

The Price of Ignorance

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Scriptural Text: Hosea 5, ESV

Punishment Coming for Israel and Judah

¹ Hear this, O priests!
Pay attention, O house of Israel!
Give ear, O house of the king!
For the judgment is for you;
for you have been a snare at Mizpah
and a net spread upon Tabor.
² And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter,
but I will discipline all of them.

³ I know Ephraim,
and Israel is not hidden from me;
for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore;
Israel is defiled.
⁴ Their deeds do not permit them
to return to their God.
For the spirit of whoredom is within them,
and they know not the LORD.

⁵ The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.
⁶ With their flocks and herds they shall go
to seek the LORD,
but they will not find him;
he has withdrawn from them.
⁷ They have dealt faithlessly with the LORD;
for they have borne alien children.
Now the new moon shall devour them with their
fields.

⁸ Blow the horn in Gibeah,
the trumpet in Ramah.
Sound the alarm at Beth-aven;
we follow you, O Benjamin!
⁹ Ephraim shall become a desolation
in the day of punishment;
among the tribes of Israel
I make known what is sure.
¹⁰ The princes of Judah have become
like those who move the landmark;
upon them I will pour out
my wrath like water.
¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment,
because he was determined to go after filth.
¹² But I am like a moth to Ephraim,
and like dry rot to the house of Judah.

¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness,
and Judah his wound,
then Ephraim went to Assyria,
and sent to the great king.
But he is not able to cure you
or heal your wound.
¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim,
and like a young lion to the house of Judah.
I, even I, will tear and go away;
I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

¹⁵ I will return again to my place,
until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my
face,
and in their distress earnestly seek me.

The humble city of Sweet Home has only one covered bridge. This rusty white landmark spans the peaceful Ames Creek in Sankey Park and represents the simple charm of this old fashioned town in central Oregon. Most people drive through Sweet Home without stopping. They pass the little elementary school in the nearby neighborhood without realizing there is an ordinary middle-class home and within there is a grandmother with an unusual story.

Her name is Janella Spears and she looks like your average homemaker. She is a registered nurse and she teaches CPR. If you met with her and her retired husband, you would be very surprised to find she lost almost \$500,000.00 to the world's most notorious internet scam referred to as "the Nigerian e-mail."

This scam is very simple. Con artists send a letter by e-mail posing as a long-lost relative or a bereaved widow from a distant country. They ask for upfront cash to help them to move several million dollars into a new account. If one pays transfer fees through an untraceable wire service they promised to send ten to twenty percent of the cash to your personal checking account. Janella Spears received just such an e-mail, promising her \$20,000,000.00, allegedly left behind by her grandfather if she only wired \$100.00. Intrigued she sent the money.

The next contact offered her \$26,000,000.00 if she sent \$8,300.00. The more she complied the more they requested.

They sent official looking documents from the president. They sent documents from the FBI director, from the Bank of Nigeria, from the United Nations. They threatened terrorists would seize her wealth if she did not comply. Each time they promised a higher payout if only she sent one last installment. For over two years she kept sending funds.

She took a lien out on the family car. She mortgaged their home. She emptied her husband's retirement account. You probably wonder: Why could she not have been warned? The truth is she was. Janella Spears was not unaware. Everyone in her life told her it was a scam and they begged her to stop, but she ignored warnings from law enforcement. She overlooked the pleadings of the bank officials. She disregarded the cautions from her family. One undercover investigator commented it was the worst case he had ever seen. She was obsessed with getting paid, recovering her losses, and finding her fortune. Each letter promised more wealth and reassurance with the last payment and each was a down right lie. Yet, she devoured it and this was not because she was uninformed or uneducated. Her problem was not that she was unwarned about the lies, but it was being unwilling to hear the truth. It was continual ignorance not due to weakness but to stubbornness and deliberate denial. Not accidental, her ignorance was intentional.

Her home may seem ordinary on the outside, but she reached out to the news and she wanted people to learn from her experience that beneath the quaint exterior lies a devastating debt wrought by intentional ignorance, the price of almost \$500,000.00.

