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You know, it's oftentimes when we gather in a place such as this, at a time such as this, that people ask, "Well, what does the Lord desire of me? What does he need or want of me?" Well, you just heard it, he just wants you to be honest. He just wants you to be honest with him, with yourself, and with those that are around you.

Let's pray that that's what we'll be and who we will be today.

Heavenly Father, as we prepare to open your word, Lord, we have been prepared to do so. We have heard and understand the power of the blood to heal and to forgive and to restore and, Lord, we've been challenged to be honest about our condition. Lord, we confess we are so good at putting up the images, we are so good of erecting some type of image of ourselves that is dishonest. Lord, we know deep down inside that we are hiding ourselves and our trueness from others around us, and even maybe the one we look at in the mirror but, Lord, we also know that we are not really hiding it from you. Your word says very clearly in Hebrews 4:13 that we stand naked before you, completely exposed. So God, help us today to realize that and just to be honest with you. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Hosea. When you turn to the book of Hosea, I'm going to ask you to fast-forward a little bit into the fourth chapter of the book of Hosea, but when you do so, you are opening your Bible to a very special, strategic, and oftentimes neglected section. For those of you that are guests or visitors with us, we as a family of faith have been journeying now for almost a year through the Scriptures one chapter, maybe sometimes two chapters a day, and even though our journey will not be complete for two more years or so, we find ourselves in this season of walking through what you and I often refer to as the minor prophets, beginning with Hosea and ending in Malachi, these are the last 12 books of the Old Testament.

Now they are minor prophets not because of the message, this is really a quantitative analysis. In fact, oftentimes we refer to the major prophets or just the prophets in general as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel, and if you read them, they are very lengthy and at times somewhat complex, but what we know as the minor prophets at times can be

very brief, for Obadiah only gets one page in your Bible unless you have large print, it might be a page and a half, 21 verses.

So the reason we designate them as minor is not because the message is minor but because the length is minor, and today as we begin our study in what we know as the minor prophets, I want to refer to these individuals as "The Other Twelve." You see, when we talk about a group of 12 people, there are two others that naturally come to mind, whom we know as the apostles, the men who the Lord called to walk by his side and to partner with his ministry for three and half years not only from his baptism but to his eventual death and resurrection, and as you study those famous 12 apostles, you discover that after the passion experience, after the cross and the resurrection, we see that the identities changed somewhat. Remember the garden of Gethsemane when Judas came and betrayed the Lord with a kiss that would ultimately result in him running out, the Bible says he hung himself and his guts spilled out. Upon the resurrection sometime later, the remaining 11 gathered together and they called one Matthias to fill his spot. Then in 2 Corinthians, whom we know as the Apostle Paul defends his apostleship by being the disciple that was called out of due time, specifically to the Gentiles. So what we know as the 12 apostles not only changed somewhat of their identities but also expanded their territory, so to speak.

The other 12 that we often think of are the famous 12 tribes of Israel. The patriarch whom we know as Abraham giving birth to Isaac and then to Jacob. Those famous 12 tribes that would inhabit what you and I call and refer to as the Promised Land. But they would suffer the same fate as the 12 apostles just a little bit earlier, for when you make your way to the book of Revelation 7, and you begin to deal with all of eschatological or second coming passages, we discover that there are two tribes that are no longer referenced in that famous chapter: Ephraim and Dan. As you study through the Old Testament, you discover both of them fell into idolatry and false worship, and we see that the Levites who are not given a land possession in the Old Testament all of sudden are named as a tribe in Revelation 7, and Joseph is also named as one of bearing a tribe.

So when we think of the 12 in the Bible, we think of the tribes, we think of the apostles, but what we see that they have in common is there's a little bit of flux, there's a little bit of ebb and flow. When it comes to these guys, hear me clearly, there is no flexibility. There is no ebb and flow. In fact, the same 12 that the Lord spoke to thousands of years ago are the same 12 that we will read today, and allow me to warn you in advance the message is going to be very clear, it's going to be very pointed, and it's going to be incredibly relevant. In fact, we read these name such as Habakkuk and Zephaniah and we think to ourselves how could they have anything to say to our 21st century culture? If you've been a part of just our readings this week, you've been reading through the beginning part of the book of Hosea, if that is not a description of our culture, I do not know what is and what we're going to see today is that their message was not only relevant for years ago, it is relevant for today as well.

In Hosea 4, beginning in verse 1, somewhat of a launching pad to a study of these "Other Twelve," it begins in chapter 4 with these words,

1 Hear the word of the LORD, ye children of Israel: for the LORD hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. 2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood touches blood.

Push pause. That sounded like the morning news, did it not? That's exactly what you and I are living in today. You see, these guys aren't just relegated thousands of years ago, they are real for today as well.

