

Weekly Bible Study Series, Vol. 9, No. 1: 20 January 2008

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NO PLACE TO HIDE!

Today's Text: Hosea Chaps 12-13

Extracts:

When Ephraim spoke, trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he offended through Baal worship, he died. Now they sin more and more, and have made for themselves moulded images, idols of their silver, according to their skill; all of it is the work of craftsmen. They say of them, "Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!" Therefore they shall be like the morning cloud; and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor and like smoke from a chimney. "Yet I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt, and you shall know no God but Me; for there is no Saviour besides Me" [Hos. 13: 1-4]

Jack McClellan, aged 45, is a self-described paedophile (US- pedophile), that is, a person whose sexual desires are directed at children.¹ He enjoys hanging around spots where children normally gather, such as childcare centres and amusement parks. He takes pictures of such children which he publishes on his web site. McClellan is unemployed and lives out of his car. In June 2007, as a result of public outcry, he was virtually run out of Washington State, USA. He then escaped to Los Angeles, California, where he thought he could hide and continue with his nefarious activities. Soon enough, he was arrested twice, first near the UCLA child care facility (for children 3 months to 3 years old) taking pictures of children and then after he gave a live television interview in a campus parking lot. Parents' groups rose against his presence in their neighbourhood. McClellan was forced to flee again.

As long as McClellan remains a paedophile, he has no place to hide, no matter what disguise he wears. So it is with those of us who think that they can get away with unconfessed sins. Sooner than they think, they will be caught because, according to the word of God, "be sure your sin will find you out" [Num. 32: 23]. If there is no place to hide and unrepentant sinners of old were punished, why do we continue to make the same mistakes today? Can we really hide without being found out? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

¹ Based on "Self-Described Pedophile Arrested in L.A.," CBS News, Aug. 14, 2007, www.cbsnews.com/stories/2007/08/14/national/printable3165754.shtml

1. Background: the Sin-Judgment Cycle

Today's lesson is based on Chapters 12 and 13 of the book of Hosea where God reveals His anger with the sins of the nation of Judah and His fierce judgment on Israel. The cycle is quite clear: the people sin and God sends prophets to warn them; but instead of repenting, they sin more and God visits them with severe punishment. The same pattern was exhibited by Judah as follows:

a) *The people sinned*

God revealed through the prophet some of the sins of the people of Judah. For example, Ephraim “daily increase(d) lies and desolation, ... (made) a covenant with the Assyrians and oil (was) carried to Egypt” [**Hos. 12: 1**], and became rich through deceit and oppression [v. 8]. The inhabitants of Gilead relied on their idols [v. 11]. In other words, the chosen people of God relied on man rather than on God for their economic sustenance.

How many of us profess to walk by faith and yet their actions betray their total reliance on flesh? When we indulge in slander, lying or trading sexual favours for appointment, election or promotion, are we obeying God or flesh?

b) *The Lord sent prophets to warn them*

God said to the erring people through the prophet Hosea, “I am the Lord your God ever since the land of Egypt; ... I have also spoken by the prophets, and have multiplied visions; I have given symbols through the witness of the prophets” [**Hos. 12: 9, 10**]. He encouraged them to return to their God and “observe mercy and justice, and wait on (their) God *continually*” [v. 6].

At no time through their history, from their days in bondage in Egypt to their final settlement in the Promised Land did the people lack words of warning from God through His messengers. Therefore, they had no excuse for remaining in sin unless they had motives superior to God's plan. In our own case, we live in an age when God has poured His Spirit on ALL flesh [**Joel 2: 28-29; Acts 2: 14-17**]. We have prophets, visioners and dreamers in the church through whom God has been speaking warnings to believers. Whether they accept or deride such messages is another matter! Nevertheless, they can no longer claim that God has not warned them to repent.

c) *Rather than repent, the people persisted in sin*

Instead of repenting, Ephraim “sin(ned) more and more.” The people made for themselves more “moulded images, idols of silver according to their skill... and they sa(id) of them, ‘Let the men who sacrifice kiss the calves!’” [**Hos. 13: 2**]. They had forgotten that it is God that gives us the power to get wealth for His own purposes [**Deut. 8: 18**]. Instead, their hearts were lifted up and

they began to worship the works of their hands, and persisted in doing so in spite of timely warnings from God through His prophets. How many of us are today living in sin and daring God to prove them wrong?

d) *God's judgment inevitably followed*

Speaking to an earlier generation of Israelites, God said through Moses, "If you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, ... I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies... and if by these things you are not reformed by Me but walk contrary to Me, ... I will punish you seven times for your sins" [Lev. 26: 14, 17, 23, 24].

Having rejected God, He descended relentless judgment on the people. They became "like the morning cloud, and like the early dew that passes away, like chaff blown off from a threshing floor, and like smoke from a chimney" [Hos. 13: 3]. He was going to let them know that "there is no Saviour besides (Him)" [v. 4]. For exalting themselves above God, "pity (was) hidden from (His) eyes." War, hardship and exile would be their portion [vv. 6-16].

From the foregoing, God has made it abundantly clear that He may be slow to anger but He will "not at all acquit the wicked" [Nah. 1: 3]. The wicked is the unrepentant, the person who persists in sin. So, if the end is so clear, why do we behave as if we can get away with sin, that we have a place to hide from God's judgment? Before we can adequately answer that question, let us examine places where we tend to hide!

2. Our hide-outs!

Here are some examples of how we try to hide:

a) *Anonymity*

Some people work hard to hide their true identity from others by disclosing as little as possible about themselves. Look at certain of your neighbours at home or at work. You see them come in and go out. They do not greet or mix with anybody. You do not know what they do for a living other than the little you can see. Yet, they wear expensive clothes and ride prestigious cars. If you dare to ask, they may never give you any satisfactory answers. Such people are either hiding something or hiding from somebody or something. They are hiding in anonymity.