Israel is about to pay the price for her ignorance. They have forsaken their covenant with God. They have listened to ear-tickling promises from foreign nations and pagan deities, but do not think that God has failed to warn them. He uses drastic methods to warn His people. His love is so radically commissioned His prophet Hosea is told to marry an adulterous Gomer as a living picture of His faithfulness. And Israel rejects God's advances and she ignores His warnings and she disregards His extraordinary efforts. Despite His depiction of devoted love through Hosea's unconventional household, she refuses to listen, set in her ways.

In Chapter 4, God raises three charges against Israel: no truth, no love, and no knowledge, the third being foremost. In the previous study, Pastor Ritch addressed this third charge. This was their primary problem and God's main accusation; they do not know God,

^{6a} My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...

Have you ever wondered why God said Israel's problem is lack of knowledge? Here is a hint: what is the beginning of knowledge? It is the fear of the Lord, Proverbs 1:7 tells us. Knowledge is intimately tied to the fear of God. To lack a knowledge of God is to lack a fear of God and we should not miss that connection. They lacked a wisdom. A bankruptcy of the fear of the Lord prevents people from knowing God and this concern weighs heavy upon Hosea's heart, that God's people reject wisdom. Here are the last words he leaves ringing in their ears,

Hosea 14:9a Whoever is wise, let him understand these things; whoever is discerning, let him know them...

This is a call to wisdom and wisdom says, "Fear God!" In his prophesy about the repentance in the end, Hosea tells us,

^{3:5} ...the children of Israel shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king, and they shall come in fear to the LORD...

Israel does not know God because they do not fear God. Their problem is a lack of fear has hardened into intentional ignorance. They do not lack knowledge because they lack information,

^{4:6a} My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge...

Their ignorance is intentional and it is not because they have not heard of God's ways, but it is because they have stopped listening. God pleads with them to pursue knowledge of Him but they refuse. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, the hammer drops. In Chapter 4 is the accusation of guilt. Chapter 5 is the announcement of judgment. In Chapter 4 is the prosecution. In Chapter 5 is the sentencing. Chapter 5 gives the price of ignorance: Divine Judgment.

To those ignorant about God comes judgment from God. This begins the written notice, the final announcement. At the top, Verse 1, in bright red, all caps it reads, "**ATTENTION! WARNING!**" By now Israel's has incurred such a deep debt of ignorance God sends her a final notice, "Payment is overdue. Your ignorance is accrued! Your guilt is proven! The verdict is delivered! Your punishment is secured! Divine Judgment!" Israel skims the notice and she takes the letter and she dumps it in the gutter, "No worries. I have read this before. I have received plenty of these." God sends bills of warnings but she disregards the statements. She denies the charges. She is deceived she believes she will never have to pay.

In this study we want to pick up the envelope and unfold it and we shake our heads at the terrifying price she will pay for her ignorance. Have you ever wondered what brings God's judgment upon a nation? What makes God angry? Few things incite God's judgment like intentional ignorance, when people stop fearing Him and plug their ears to His Word.

There are three charges of ignorance in this notice to which we should give careful thought. The first is the ignorance about sin. The second is the ignorance about holiness. The third is the ignorance about idolatry. These are three areas of ignorance which provoke God's judgment because they betray a complete lack of fear: intentional indifference toward sin; deliberate denial of holiness; and arrogant apathy against idolatry. Do not ever ignore these three. Pay close attention because this ignorance provokes God's judgment upon a nation, upon a home, and upon a soul.

What provokes God's Judgment? First, it is an ignorance of sin. We incite God's Judgment by ignoring the gravity of sin. God hates it when we intentionally ignore the weight of evil, the depth, the seriousness, and the scope, and the pervasiveness. It should not be ignored.

