

# Southland Keswick Convention Gods Problem With a Soul

by Alan Redpath

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*God's problem with the soul is not with sin, but with the fleeting nature of human goodness and the lack of true submission to Him.*

**Duration:** 47:40

**Scripture:** Psalm 86:11, Psalm 119:36, Hosea 6:1-3, Hosea 6:6, Hosea 14:4, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "God's Problem"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the rebellion in the hearts of people against God. He emphasizes that God's answer to this rebellion is for people to return to Him. The preacher reads from the book of Hosea, highlighting verses that speak of God's desire to heal and revive His people. He also mentions the struggle of God for the soul of a nation and the difficulty of understanding what must be done to be saved.

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## Transcript

Dr. Alan Redpath, Message, God's Problem with the Soul. Good morning. That's better.

It's all the polite ones. And that makes me feel better now. I want you to turn with me this morning, The Prophecy of Hosea, the sixth chapter.

The sixth chapter of The Prophecy of Hosea. I was telling the folk in Jamaica from which island I have just come, it's about Saturday with Mr. Walsh, that just over a year ago I knew that I was facing the possibility that my ministry was over and that I would not again be able to speak for the Lord in public. It seemed as if the bottom had dropped out of everything.

And at that time, when I was in a nursing home, I was visited by one whom you will all know, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones, from Westminster Chapel. If you want to buy a good book, buy his books on the Sermon on the Mount. They're a masterpiece.

He happened to be speaking at the anniversary services of my church, and he came along to the nursing home to see me. And he spoke to me, prayed for me. I shall never forget how he knelt down and laid hold of God for his healing touch.

And in the course of speaking, he said, you know, I met a few years ago, some years ago, a Welsh evangelist who had the same trouble as you had, only much worse. And he was laid aside from preaching and from all work for two or three years. I often heard him.

He was a fiery preacher. But after he'd come back from his illness, I went to hear him again, and again, and again. And I never could hear him after that without wanting to weep.

Because Jesus Christ was so absolutely real to him and through him. The fire had all gone. But in place of the fire, there was a tenderness and a love which spoke of the reality of Christ.

Somehow that day, a gleam of hope came to me. And I said, Lord, do that for me. I shall never be able to speak again in the same way as I did before.

But if only the tenderness of Christ can get through, that's what matters. And that's why in recent months, I have spent much time in the prophecy of Hosea, which is the most tender, most loving, yet most dreadful and most solemn of all the prophets of the Old Testament. We'll just read this chapter together.

Now, you would do me a good turn. I wonder if you'd help me by reading it to me. Hosea chapter 6. I'm sure you've all got your Bibles, the Bible hour, or you can borrow one.

Hosea chapter 6. I've given you plenty of time to find the place. Are you ready? Then go. Lord, with thy word open before us, we say, speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.

Speak just now some message to meet my need, which thou only dost know. Speak now through thy holy word, and make me see some wonderful truth thou hast to show to me, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

First thought. Oh, Ephraim, this is God speaking. Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? Then missing out the next phrase.

For your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew, it goeth away. This prophecy is a most amazing revelation of the struggle in the heart of God over the soul of a nation, as he fought to win this people in surrender to himself. Now, at once you may say, God does not deal with nations nowadays, and therefore that cannot have any particular application to us.

In a sense, that is true. But every nation has a soul, has a secret to its strength or to its weakness. And I suggest to you that the soul of a nation is the church, is the body of people within that country who have been redeemed by the blood of Christ, and who, of whom the Lord Jesus would say, ye are the light of the world.

I think back to my little island home in Britain, fifty million people in it. I read in the newspaper the day after Christmas that in Britain, during the Christmas week, the nation spent no less than 300 million pounds on intoxicating drinks. That is about 850 million dollars.

Fifty million people, and if you count among them children and those who are old, you realize something of what that means. That's 300 times more than is spent in our country on missionary enterprise in a year. And as I thought of that with a horror of it, it's easy to stand in judgment.

