

Return To The Lord

Joe Slater

Hosea wrote during a low point in Israel's history. While the nation prospered materially, the people's spiritual condition was deplorable. Hmm. . . sound familiar?

Despite everything the Lord had done for Israel for centuries, the unthankful nation was *"bent on backsliding from Me"* (Hosea 11:7). They actually believed their prosperity came not from the Lord, but from their alliances with pagan trading partners. "For she did not know that I gave her grain, new wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold – which they prepared for Baal" (2:8).

God repeatedly warned His wayward people that He would take away their blessings and they would suffer (2:9-13). Because of their false swearing, lying, killing, and adultery, *"therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells there will waste away"* (4:2-3). In addition, Israel's idolatry (spiritual harlotry against God) would result in severe punishment: *"Therefore people who do not understand will be trampled"* (4:14).

In loving mercy, the Lord pleaded with Israel to return to Him. *"Come, and let us return to the Lord"* (6:1). *"O Israel, return to the Lord your God"* (14:1). *"But they do not return to the Lord their God, nor seek Him for all of this"* (7:10). *"They return, but not to the Most High"* (7:16).

Does this sound like horrible news? Only for those unwilling to repent and return to God! *"I will heal their backsliding and love them freely"* (14:4). Jesus cures us from the fatal disease of sin: *"(He) bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness – by whose stripes you were healed"* (1 Peter 2:24).

Nosedive To Destruction

The other day I was driving down Grand Avenue, the main street of our hometown and an adjoining city. Out of nowhere a seagull dived right into the side of my truck! Seagulls are not known for their dangerous maneuvers. This one must have seen what he thought was food on the road. In his efforts to fill his stomach, he met his demise.

My first thought was what a tragedy it was for this hungry bird. Next, I thought how similar it was to the actions of humans who are so blinded by their desires that they venture down paths that are self-destructive. The Black Widow's mate is so determined to mate that he risks his life to fulfill his drive to produce offspring. He seldom makes it out of the web. The name of the Black Widow was well chosen!

I read the story of a buzzard that saw a dead rabbit on a large piece of ice floating down a river. He swooped down and landed on the ice to feast upon rabbit. He realized the ice was nearing a waterfall, but trusted his wings to lift him off the ice to safety; so he continued to eat until the last moment, only to discover that his talons were frozen to the ice.

As Christians, we are painfully aware of the horrible consequences of unrepented sin. These stories are tragic, but not nearly as tragic as those of people who are enslaved to sin and are past the point of no return.

We cannot determine where that point is with others or with ourselves. God knows. It's my responsibility, as well as yours, to warn others of the dangers of unforgiven sin. Had I seen that seagull earlier, I would have slowed down giving it time to change its flight path. When we see others overtaken in sin, we must reach out to them to bring them back to the Lord. Remember, *"he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins"* (James 5:20).

--Rob Redden (Arroyo Grande, CA)

DANGEROUS WORDS

Jesus said, *"Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:36-37). Idle words are empty words, careless words, unprofitable words.

Discouraging words have power to spark depression or dismay. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Proverbs 18:21). Encouraging words have power to give hope and joy.

Idle words are a big deal to God. They are vicious tools of Satan. Too many people just say whatever they feel, with no consideration of how it affects those who hear. Our words carry weight, and with them we can do good or inflict tremendous damage.

Jesus said, *"Whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council; But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell fire"* (Matthew 5:22). 'Raca' means empty/worthless one, and 'fool' means morally worthless. In both cases, Jesus clearly taught that when we speak demeaning, belittling words, we put ourselves in grave danger. When we demean and belittle those for whom Jesus gave His life, it brings into question the quality of our character and jeopardizes our salvation.

Paul said we are not to give place to the devil. We are to let no corrupt words proceed from our mouths. Rather, we are to build one another up. We are to put away evil speaking and all malice. We are to be kind to one another, tenderhearted and forgiving (Ephesians 5:27-32). God is love, and love is kind. We are to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15).

Our words can be filled with life or with death; they can be filled with peace or with fear; they can be filled with kindness or with hate. Don't let idle words come out of your mouth. Don't give place to the devil!

--Danny Tunnell (Miami, OK) via *Old Paths*