Is there anything darker than the bright smile of an inmate on death row, unremorseful, insensitive to the tears of the woman he made into a widow and a single mother, or numb to the pain of the young girl's whose father he murdered? Such men believe their actions to be a justified pleasure. This is evil that demands justice. We wonder, "Where does that kind of evil come from?" If we listen closely we will hear the whispers echoing in our own heart.

It always starts small: numbness to making mean comments to others; lacking empathy for their pain; gratuitous violence in movies; no remorse for killing animals. Ignorance to the gravity of sin starts small and so does the war against it. Today is the day we need to be willing to smell the stench of sin and to feel its gravity.

There are two things we should never forget about the gravity of sin. First, sin is a grave offense to God. Second, it has grave affects upon those around us.

Regarding sin as a grave offense to God, what does Israel not know? They do not realize how much their sin offends God. Look at the words He uses and the radical commands,

^{1a} Hear this, O priests! Pay attention, O house of Israel! Give ear, O house of the king! For the judgment is for you...

Here are three cries for attention: the priests, the people, and the politician. His finger is pointing and He is saying, "Religious rule and royalty, listen up because I am talking to you!" He is screaming for the attention of His own children.

God's Nation is split into two kingdoms: Israel on the north and Judah on the south. The more rebellious is Israel and it is sometimes referred to as "Ephraim" because they were the dominant Tribe. To God their sin is gravely offensive,

³ I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me; for now, O Ephraim, you have played the whore; Israel is defiled.

To God it is as if she played the whore for fun. She has defiled and desecrated and violated her God. She may be ignorant, but God is not and He knows every sin and they always offend Him. Sin offends God because it shows a heart unwilling to fear Him and know Him,

Psalm 36:1 Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

Like going from earth to Jupiter, the gravity of sin is compounded when we refuse to know God.

Jeremiah 9:6 Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD.

What is it to know God? It is to fear God. What is it to fear God? Fearing God means hating evil and embracing humility. The pride of Israel in Verse 5 prevents them from hating evil and provokes God's hatred,

Proverbs 8:13 The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.

Sin is a grave offense to God because sin will not hate evil and it will not fear God. It pridefully loves evil and invokes God's hate.

The second truth about the gravity of sin we should not forget is: Sin has grave affects upon others and those around us. In Verse 1, the initial threefold cry and threat of judgment is followed by a threefold charge and threat of judgment. God says,

^{1b} For the judgment is for you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah and a net spread upon Tabor. ² And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter, but I will discipline all of them.

Israel is a snare, a trap, a noose used to capture victims. They are a rope used to lead others away to slaughter. For this God promises none will go undisciplined. We find proof of this charge,

^{5b} ...Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.

In Chapter 4, who did God warn not to join Israel in sin,

¹⁵ Though you play the whore, O Israel, let not Judah become guilty.

Yet, in Verse 5 we find Israel ensnares the remnant Judah to join their fall. What sin was it exactly? It was the sin of disloyalty to covenant with God, unfaithfulness worshipping idols, following foreign nations and pagan gods,

⁷ ...for they have borne alien children.

This, possibly is a symbol of infidelity with foreign gods, but it probably literal. They have entered foreign temples to physically join with pagan prostitutes in satanic worship and they have given birth to a generation without knowledge or fear of God. The drastic affects of their sin upon others multiply. They have dealt faithlessly with the Lord and they have borne alien children and now judgment is certain.

Israel is a sad reminder of Proverbs 1. She laid a snare and ambushed herself and she got Judah to join her fall,

¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent. ¹¹ If they say, “Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood; let us ambush the innocent without reason; ¹² like Sheol let us swallow them alive, and whole, like those who go down to the pit; ¹³ we shall find all precious goods, we shall fill our houses with plunder; ¹⁴ throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse”— ¹⁵ my son, do not walk in the way with them; hold back your foot from their paths, ¹⁶ for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.

The point is, our sin is much worse than we think and Israel is just an example as to how we underestimate the way our sin offends God and affects others.

