mount of Olives to spend the night. There are two instances where the Bible records Jesus becoming enraged.

And both of those instances have to do with Jesus and the mistreatment of God's house. The temple. The first instance is described in John 2, verses 11-22.

Soon after Jesus had begun His public ministry, He headed to Jerusalem once again to celebrate the Passover. But once He arrives at the temple, He is livid.

[5:55] He is infuriated by what He sees happening there. Let's read that account in John 2, verses 13-17. The Passover of the Jews was at hand and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

In the temple He found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons and the money changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple with the sheep and with the oxen.

And He poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. And He told those who sold the pigeons, Take these things away. Do not make my Father's house a house of trade. His disciples remembered that it was written, Zeal for your house will consume me. And then there was a second instance, which Matthew, Mark, and Luke describe.

This happened about three years after this first cleansing of the temple. After Jesus' triumphal entry. Remember they were singing Hosanna to Him as He was coming into the city.

[6:58] This time He didn't make a whip of cords, but He was still very angry at what He saw. And He flips over the tables of the money changers and He runs them all out of that place. And for a week the Son of God had God's house to Himself where He preached and where He taught the people.

Why was He so angry? Why was He so angry at what He saw? Well, He was thoroughly disgusted by what He saw was being allowed to take place in God's house.

Wicked men were using it to make a profit illegitimately. Jesus said that they turned the temple, His Father's house, into a den for robbers or for thieves.

If you know anything about this time, the history of Judea was under the control of the Roman Empire. And the money that was used during that time primarily was Roman money.

However, the Jewish law required that every man, when he goes to the temple, pay a tribute to the service of the temple. And that they used Jewish currency, the half shekel, to do that.

[8:08] So, when you came to the temple, you had to exchange your Roman money for Jewish currency so that you could pay that fee to the temple. Now, imagine, it would be like you trying to pay your taxes with pesos or something like that, right?

If you try to do that, the government, you will soon hear from them, correct? Because that's not the way it works. So, it ended up being a convenience to those who came to the temple where they could take their Roman currency and exchange it for Jewish currency.

And the money changers who did this provided this convenience, but they demanded a small fund for doing it. But because there were so many thousands of people who came to this place, they soon saw that this was an opportunity to make quite a large profit.

And that's exactly what they did. They began to cheat people out of the exchange. And they profited very much off of that practice. Not only was that going on, in addition to that, the law required that different animals be presented as sacrifices for sins when the people came to the temple.

And many of them came from long distances. And so, they didn't want to bring all of that livestock with them. So, they would get to the temple and the birds and the livestock was there. And you could buy it right there.

[9:30] And then you could have that sacrifice there for you as a matter of convenience. So, you imagine now the temple, the outer court was the only place where the Gentiles could come, were

allowed to worship.

They couldn't go any further in towards the Holy of Holies. That was their place to worship. So, Jesus goes in. He sees all of this cheating and backstabbing taking place.

He sees that this place of worship, the only place where the Gentiles have to worship, is filled with the noises of people trading and animals, buying and neighing and birds and all of the smells, you know, that come along with being in a barn yard, right?

And so, he sees all of this. He perceives all of this. And he's infuriated by it all. Now, Jesus takes all of this in.

And though the temple is merely a building, what it stands for, what it literally stood there in Jerusalem, was to be a place where the one true and living God was worshipped.

[10:39] And what he saw was people using it for an entirely different purpose. And man, that made his blood boil. And so, with holy and with righteous indignation, he put an end to all of it.

Again, two times he had to do this. And we understand that Jesus would not tolerate any kind of irreverence towards his Father or towards the Spirit, for that matter.

He especially would not tolerate such attitudes in a place that was designed for worship. So, yes, the church is more than a building.

However, the place where Christians gather and assemble as the church of Jesus Christ and what happens there when they gather matters greatly to God.

So, then I believe how we view our place of worship and our motivation for being here matters greatly to God.

[11:40] And I hope that you agree with that. But you might be thinking, what does that have to do with the passage in Hosea that we've just read?

Well, look again there at verse 5. Where Hosea talks about the inhabitants of Samaria trembling for the calf of Beth-Avon.

Having gone through this book, right? Chapter by chapter, verse by verse. We know a lot about the calf that he's referring to here. During the Exodus, if you remember, the people asked Aaron after they perceived that Moses had been delayed with God and they wanted to proceed forward.

They demanded that Aaron make an image of God for them, a golden calf. And that was their attempt to make God in an image that they preferred that they were comfortable with.

And they broke the second commandment as a result. Later on, Jeroboam would reestablish this kind of worship of the golden calves soon after the northern kingdom broke away from the southern kingdom of Judah.