In the body of Christ (the church), there are some pastors or priests who have been discredited in one part of the world or country but they have migrated to a new place where they are hardly known and continued with their wicked ways. Some married people have abandoned their families abroad or in

another part of the country and settled down in a new relationship as if that was their first and they give everyone around that impression.

Unfortunately for such people, they cannot hide under anonymity for too long. First of all, what you may consider confidential will one day be revealed when you lose custody or monopoly of the information. Secondly, there are many things that people around you may know about you that you may never know about yourself. Do you know that even your accent when you speak, no matter how much you disguise it, can give much away about you than you can imagine? Finally, God sees and knows everything! The Psalmist says [**Ps. 139: 7-12**]:

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there. If I take my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall uphold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall not hide from You, but the light shines as the day; the darkness and the light are alike to You.

Anonymity cannot hide your sins!

b) *Time*

We have often heard it said that time is a healer. When you offend somebody, the hurt feelings will heal over time even when the offender has not apologized or shown remorse. Some of us do take advantage of that to persist in error. You have hurt other people's feelings. You have refused or neglected to own up and ask for forgiveness. As good believers, the offended party may have forgiven you but has God forgiven you? No, because the raw wound may have healed but the scar remains as a reminder and no time can remove that mark except the blood of Jesus! That blood only avails for the obedient and repentant.

Take the case of Joseph and his brothers. Thirteen years after selling Joseph into slavery in Egypt, they still had not told their father what they had done. Unknown to them, Joseph had become governor of Egypt. Famine brought them face-to-face with Joseph who recognized them but they did not recognize him. As he threatened to lock them up as spies, they said to Joseph's hearing, "We are truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we could not hear; *therefore, this distress has come upon us*" [**Gen. 42: 21**]. Some years later, on their old father's death wish, they knelt down to ask for Joseph's forgiveness [**Gen. 50: 15-21**]. Unconfessed sins will continue to attract God's judgment; they can never be time-barred! Time is not a healer. Confession is. So, you cannot hide under the illusion of the healing power of time.

c) *Age*

We have also heard the argument that age can be a refuge for some people who have offended us. They say that the offender is too young or too old to understand what s(he) has done. Therefore, s(he) should not be held accountable. That may be true in law and many youths are taking advantage of that to steal and kill for adults, especially in street gangs. Therefore, you can hide under age and get away with wicked acts.

Again, that argument cannot stand spiritual test. Age is a relative thing. For example, at “birth”, Adam was already an adult! He was created a full-grown man that was capable of getting married. His age-mates today (in infancy) would still be on feeding bottles! In Eli’s house, the child Samuel was the youngest member. When the priest’s grown sons, Hophni and Phinehas, defiled the temple by sleeping with female worshippers there [**1 Sam. 2: 22**], little Samuel “grew in favour both with the Lord and man” [v. 26]. At the time that David killed Goliath the giant, he was not yet qualified to join the army of Israel, being under 20 years of age [**1 Sam. 17: 17-49**]. Therefore, you cannot hide under age to continue in sin.

d) *Religion*

Religion as used here means doing God’s work but not according to His will. In the words of Jesus Christ, whoever does the will of God is His brother, sister or mother [**Mk 3: 35**]. Yet, there are many brothers and sisters in the Lord who are so busy doing God’s work but not for Him! They go to church more often than anybody else. They fast and pray more than anybody else. They serve in every important church committee. Some may even pastor large congregations. Some can quote the bible in their sleep! Yet, you cannot see their fruits. Is it not possible that they are hiding their sins under the guise of religious piety?

Jesus summarized the phenomenon this way [**Matt. 7: 21-23**]:

Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practise lawlessness.’

Obedience is better than sacrifice [**1 Sam. 15: 22**]. If all God wants you to do for Him is to sweep the church, stop everything else you are doing and sweep! Perhaps you are a top shot in government or business and your sweeping ministry is God’s way to teach humility to those around you. When you refuse

to sweep because it is too demeaning for your social status, and instead you travel around the world with your pastor, you are hiding in religion. It will not avail much when God's judgment comes.

e) *Law and tradition*

Some of us believe that anything that is legally permitted is okay, even when it is morally offensive. So, abortion and same-sex marriages are okay as long as the law allows it. Some believers hide under law to remain in sin. That may explain why we now hear of gay bishops and priests or Christian doctors running abortion clinics. They may never receive any legal sanctions but can they escape the wrath of God? Would the same God that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for homosexuality thousands of years ago [**Gen. 19: 4-14**] now condone it because we are in the 21st Century? No. You cannot make God's commandment of no effect by human law or tradition [**Matt. 15: 6**]. That is why you cannot hide under it to refuse to confess your sins and be healed.

3. Conclusion: You can only hide in Jesus!

The Lord said to the people of Judah, "I am the Lord your God... for there is no Saviour besides Me" [**Hos. 13: 4**]. He said to Israel, "You are destroyed , but your help is in Me" [v. 9]. Speaking of Jesus Christ, John the Baptist said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" [**Jn 1: 29**]. Therefore, Jesus the Christ, the "Lion of the tribe of Judah (and) the Root of David" [**Rev. 5: 5**], the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" [**Rev. 13:8**], is your only Saviour in whom you can hide. He has assured you, "In Me you will have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" [**Jn 16: 33**].

As you enter a new year, make it your resolution to stop running away from God by continuing in sin and disobedience. Confess your sins. Admit your guilt and repent. Then, let the Sun of righteousness (Jesus) shine upon you. Only the light of Christ can give you peace.

Jesus will soon return to judge the whole world. You will have no place to hide from Him!