But then I asked myself, how much more did Christian people spend in Christmas week on buying Christmas presents and exchanging Christmas greetings than they do in missionary enterprise in the whole year? I believe there's an ache in the heart of God over that little country, and if I may say so too, in

America. I lived long enough here to recognize that within this land there is a tremendous company of believing godly people whose hearts hunger for all that God has for them. But there is also a vast number of nominal Christians who are heedless and indifferent to the things of God and carry little of his burden upon their hearts.

The struggle of God for the soul of a nation. And Hosea was given a humanly impossible task. If I may put in the picture of the background for a moment, you will remember perhaps that he prophesied, he preached, in the northern kingdom of Israel and was the contemporary of Isaiah in the kingdom of Judah in the south.

He was preaching to a nation which had already rebelled against God. They had revolted against his rule. Of course, they had not become pagan.

They had not become atheists. They had set up a form of religion which, as nearly as possible, was like the real thing which they had known when they were all one nation with Judah. Satan's masterpiece is not to turn out a nation of atheists, it is to turn out counterfeit to reality.

The devil has a motto, and it is, give them anything but Jesus, give them anything but the cross, and the nearer he can get his counterfeit to be like the real thing, the better is pleased. And this was a nation of counterfeit religion, with all the sacrifice and all the form and all the outward ceremony that looked like reality, but it lacked the power to do the one thing essential, and that was to bring men into fellowship with Jehovah. The one thing that an aching, longing heart desired was not provided for in that system of religion, and into that situation Hosea was called to preach.

The nation had gone from bad to worse. Its priesthood was corrupt, therefore its people were corrupt. And that's always a principle.

If the pulpit is rotten, the pure is rotten. No man can lead a congregation nearer to God than he lives himself. No man can raise a congregation to a higher standard of life than that upon which he lives.

A corrupt priesthood means a corrupt people, and a minister not right with God means a congregation not right with God. A minister who is careless, busy, fuzzy, active, will produce a congregation which doesn't pray but which works, but is utterly ineffective for the kingdom. And into that situation God sent Hosea.

What a hopeless task! From the human angle, he would be judged by a standard of, and would be reckoned, a complete failure. A church can forgive a minister anything, provided he gets results. But if he hasn't baptisms, and if he hasn't got conversions, he's no good, pity the poor missionary.

Some who are the very queen of the Christian church, I know, who've been in India for a lifetime and haven't seen a single convert, are they failures? My friend, what a false standard it is to judge a ministry by success. The only standard to judge a ministry is by whether or not, in the course of a man's ministry, that man himself becomes more like the Lord Jesus, more lovely in his character, more gentle in his life. And Hosea is sent into this situation to preach, to declare the word of God to that people.

But there was a price to pay. God couldn't give the man the honor of such a strategic ministry of that, unless he was willing to pay a terrific price. And you remember the story.

The first three chapters tell us. Hosea, early in his ministry, was married at the command of God. And there were three children to the marriage.

And then tragedy broke into the home. Goma, his wife, was unfaithful and left him. He could have looked back upon that marriage and said to him, said to himself, that's the biggest disaster of my life, but God ordered it.

And the home broke up. An all too familiar story. But then something very strange and wonderful happened.

God said to Hosea, go and get her back again. And take her back to yourself. And so he had to swallow his pride.

And he went down to the slave market and bought her for half price, just how low she had sunk. Half the price of a slave and a day's rations of food. She was just a prostitute, you see.

And he brought her back to his side, to his wife, to be his wife once more. And out of that experience, Hosea learned that the one who suffers most when a man sins is the one who is sinned against, is the God against whom he sinned. Hosea learned something of the suffering that came from the sin of his wife in the home.

And then he learned something more of the tenderness and the love and the forgiving mercy of God, which would go to any length to rescue a soul that had fallen. Had he been sent to preach in that situation, without that lesson, he would have thundered hellfire at the whole lot of them. He'd have told them in no uncertain sound what he thought of that country.

But God didn't want him to do that. The only hope for that country was that they would understand what was the true character of the heart of God. God filled Hosea with love, with tenderness, with sweetness, and yet with firmness.

And therefore he went to preach to that people as the very voice of God for the hour in which he lived. My dear brethren and sisters, God has never left himself without witnesses. God has his man for this twentieth century, his man for your town, for your church, but he's got to pay a price.