[12:44] And again, this was his attempt to establish a deity and a religion that he was comfortable with because he could control it. So, he set up an idol, a golden calf, in a place called Bethel and another in a city called Dan.

And it's Bethel that I want us to focus on this morning because I think that's key to understanding the rest of this text and the rest of this chapter. Bethel was an important place of worship.

The name Bethel literally means house of God. Bethel means house of God. But we see here by Hosea's time, this exact same place had earned a new name.

And they called it Beth-Avon, which means house of wickedness. Much like how the temple had been polluted by sinful men using it for sinful gain, Bethel had been polluted by impure worship to false gods.

It became a place known for its wickedness and not for its worship to the one true and living God. And much like how Jesus cleansed the temple twice, God would cleanse this place of this false worship, of this false idol, sending it and all the rest of the people away to serve their captors in Assyria.

[14:16] God will not sit idly by and watch His house of worship become a house of wickedness.

Now I want to take that one step further. Not only should we consider the place where we gather for worship to be a house of God, we should, I think, also consider the place where we live.

Our homes to be places of worship. And I believe that our homes should be places that we consider to be households of God too.

In Joshua chapter 24, Joshua has led Israel in conquest of the promised land. And after doing so, he gathers all the tribes of Israel together to worship and to celebrate and to praise what God had done for them.

He reviews their history, their history with God, their history of sinfulness, God's history of being gracious to them, of being good to them. And then he challenges them to make a very important choice that will affect all of their community.

[15 : 38] Joshua 24, 14 through 15. Joshua speaking to his brothers and sisters. Now therefore, fear the Lord. Serve Him in sincerity and faithfulness.

Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods of your fathers, they served in the region beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose lands you dwell.

But as for me, in my house, we will serve the Lord. In verses 16 and 18, then the people, after hearing Joshua, make this choice to them, they pledge their devotion to God, and they promise that they're going to serve Him only.

But Joshua knows these people well. He knows how fickle they are. So he makes sure that they understand completely what it is that they are saying that they will do, and the severe consequences that will result if they end up leading their households away from God.

So there in verse 19, he continues, But Joshua said to the people, You are not able to serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God.

[16 : 58] He will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. If you forsake the Lord and serve the foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after having done you good.

And the people said to Joshua, No, but we will serve the Lord. Then Joshua said to the people, You are witnesses against yourself that you have chosen the Lord to serve Him.

And they said, We are witnesses. Then he said, Then put away the foreign gods that are among you and incline your heart to the Lord, the God of Israel. And the people said to Joshua, The Lord our God, we will serve, and His voice we will obey.

I think it's very important that we make this connection here so that we understand what God has for us in this verse.

The overall spiritual health of the nation depended upon the spiritual health of each individual household.

[18 : 02] Do we understand that? Each household and its health was important to the overall health of the nation, of the entire community. And I believe in the same way, healthy homes make for healthy churches.

And healthy churches make for healthy homes. We have a purpose here. And a mission. And that's to make and train and teach disciples.

The more healthy we are as a church, the better we will be at doing that. But that requires each of us pursuing one kingdom, as we talked about last Sunday.

Not our own individual kingdoms. As part of that, we encourage here, our men and our women and our children to grow in Christ-likeness.

We encourage everybody here to pursue their God-given role in the church, but also in their families. Not only is this a place where we gather and we use it for worship, but I think that the homes that we live in are also places that should be used for worship.

[19 : 25] I think that this is what Paul is getting to in Ephesians chapter 5 where he stresses the importance of submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ. And then immediately after that, he goes to talking about the roles that we play in our homes.

And how important it is that we fulfill those roles. And how important it is because it has an impact on our church. And it has an impact on our community. What happens in your homes matters to what's happening here.

So here's the main idea for this morning's message. The Bible says that the local church that a Christian belongs to and the home where they live are to be households of God.

Therefore, the Christian's church and home are to be used for worship, not wickedness. Not just this place where we gather, but also the homes in which you live should be places of worship, not wickedness.

What we do here matters to God. What we do in our homes matters to God. If we allow those places to be used in ways that displease Him, then we understand from this text that there will be consequences.

[20:46] Such was the case for the people of Israel during Hosea's time. They mistreated the house of God. Their households suffered as a result of that.

And their sinfulness would be punished. Their nation would come to an end. You see, our homes and our church buildings are houses of God where He should be worshipped and not places where wickedness is tolerated.

I want to ask you a couple of questions. These are rhetorical, so, you know, answer them to yourself. Why are you here? Why do you go to church here?

There are many other churches. Certainly in Bartlesville, there's a lot. Why do you go to church here? Another question. Why should Christians go to church at all?

Why should they go? What's the importance of them gathering with other believers? Amen.

Because of fellowship. What's the importance of having a physical location for us to gather in?