How do we overlook the gravity of sin? Where do we disregard its weight? What is our blind spot? God wants Israel to see her sin for what it is. Non-Christian, your biggest problem is that God is angry with you because of your sin. Do not suppress the truth. We may push it down like a beach ball below the surface of the water, but it pops up and when it does we need to listen. The weight of our sin is serious; it is a big problem. It does not matter if we are nice, religious people. When we believe we are not bad enough for God to kill His own Son, and believe we did not need it even though He did it, we insult His grave and we provoke His anger.

Why doesn't society know God? It is because they do not fear God. We do not appreciate the gravity of sin. We dress sin in nice suits and parade it with designer jewelry. We celebrate fornication on television. We promote immorality in magazines. We make light of evil and we provoke God's wrath. Yet, there is hope.

There is a man who came forth, in Isaiah 11, in whom rested the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His name is Jesus and no one understands the gravity of sin like Jesus. He knows the offense it is to God and the affect it has on others because He suffered our wrath on account of it. And, He is the only payment that could satisfy the immensity of our sin. Forgiveness is offered on the basis of His payment and it enables us to do what we could not do before. It enables us to know God.

Our memory verse from several months ago was Jeremiah 9,

²⁴ “...but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

Jesus is to us wisdom from God and He enables us to know God. How do we know we know God? 1 John 2 tells us,

³ And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. ⁴ Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him...

We know God through Jesus and we show that by how we live. Children, if you believe in Jesus, ask God to change your heart. When you disobey your parents, you disobey God. You hurt them when you do not come when they call. It hurts your brothers and sisters when you say mean words. Young people, God knows what you do in your free time and it affects all of us. What you watch. The books you read. The sites you visit. The friends you keep. These impact this church. I know it is hard, but listen to people when they tell you about the gravity of your sin.

Married men, your sin can destroy a family. Teach your children the Word of God. Protect the purity of your marriage. Do not feed the fantasy. Do not let sin take root in your basement and ruin the foundation of your home.

Parents, the greatest thing you can do for your children is know Jesus yourself. Your children need humble parents who know and fear God. They do not need perfect parents who do not look at the gravity of sin. They need parents who understand the gravity of sin. Your children do not need to be perfect like you wish you were perfect. They need to know Jesus is there when you are not. When they are desperate, direct them to Jesus.

What provokes God's Judgment? First, it is the ignorance regarding the gravity of sin. Second, God is provoked by ignorance of the intensity of His holiness. To be holy is to be set apart utterly and God refuses to be treated as common. He is zealous over the untainted purity of His holiness. His holiness suffers no contamination. He regards it with unmatched intensity.

No one tested my mother's patience as much as siblings and me. We put her through more than our share of trouble. We used to hide in closets and jump out and scare her. We would sneak candy from the kitchen. One time we took an inflatable castle my little brother got for Christmas from my uncle and we deflated it halfway. We put little diapered brother on the deflated end and the three of us would jump on the inflated end and launch him onto so me pillows on the couch. It always ended with a conversation with dad and gray hairs for mom, but every once in a while, one of us did something that really hurt her, that did serious damage, that treated mom like an equal, and we disrespected her in front of other people. Dad would come in to protect her and he would say, "Do not treat my wife like that!"

I remember the first time I heard my dad say that. It struck me. Dad's relationship to me was different than it was to mom. He loved me and he loved all of my brothers and sister, but there was a difference. With mom he is one. With mom there is an unmatched intensity with which he protects her.

There are two things we should not forget about God's holiness. His holiness demands protection and His holiness demands punishment upon the wicked.

Holiness demands God's protection. He protects His holiness. How does He do that? Access to God is restricted; it is not easy to get to Him. It is not a given, even for the children of Israel. Impurity prevents people from reaching God and in spite of their religious devotion they will not find God. Without a change of action return to Him is impossible,

⁴ Their deeds do not permit them to return to their God. For the spirit of whoredom is within them, and they know not the LORD...⁶ With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the LORD, but they will not find him; he has withdrawn from them.