And the Lord has to bring some of us very, very low down before we learn to pay it. And Hosea began to preach to the people, and you get something of the theme of his message in the previous chapter. Just glance at it one second.

Verse 12, Therefore will I be unto Ephraim as a moth, and to the house of Judah as rottenness. Verse 14, For I will be unto Ephraim as a lion, and as a young lion in the house of Judah. I even, I will care and go away, I will take away, and none shall rescue him.

God speaks through his serpent and says, I will be to this people like a moth. The subtle unseen decay which goes on and on till it renders something useless and powerless and corrupt. And then I will be to this nation as a lion.

I shall meet them with disaster and with tragedy. The moth and the lion. Do you know anything about that in your life? Do you know anything about the hidden, unseen, almost unnoticed, heady decay of spiritual experience, eating away strength and life and vitality? And do you know anything about the sudden onslaught of some tragic circumstance and experience which has come with some shattering blow upon your life? That's how God was going to deal with this nation.

And then he said, I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offense and seek my place. In their reflection, they will seek me early. I'll leave them alone, said God, until they acknowledge their offense.

Until. When God withdraws the sense of his presence from us all, it is his last resort. He doesn't do it willingly.

He doesn't want to deal with people that way. But if they won't learn any other way, that's all he can do. And when God withdraws the sense of his presence, he doesn't withdraw his government.

A man or a woman are always in God's hands in every circumstance, never out of his sovereign control. I will go and return unto my place until. Thank the Lord for that word, until.

The door for a return to the Lord is wide open. And no sooner had that word been uttered than there is sounded out by whose ears a great appeal, from which our text has taken, full of the promise of blessing. God has been to you, he says, as the moth.

He has been to you as the lion. Now, I trust that the Holy Spirit this morning has applied that to your heart. There's a hymn of John Newton's that I don't like.

But if we were honest, I wonder if we wouldn't sing it. Really, that would be the song of our heart. Oh, for a closer walk with God, a calm and heavenly friend, a light to shine along the road that leads me to the Lamb.

Where is the blessedness that once I knew when first I saw the Lord? The so refreshing view of Jesus and his word. Where? You'll go back to the day of your conversion, can you do that? I can. Do you recall? Oh, the simplicity of it, the sweetness of it, the wonder of it, the thrill of it.

Like Christian in abundance, pilgrims, progress, you gave three leaps for joy. The burden had snapped and fallen from your back into the sepulchre, never to be seen again. And my word, you went round shouting hallelujah.

It was all so wonderful and Christ was all so real. My brother, my sister, is it like that today? Has it been like that with you? Has God been dealing with you like the moth? And has he even dealt with you like the lion? And has he even taken the last step and said, I will withdraw? He never takes his Holy Spirit from us. When we're born again, we have him.

But the consciousness of his presence and the effectiveness of his power is gone. And like a train, a mainline train running along the line, and it shuts off the power, it goes on for miles on its own momentum. And you've been going on for miles like that, preaching, singing, talking, witnessing, speaking, serving, bearing testimony.

But oh God, how dead it's all been. How bad. And in your heart, you know it.

And in that situation, Hosea made this plea, come, and I would make it with you. Come, let us return unto the Lord. For he hath torn, and he will heal.

He hath smitten, and he will bind us up. And suddenly, there breaks into that appeal, it almost seems as if, just as if God, as if Hosea, in the act of his preaching, is interrupted, and heaven steps in, while Hosea is yet talking and still appealing, let us return unto the Lord. After two days, he will revive us, and the third

day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.

And God suddenly breaks in and says, O Ephraim, what shall I do to thee? Thy goodness is as a morning cloud. As the early dew, it goeth away. Here is an amazing, amazing text.

Amazing revelation. It's the revelation of God in a difficulty. The struggle of God for the soul of a nation.

The struggle of God for his dear child. Let me examine with you this difficulty, and then let us ask ourselves the answer to it. What is this difficulty? The more I think about it, the more it staggers me.

I can understand a man saying, what must I do to be saved? I wish I had them say it more often. But this is not a picture of a man in difficulty because he can't find God. It is a picture of God in difficulty because he can't deal with a man.