Verse 3,

3 Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwelleth therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away. 4 Yet let no man strive, nor reprove another: for thy people are as they that strive with the priest. 5 Therefore shalt thou fall in the day, and the prophet also shall fall with thee in the night, and I will destroy thy mother. 6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children. 7 As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory into shame. 8 They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity. 9 And there shall be, like people, like priest: and I will punish them for their ways, and reward them their doings. 10 For they shall eat, and not have enough: they shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase: because they have left off to take heed to the LORD. 11 Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart.

And that, my friends, is just a paragraph of these "Other Twelve." So today as we begin this study of these men and the message that the Lord gave them, I want to address the totality of the minor prophets through this singular passage that the Lord gives to Hosea and to ourselves just by answering very strategic yet brief questions about who they are and the when and the where and such.

The first one is this: who are these guys? Other than the fact that they've got some strange names, other than the fact that if we were to do a Bible drill exposé this morning, it is hard to find them in Bible, they are so brief in nature, oftentimes only taking maybe one or two pages of the Bible and having three or four less chapters per book, who are these guys? Well, I think the one thing we need to know about them strategically is this: they were part-time preachers and that's important to understand. You see, Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel and Daniel, these guys, that was their livelihood, that's who they were. Their entire existence was, "Thus saith the Lord." These guys were all what we often might call bi- or multi-vocational.

Now there's a few exceptions to the rule. Hosea, because of his tenure of 60 plus years, and whom we know as Micah, 40 plus years, were priests on behalf of the Lord. Now this is still important because even though they were full-time priests, they were part-time prophets. Their job each and every day was to get up and to facilitate the sacrificial worship of the people of God. Their role was to take the offerings and to make sure that everything was just the way it should be. There's only a small aspect of their life that was, "Thus saith the Lord," and as we continue our study of Hosea, we discover it really wasn't so much what the Lord was saying but he utilized his life and the circumstances therein to preach the message in illustration and by analogy, but when you look at the totality of these guys, most of them had what you and I would call secular professions. In fact, Amos makes a disclaimer, he says, "My dad wasn't a prophet, I'm not a prophet. I'm just a herdsman from Tekoa." In fact, Amos is the original one hit wonder. You know what a one hit wonder is, right? It's a band or a musician who makes one song that we can't get out of our mind and we can't name a second. Well, Amos is the same way. Amos shows up to the northern kingdom of Israel, he preaches one sermon. That's it. You read Amos from beginning to end, it might take you 20 to 25 minutes, yet that one sermon has lasted thousands of years. He was not a prophet by trade. Obadiah, the one who has the shortest tenure in Scripture of 21 verses. We do not have this laid out in Scripture but it is tradition that his family actually was in the food service business and that he was a waiter by trade, making sure people got the proper amount and style of food and such.

Now you think to yourself, "Well, why is this critical? Why is this important?" Because in Israel and in Judah's day, the Lord utilized these individuals to communicate a message that you and I need to heed today. It's the message of what I call the pew revival. You say, "The pew revival, what's the pew revival?" Allow me to illustrate or explain what that is. When somebody, whoever they are, stands in front of you as a pastor or preacher, whomever, and they declare what the Bible says, how often are all of us, notice I use the personal pronoun, how often are we guilty of saying, "Well, he's the pastor, of course he's going to say that. That's who he is." And we see this disconnect from the pew to the pulpit, but a pew revival is when somebody sitting next to you does what I've seen so many times. By the way, one of these days I'm going to write a book and it's going to be entitled, "View from the Pulpit." Y'all don't think I see everything you do, I see it all. Let me tell you what a pew revival is. I get up here and I just begin to go at it and all of a sudden, and typically it's the wife, nudges and says, "Are you paying attention to this?" That's what a pew revival is. That's who Hosea is. That's who Joel is. That's who Amos is. That's who suffered Zephaniah is. They said, "Hey, we've heard Isaiah, we've heard Jeremiah," but for some reason there's a disconnect and these guys come along as herdsman and waiters and other professions and they elbow us in the side and say, "Hey, this isn't just for the preachers, this is for all of us."

Now allow me to give you a little justification for this, turn over to chapter 5, verse 1, I want you to hear what the Lord says is the reason for their condition and why what we know as the minor prophets were so critical for their lives. It says,

1 Hear ye this, O priests; and hearken, ye house of Israel; and give ye ear,
O house of the king; for judgment is toward you, because ye have been a
snare on Mizpah, and a net spread upon Tabor.

Let me tell you what that is saying: the reason that the people and the reason that the culture has so strayed from the things of God is the people who the Lord put in place to communicate truth have voided truth in their own lives. Notice who the Lord says are to blame: the priests or the preachers and the politicians or the kings. And you and I today live in the same environment. This is not a disconnected world from us. Let me ask you a very rhetorical and simple question: how many more people are we going to need to elect only to get disappointed by how they act in office? How many more pastors and preachers are we going to see fall in disgrace? How many more men who get up and say, "Thus saith the Lord," and you realize behind the scene there is not only illicit behavior but all kinds of financial shenanigans and such?