They go to sacrifice to God but no one is there. This is the terrifying shadow of God's absence. What happens when we ignore God? He ignores us. We stop listening to God and He stops listening to us. We forget the audacity of assuming access to God through religious rituals. We forget the intensity of His holiness. He will not draw near to those who delight in sin. Wisdom will flee their presence,

Proverbs 1:28 Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me.

It does not matter how religious we are,

Proverbs 21:27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination, how much more it is when we bring it with evil intent.

When we attempt to seek God through religion without submitting through repentance we will discover God is no where to be found. He protects His holiness with intensity and He separates Himself from sin and He demands His people do the same.

We move into the second portion of this chapter,

⁸ Blow the horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah. Sound the alarm at Beth-aven; we follow you, O Benjamin!

I suggest we view this like a tornado siren, a violent alarm crying for us to take cover. They used to blow the horn so the people would withdraw into the city to defend themselves when the enemy drew near. God is saying Israel is sinking, Ephraim is going down and they need to take cover. God is about to protect His holiness.

Second, holiness demands God punish the wicked and He does so with severe anger. Holiness makes God angrier than we think. He is not safe; He hates wickedness with a righteous anger,

⁹ Ephraim shall become a desolation in the day of punishment; among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

Israel is a goner. He will make sure they will become a desolation. It is certain and they are cursed by God. Judah is cursed also because of a disregard of God's commands. They are like neighbors who build fences into our yard and claim it as their own. It is like the youth who captured the flags and moved the cones to give themselves an advantage. There is no regard for the law and for authority,

¹⁰ The princes of Judah have become like those who move the landmark; upon them I will pour out my wrath like water.

They are cursed by God and now are His enemy. His wrath comes rushing in like water and it will be too late. God give warning in Psalm 32,

⁶ Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.

In fear God is still crying out to Jesus while there is still time,

Psalm 115:11 You who fear the LORD, trust in the LORD! He is their help and their shield.

Psalm 128:1 Blessed is everyone who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

Psalm 128:4 Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

God's blessing of protection is for those who fear Him and He requires anger against those who threaten His holiness with intensity. It is so much so, Proverbs 6 tells us,

²⁷ when terror strikes you like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. ²⁸ Then they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but will not find me. ²⁹ Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD...

How can God be so angry against us? It is because He has so much love for His Son and for His holiness. He is angry because of His love. The point is, God's holiness is much more intense than we believe. Israel shows us how vastly we underestimate the protection and punishment God demands for His holiness. We need a love for Jesus that includes the wonder of His holiness.

How do we overlook the intensity of God's holiness? Israel approached God without addressing their sin and they were not allowed access and God did not avert His anger. Christian, do not believe God is "safe". Our disregard for His holiness provokes anger. If we do not repent and if we refuse to submit, beware because pride incites God's wrath, but humility invites God's mercy.

Our world has no understanding of holiness so they do not understand for a Christian to pursue holiness. This does not make sense to our world and they hate holiness. Satan hates holiness so he will hate us as we pursue holiness. This would be a dark truth but for the lighthouse of one man, a man who lived a life of holiness and who has the purity and access and authority to reach God on our behalf. Because of His work, God tore the Temple veil. God made a way for us to enter glory and escape judgment through Jesus. We can be saved, loved, made new, and sanctified to become holy.

Jesus shows us a life of holiness is possible because of God's Spirit within us. As a church we need to not overlook the intensity of God's holiness. It is not just an Old Testament proverb. James wrote this to a church,

⁴ You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God...^{6b} "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble."⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God.

This is a call to mourning and humility, hearing God. There are times when Christians are called to repent and there is a special grace only given to the humble.

The third area that provokes God's judgment is the ignorance that overlooks the futility of idolatry. Men provoke God's wrath when they overlook idolatry. Idolatry is the worship of anything not God. It finds its source in our heart. We love, we trust, and we hope in anything that is not God. Idolatry is always futile, helpless, pointless, vain, and worthless. No idol can be as good as God and they cannot bear that weight. When we depend upon idols we will always find they are limited, deficient, and weak. They crumble beneath us. Idolatry is futile.