Now that's very arresting. What does it mean? Wherein lies the difficulty? The answer is given, and please note very carefully that the difficulty does not lie with human sin and failure. Oh, the whole of this precious book is full of the story of that.

But sin never creates a difficulty to God. It is an opportunity for him to display his healing power as soon as faith and repentance are exercised, and faith is placed in the divine remedy, the blood of Jesus, God steps in to save. He's never failed to do that, never once.

Anyone who truly repents and truly believes at that moment steps out of darkness into light. Oh, sin is no difficulty. Ah, perhaps that word is just a word of comfort to someone in this church this morning.

Perhaps you labor under a sense of failure. You imagine that it's all too big a mess for God ever to come in and clean up. My dear friend, as I part, I would say to you today, that our message of that be your thinking is, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as white as wool. Sin is never God's difficulty. Though the defeat and the bondage may have gone on for years, and may have gone an awful long way, it can't go so far as the power of the blood of Jesus to save you from it.

And though the tragedy may have gone deep, deep down to the depths of your soul, the cross can go deeper. Just let him have his way with you, and in answer to your willingness, he's able. Sin isn't God's difficulty.

Then what is God's difficulty? Here it is. Your goodness is as the morning cloud. Not sin, but goodness.

That's the divinity with God. Now, isn't that arresting? Goodness as the morning cloud, as the early dew which goes away. Beautiful, every blade of grass shining in the sun.

But the moment the sun comes up, God never produces any harvest, never encompasses anything permanent. God's difficulty with the soul is not created by its simple-ness, but by its goodness. Now, what is meant by this word goodness? In the margin of the authorized version, you will find mercy, or kindness.

I am no Hebrew scholar, and I don't know a word of it, and I don't want to pose as one. You can go a good long way with a concordance, and it sounds quite impressive to say that the Hebrew meaning is this. But having disposed of any imagination, if you think I have any scholarly bent, I understand that the root meaning of this word goodness is, in the Hebrew, bending the neck.

Submission. And goodness, and kindness, and mercy are all the outcome of submission. O Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee? For thy submission is like a morning cloud.

Do you see it? God says, I will withdraw myself until they acknowledge their offense, and seek my face. Then Hosea pleads with them to return, and God breaks in. Ah Hosea, but that's the trouble with this people.

They've come back to me so often. They've returned so frequently. They're always doing it.

They've submitted so sincerely. But it's like a morning cloud. I've looked for something permanent, but it never takes place.

And their way down in the southern country, Isaiah, was saying the same thing to Judah. Listen. My beloved hath a vineyard in a very fruitful hill.

He fenced it, gathered out the stone, planted it with the choicest vine, lit a tower in the midst of it, and the wine pressed therein. Looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes. What could have been done more to my vineyard than I have not done in it? Wherefore when I asked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes.

Now do you see God's difficulty? I want to put it very clearly, very simply to you. Not my sins, which may bear like a mountain. He can deal with them.

But my submission, which in all sincerity I have given to him, perhaps. I've kept the convention every year I've attended it. And I've resolved, and I've determined, and I've yielded, and I've consecrated myself.

And it lasted twenty-four hours. Because I refuse to give up the principle upon which I live my life. I refuse to admit that I was beaten.

I thought that I could still, with help from reading my Bible, with help in prayer, I could still live the Christian life. I could still make myself a good Christian. Polish up the flesh.

Improve it. Refine it. Sanctify it.

I will make myself live this Christian life, and I'll come to Keswick and take all the notes of sermons that I can ever hear, and I'll seek to put them into action, and I'll do my best. And all you do, my friend, is to try and make yourself, just think of it with me, try and make yourself, who couldn't even live an unconverted life to your own satisfaction, that's why you turn to Jesus, try and make yourself live a Christian life. Hmm.

No wonder the psychiatrists are kept busy. No wonder that many Christians have to live with coffee and tranquilizing pills. All the tension in the heart that says, I will be God.

There's a chorus that we sometimes sing in the old country. Perhaps you know it. If my memory serves me rightly, it's so long since I've sung it, but it goes something like this.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. All his wondrous compassion and purity. All thou spirit divine, all my nature refine.