[22:05] Well, I think that when we understand what Bethel was and the significance that that place had, we'll be able to answer those questions.

Being able to understand then the rest of this passage, the history of Bethel, this place, and the events that transpired there have a lot to tell us today about what a church should be.

They have a lot to tell us about why we should go to church and how critical it is to our spiritual growth. To begin with, when God called Abraham, Abraham, he told him to go to a land that he would show him where his descendants would one day become a great nation.

And so when Abraham arrived in that place, when he came to the land of Canaan, the promised land, the Bible says that God appeared to him and promised to him once again that he would give this land to Abraham and to his offspring.

The Bible says that that place where all of that happened was at or near Bethel. After this meeting, Abraham built an altar and it was here in Bethel.

[23:27] The Bible says that Abraham called on the name of the Lord. The next time Bethel appears in the Bible is years after this event when Abraham's grandson Jacob is on his way to Syria to find a wife.

Jacob was a man on the run. If you remember, he had conspired with his mother to steal his twin brother Esau's birthright. His brother was upset, so was his father.

So he's on the run and that night he has a vision and in a dream God confirms that promise that he had made to his grandfather and he says that he would continue to fulfill that promise through him. God promises that he will be with Jacob wherever he goes and that again he will fulfill everything that he promised. Jacob then wakes up after that dream, after that vision and this is what he says, surely the Lord is in this place.

Then he goes on to say, how awesome is this place. This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate to heaven. Then just like his grandfather Abraham, Jacob in that place, Bethel, calls out to God in prayer and this is what he prayed.

[24:50] Early in the morning Jacob took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and he poured oil on top of it. He called the name of this place Bethel but the name of the city was Luz at the first.

Then Jacob made a vow saying, if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me my bread to eat and clothing to wear so that I come again to my father's house in peace then the Lord shall be my God and this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house and of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you.

Then again, years later, God sent Jacob back to this place back to Bethel where he once again confirmed his covenant with him and Jacob once again the Bible says worshipped him in that place. So from this we see that God's house is a place where we worship by calling out to him. How do we do that?

How do we call out to God here in this place? Well, in song as we've done in prayer as we've done in listening to God's word being taught to us being preached to us as is happening right now in the house of God God is the only object of our worship.

[26:20] It is he who we are addressing in all of these things we are addressing him when we sing when we pray we are addressing him we are serving him here.

He is the one who saved us. He is the one who gets all of the glory. Now listen we can celebrate what God has done in this room.

The people who have come forward over the years the baptisms that have taken place the babies that have been dedicated so many wonderful things that have happened in this building. but we should never forget that the reverence we feel and that we give when we gather together in this place isn't for anything this room has accomplished.

Do you understand what I'm saying? It's what God has accomplished in this room that we celebrate. we can be thankful for what has happened here and this room will always be special for that.

[27 : 32] We're going to take good care of this room right? We have a lot of bathrooms down in our gym which many of you haven't even been to before. Some of those bathrooms never get used and so we're going to take much better care of this place than one of those bathrooms.

Do you understand what I'm saying? Because what happens here in this space is more important than what happens in that space. This is a special room but we cannot allow this room to become a sacred calf.

I've been in churches and I've heard stories people get in huge arguments about the fact that stained glass windows were going to be covered up. There was a need for a screen but they couldn't put them up because there were stained glass windows that somebody had made and they were important.

Not taking away the fact that they were important but to them we can't worship in this place unless I see those stained glass windows. Others in the church where I grew up it was bright red carpet.

We have to have the bright red carpet. How else are we going to be reminded of the blood of Jesus Christ without our bright red, bright as this vest carpet telling us about the blood of Christ?

[28 : 49] Christ. We can't worship in a place without bright red carpet. And we could go on and on and on. This is what we do.

We can't worship without an organ. We can't worship without a piano. We can't worship with those different kinds of instruments that are too trendy or what not. This place is special because of what God accomplishes in it.

It's not as if God is sitting up in heaven and being like you know what I really I want to do things there but they don't have any stained glass windows. How am I going to reach my people when we don't have stained glass windows?

Right? No. No. That is not at all what's happening in God's mind. God's house is a place where we call on God's name and we do that and we can do that regardless of the decor.

I'm not taking away the importance of this place and treating this place with honor and respect. I don't want you to get the wrong impression but look a rock was sufficient for Abraham and Jacob to worship.

[30 : 13] Many years later the Ark of the Covenant was brought and kept in Bethel and it was during that time that the judges they would judge the people would come to them to seek advice to end disputes to receive encouragement and so we see from that that God's house is also a place where we seek His direction and His encouragement.

This is a place where we call upon His name call out to Him this is a place where we also receive His direction and encouragement. When you feel stressed when you feel anxious when you are afraid when life gets difficult this is a place where you come to be comforted encouraged and strengthened.