My favorite place to eat breakfast in college was just a walk from my dorm. It was a little restaurant and they had great breakfast burritos. At the corner of this shop were some arcade games full of some prizes. One had a moveable claw to grab stuffed animals. On the other side was a machine the best prizes: iPods, Xboxes, \$100 gift cards. It had a dancing light that tempted the player to push the button seven times in a row and line it up the player would win one of those prizes. I watched kids waste all of their breakfast money on that machine and they never got a prize. They would press their face against the glass, staring at the prizes, but they did not realize this machine was "rigged". It had a factory setting in the back the manufacturer could set how many tries it would take to permit a win. It was rigged against them. The management had limited the amounts of win it would give. As much as they wanted to win, it was a waste of time and futile to keep trying to win.

You and I are designed to worship and we are designed to long for what God can offer, but when we hope in idols it is futile because they cannot deliver when management is set against us. Israel has God set against them and idols will never deliver when God is against us. Idols cannot cure us, they cannot care for us, and they cannot defend us when our enemy is God.

Verse 9 makes the judgment sure and in Verse 10 God is pouring out His wrath and then God gives the reason: She is determined to pursue her idols,

¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, crushed in judgment, because he was determined to go after filth.

The term "filth" can be interpreted to mean they were determined to pursue human precepts, principles of men, utter vanity, and they followed the idolatry of nations surrounding them. Idolatry cannot keep us from being oppressed and crushed and God. Human principles will not save Israel and their determination for idolatry is matched by God's judgment and that is certain,

¹² But I am like a moth to Ephraim, and like dry rot to the house of Judah.

These are symbols of natural destruction, inevitable and indifferent. This is like the moth that eats the garments in our closets and the rot that devours a house and a worm or maggot that wriggles through a course. There is no stopping God's destruction on their futile idolatry. James calls it spiritual adultery. This is futile because idolatry makes God our enemy and when our enemy is God, idols cannot help us, they cannot care for us, and they cannot cure us.

Israel and Judah knows they have needs. They are political threatened. There are foreign issues and turmoil and instead of turning to God they look for help in men and they call out to the king of Assyria. Instead of getting the teacher, they ask for help from the big bully on the playground,

¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to the great king. But he is not able to cure you or heal your wound.

The strongest king will not be able to help Israel and it will not matter because their problem is not time, money, or the enemy. Their problem is God and no one can save them from God.

I have enjoyed enough African safaris to grow a healthy fear of lions. My mom and sister will tell stories of riding in open air jeeps and seeing a lion roar and charge and then stop short, grab an impala with its mouth and leap over the brush to its lair. No one in that experience does not understand what fear is. The lion's roar invokes fear in the bones. The guide had to return to the lodge for a change of clothes. My mom was scared at the opening MGM lion at the beginning of movies for months.

You may have seen a youth wearing a t-shirt with a lion roaring and the caption was, "Fear Is Good!" It was our summer camp theme. Here, we see why fear is good. God is a roaring lion and when He attacks there is no where to hide,

¹⁴ For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I, even I, will tear and go away; I will carry off, and no one shall rescue.

No idol, no amount of skill, knowledge, talent, money, or insurance can protect us from God. How do we overlook the futility of idolatry? What idols do we trust? Where do we turn for hope, for comfort, for fulfillment, for satisfaction? Where do we put our time and our money? What do we think about the first thing in the morning or when we go to bed? What do we turn to? What is our idol of choice? Is it our iPhone, messages, e-mails, stocks, news, sports? Do we trust in medication? In what do we hope? Do we hope in politics, family, immigration reform, economics, medicine, wealth, education, time alone, identity, leisure, food? These things may not be bad, but when they become our idol and our hope they will fail us. If we pursue them instead of God, God will be against us. Idols will always break our heart and our job is to break them before they break us.

Israel looked for help in human strength and military might, but no one can rescue from God. We might believe our investments are secure. We might believe our health is strong. We might believe our job will save us, but none of these can us from God. Idolatry is futility.