Huh. What a hope. If that chorus said, all thou spirit divine, make all thy nature mine, then I could go along with it.

My dear friend, Keswick does not teach simply because the New Testament does not teach sinless perfection. Keswick teaches, and the New Testament teaches, sinful corruption. And the only goodness that you and I will ever know is the power and life of God the Holy Ghost replacing and taking the place of the corruption of the flesh.

Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do unto thee for thy goodness? Is this a morning class? Of course it is. You've responded and surrendered and stood up and hold your hands up and signed cards and gone back to your church and you're determined to live the life and make good and I tell you, some of you, you're back here in the same old mess as you were before. And I will withdraw myself, says the Lord, from all sense of my presence until we've been so sincere with our determination to pray, our determination to give, our determination to serve, our determination to witness.

We bought books by the latest Keswick speakers from the bookstore and they're half read and half marked and they haven't been completed and we left the sanctuary and left the convention and went back into the rush and bustle of business and home and we've never faced this issue really in our lives at all. That's God's difficulty. It's expressed perhaps the most, most touchingly in the 14th verse of the 7th chapter.

And they have not cried unto me with thou heart when they howled upon their bed. They assemble themselves for corn and wine and they rebel against me. There it is.

Oh yes, we can do this. We'll go back and howl upon our bed. Howl at the mess we've made and the failures we've been and the resolutions we've failed to carry through.

But we haven't turned to the Lord and cried to him and we've come again for corn and wine at another Keswick convention and yet in our heart basically is a great big realm of rebellion against God. My doctor told me I'm to speak for 20 minutes and to keep quiet. I'm not doing very well this morning.

I have one more minute to go. Let me say to you because I must say this and will develop it more clearly in the week. What's God's answer to all this? What's the solution? Well, here it is.

Let me read to you the opening verses as they appear in the revised version. Come let us return unto Jehovah for he hath torn and he will heal us. He hath smitten and he will bind us up.

After two days will he revive us. On the third day he will raise us up and we shall live before him. Let us know.

Let us follow on to know. Jehovah. Notice this word.

Let us. Let us return. Let us know.

Let us follow on to know. Verse six. The knowledge of God is more than burnt offering.

David said, Lord, unite my heart to fear thy name. The Lord is saying to you this morning, I can deal with your sin, but I cannot, cannot deal with you as long as you insist on maintaining the place of sovereignty, the place of control. As long as you say self can do it, I can make it with God's help.

One minute you swept off your feet by emotion and the next minute you become as cold as steel. Look at the language of this people at the end of the prophecy. And with this I must close.

Chapter 14, verse four. I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely for my anger is turned away from him.

I will be as the dew unto Israel. He shall grow as the lily and cast forth his fruit as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree and his smell as Lebanon.

They that dwell under his shadow shall return. They shall revive as the corn and grow as the vine. The scent thereof shall be as the wine of Ephraim.

Ephraim shall say, what have I any more to do with idols? God says, I've heard him. I've observed him. I'm like a green, like a green fir tree.

From me is thy fruit found. My friend, listen. The only good thing about a Christian is Jesus.

Have you made that discovery? I would close, I think, by reading you the last verse of this prophecy. Who is wise and he shall understand these things? Couldn't, and he shall know them. For the ways of the Lord are right and the just shall walk in them, but the transgressors shall fall therein.

Oh, what shall I do unto thee? Thy goodness is like a morning cloud. I wonder if in this closing moment of course we bow in prayer. You would realize that your struggle and deceit and failure have all been because you've refused to forsake your belief in your own goodness.

Will you get to the place of despair in it this morning? The place where you say, Lord, I can never try again. I just give up. Praise the Lord.

That's the place of it. For then, the goodness of Jesus will replace that which is of yourself, which is like a morning cloud. Let us pray.

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. All his wondrous compassion and purity. Oh, thou spirit divine, make all thy nature mine.

Tell the beauty of Jesus be seen in me. Forgive us, Lord, for our stubbornness, for our rebellion, for our insistence upon our own way. May we truly turn from all of ourselves to find that Jesus himself is, as the early morning dew to his people, the fountain of living water within our hearts, springing up into everlasting life.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

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