How do we do that? Well through our worship through our singing through our praying through our preaching reminding us of the good news of Jesus Christ what He's accomplished for us in dying for our sins and being raised to eternal life that we will have the same things because Christ has done this for us.

We also receive this direction and encouragement from our church family from the people sitting next to you in the pews. This is a place where we can be authentic.

This must be a place where we can be authentic and where we can be honest where we can be real with one another. A place where we can come in and we don't have it together.

[31 : 59] And we are feeling like our life is crumbling before our very eyes. But a place where we feel comfortable that I can tell the people in my church family what's going on.

Because these are my brothers and sisters in Christ. And instead of judging me instead of picking me apart and throwing all my sins in my face this is a place where they will pray for me.

This is a place where when I tell them my problems they're not going to say well good luck with that. But they're going to come alongside of you. What can I do for you?

How can I be of service to you in what you're going through? Hebrews 10 24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some but encouraging one another in all the more as you see the day drawing near.

So here's the thing I think when I see that too as you begin going to a church the more that you know the people in that church the more you're drawing near to that day the more they comfort you and encourage you.

[33 : 16] It's not a place where they say oh they have real problems. We're going to back away just a little bit right? No it's a place where we find that and we say hmm we're going to bring you in.

This is the place for you. God's house is a place where we seek his direction and are encouraged. Bethel also served as a place where both Deborah and Samuel judged the civil affairs of the Israelites.

So we see that also God's house is a place of truth. In this place we speak truthfully about sin and its consequences.

We speak truthfully and unashamedly about the gospel and that Jesus Christ is man's only hope for salvation.

we speak truthfully about the church's finances. We are transparent with it all. There's no secrets there's no hidden rooms there's no secret handshakes that you've got to progress to the next level to get to.

[34 : 30] We deal in the truth. We speak truthfully when it relates to conflict among our members. We go face to face and we talk about it because we love one another.

This isn't a place where you come to get your ears tickled but to learn what is true. What is true about you. What is true about this world. What is true about God.

1 Timothy 3 14-15 This is a major purpose of the church. I hope to come to you soon but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God which is the church of the living God a pillar and buttress of the truth.

God's house is a place of truth. When David was on the run from King Saul he sought refuge and received help from Bethel and later on he sent gifts back to that city an expression of his gratitude for their sanctuary the sanctuary that it provided for him during his time of need.

And so we see from that that God's house is a place where we express our gratitude to God by giving back to him just a portion of all that he's given to us.

[35 : 58] This is a place where we are thankful. We are gracious. It's because we have a God who's given us much to be thankful for because of how gracious he's been to us.

So I hope that you see now that what we do here matters. It greatly matters. This is not a place to come and be entertained.

That's not the purpose of a church. This isn't a place designed for social networking. This is a house of God.

And all other things come secondary to our worship of him. I picked up a book recently and I've only managed to read the introduction.

I'm reading some other books but I can't wait to read it. It's John MacArthur's book called Christ's Call to Reform the Church. One of his last paragraphs in the introduction struck me because I think that this is a problem that many churches in the United States of America deal with.

[37 : 08] They don't know what their purpose truly is or they've forgotten that. They focus so much more on entertainment and just drawing a crowd but not really knowing who is in that crowd.

And I'm telling you that you should never go to a church anonymously. Maybe once or twice but people in that church should come and know who you are. We see that in Acts.

We see that in the church. These people knew each other well. They were involved with one another's lives. They truly loved and cared for one another. They needed each other to be the church that God called them to be.

And so this is what he wrote. The world is the way it is today because it is the world. And the church must confront it with the full truth. It's hypocritical for Christians to berate the secular world for the way unbelievers behave when so many churches are validating it by either believing in its ability to be redeemed by human power or by putting on a worldly circus of entertainment and cheap distractions from real issues.

It's time for the church to be about the ministry of reconciliation he says. For God's people to boldly and faithfully proclaim his gospel and for his church to be salt and light and darkness into a

desperate world.

[38 : 27] That was the Lord's message to the churches in Revelation. He commanded them to put off worldliness and corruption to renew their love for him to guard the purity of his gospel and the purity of his church.

Let's do that. Man it is so wonderful to belong to the house of God is it not? So wonderful to be able to come into this place to hear and be reminded and to be renewed of the gospel of who Jesus is of what Jesus has done and everything that we do here everything we do here is important and it matters to God and it's going to take all of us working together as a unit pursuing one kingdom in order to do that.

We need it and I think as much as we need it the world needs it especially at this point in time to be able to look at the church to be able to look at God's people God's house and see that there's something different about the place there's something different about those people and they'll know because we'll tell them the difference and all the difference is Jesus Christ.

I'll see you next time.