Our nation profits by celebrating idolatry. We have television shows built upon creating idols. We shower athletes and celebrities with money and with adoration that far surpasses our worship of God. On these shows we cheer people on as they pursue idolatry. They say, "Winning the show would mean the world," to them. That is what they live for. I am not saying it is wrong to watch these shows, but I am saying they are indicative of a society that has no fear of God. We coddle idols for which Jesus died.

Jesus did on the cross what our idols could not. He cared for us and He cured us from the curse. Because of Jesus we are saved from the wrath of God. Jesus is a Savior. Education is no savior. Medicine is no savior. Money is no savior. Jesus is a Savior. In his letter to the church in Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul congratulates those Christians,

^{9b} ...how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰ and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.

It is our responsibility to daily destroy the idols in our heart. Happiness does not come to the children from Toys R Us. It does not come from Christmas presents or birthday parties. It comes from Jesus. Toys are a great gift from God but they are a terrible replacement for God. Young people searching for happiness through video games and sports are never satisfied. Phone is a great gift from God but it is a terrible replacement for God.

Singles, it is easy to idolize relationships. You believe they will make you happy. You believe marriage will fulfill you. It will not, even if the relationship does result in marriage, if it is an idol it will disappoint. Relationships are a great gift from God but they are a terrible replacement for God.

We might believe work will give us fulfillment and satisfaction. It is a great gift from God but it cannot replace God.

Parents, it is easy to idolize your children and set hopes on their behavior. And, you are willing to sin when they do not act the way you want. Children are a great gift from God but a terrible replacement for God.

Older saints, isn't it possible to idolize the past and dwell upon memories of past grace, greater than promises of future grace? Memories are a great gift from God but no replacement for God.

Overlooking the gravity of sin, overlooking the intensity of God's holiness, overlooking the futility of idolatry, these are three areas of intentional ignorance which provoke God's judgment. How long will God judge? Will there be any mercy?

At the very end of our text, God gives a note of hope. Technically, the verse is more connected to Chapter 6, but we will touch it today since we need hope now. There will be mercy and God gives to us two conditions that must be met: humble recognition and heartfelt repentance. God will give Israel over to destruction until they recognize their sin and they repent by seeking God,

¹⁵ I will return again to my place, until they acknowledge their guilt and seek my face, and in their distress earnestly seek me.

Mercy is conditional upon humble recognition and heartfelt repentance, confession and then seeking God and drawing near to Him. There is hope no matter how much we send. God will not resist the heart that fears Him. If we feel a sense of awe and we are humbled before a mighty God, that is a sign of grace. Fear is good because fear invites God's mercy,

^{Psalm 25:12} Who is the man who fears the LORD? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose... ¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

^{Psalm 103:13} As a father shows compassion to his children, the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.

Ignorance is not a permanent sentence. We can know God and the fear of the Lord is not out of reach, but we must reach for it. If we seek for it like silver and search for it as hidden treasures, we will understand the fear of the Lord and the knowledge of God. Discipline is a sign of love. We do not run from God's reproof, but we repent because of it,

^{Revelation 3:9} Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent.

Romans 3 comes to mind. How can we seek God?

^{10b} "None is righteous, no, not one; ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God... ¹⁸ "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

What hope is there? Our hope is that there is One who sought God on our behalf. His name is Jesus and He suffered God's judgment for our ignorance and because of His death God's Spirit can grant us a new heart of repentance, a heart that seeks God. It is the same heart God will one day give to Israel,

^{Jeremiah 24:7} I will give them a heart to know that I am the LORD, and they shall be my people and I will be their God, for they shall return to me with their whole heart.

But not yet! In Hosea, the repentance never comes. This picture is God as a lion vanishing into His lair, waiting while Israel wallows in ignorance and so often it is the same with us. We overlook our sins. We overlook God's holiness. We overlook the idolatry in our life.

Is there any hope for such ignorance? If we repent there is always hope. Because of Jesus God can overlook ignorance because the price of ignorance has already been paid,

Acts 17:30 “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,
31 because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”