You see, you think that what we see on TV and what we read in the newspaper is new to us, this is a new day and a new age, if there's one thing we can learn about humanity is this, is that we don't change a whole lot. The preachers and the politicians were just as crooked then as oftentimes they are today, and oftentimes we say, "Why should I do as they say. Why should I hear their words, their lives aren't any different than mine?" Well, congratulations, you and I are the perfect audience for what we know as the minor prophets. They're going to come alongside of us, they're going to elbow us in the side and say, "Hey, even though their life didn't match up with their words, it does not change the truth of what God said." These are who these guys are.

The second very important question is this, the when. When did the Lord utilize these guys? Now chronologically speaking, the first minor prophet was in about the ninth century BC and the last one was in the fifth century BC so about 500 years worth of the Lord using them as his mouthpieces. Now interesting that it is a minor prophet that is both the first and the last voice of the prophets if you include all of them. It is believed by many, including myself, that Obadiah, that little 21 verse book of the Bible, is actually the first prophet that the Lord spoke through in the ninth century BC. You say, "Why is this important?" You remember the 10 Commandments, two tables of stone, right? Pretty simple. You read Leviticus, in other words, we couldn't get 10 simple statements so God had to give us dozens of chapters of explicit detail to explain how we were in violation thereof. It's very possible the Lord gave us 21 verses and said, "If you will heed my voice, you won't fall into captivity. If you will heed my voice, everything will be okay." But what did we do? How could the Lord be speaking through a waiter? What did we get? Sixty-six chapters of Isaiah, 52 chapters of Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, God help any of us if we can understand what he was saying. Why? Because just like the 10 Commandments, God made it so simple and we rejected it.

But to get a little more detail here, there are three phases of the prophets of the Old Testament, we call them pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic. Let me explain what that means. Pre-exilic means this, that they spoke to the people of God before they went into exile. Now in the old northern kingdom of Israel, they went into exile in 722 BC, the

southern kingdom in 586, so if any of the prophets whether minor or major spoke to the people of God before Assyria or Babylon came and got them, we call them pre-exilic. If they spoke during the exile, we call them a major prophet. Why? Because Jeremiah, Daniel and Ezekiel were the prophets while they were in Babylon, particularly the southern kingdom. Interestingly it is the post-exilic prophets that are all the minor prophets. You would think after being ransacked by the Assyrians and the Babylonians and spending 70 years in captivity, you would think that when they come back and rebuild the temple, they come back and rebuild the city, you would think that they'd have their heads on straight but guess what? We don't. So the Lord used again these minor prophets to come alongside of them and say, "Hey, still things are not as they should be."

And when we speak of the when, the thing that we need to understand is that whether it was before captivity or after captivity, the Israelites, as you and I, still struggle with the same problem. In simple terms it's called pluralism. Now I know that's a big fancy term but essentially it means this: pluralism is any time you adopt competing views as both being true. Now let me share with you how this worked in the Old Testament and then we're going to talk about how it works today in our lives. In the Old Testament, they would gather on the Sabbath, they would worship the God of Israel, and then during the week at some point they would offer a sacrifice to Molech or to Ashtoreth or to Baal of the like. Pluralism is when they segmented or compartmentalized their lives of faith, the God of Israel in one circumstance and the God of something else in another.

Now I know what many of you are thinking, "Well, phew, of all the things I'm guilty of at least it's not that." Not so quick because here's what we say, "Well, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe he is the way, the truth and the life, I believe that nobody comes to the Father but by him. I don't entertain any of the world's religions so therefore I cannot be a pluralist." Well, yes to some extent, you cannot have Jesus and Mohammed both be true at the same time, it's impossible. In fact, let me give you the best analogy: have you ever heard of a married bachelor? You can't have it, can you? It is impossible to have two absolutely different competing thoughts both be true at the same time but that's what the Lord was struggling with the people no matter whether it was before exile or after. But the same struggle is today. How many of us compartmentalize our faith, it's all about Jesus on Sunday and it's all about something else on Monday? We'll act one way around one group of people and a different way around another group of people.

And I know you mean well, trust me, I've got a great sense of humor if you haven't figured it out, but I will see folks within the community and even here on our campus, and they'll see me walking up and they'll say, "Boy, don't tell that, the preacher's coming." Can I give you a hint? Tell the story whether I'm there or not. You say, "Well, I don't want to tell the story if you're there." Then don't tell it when I'm not. That is modern day pluralism and so oftentimes we say, "Well, at least I believe in Jesus." Yes, but the question is the Jesus that we declare on Sunday, is he the same Jesus we live for on Monday through Saturday? You see, the message of pluralism is relevant to us today as well.

The next question we've got to answer is this, the where question. Where did these guys minister and preach and teach? Well, if you're going to look on a map it's real simple, it was either Israel in the north, Judah in the south, unless your name happens to be Jonah and then it's Nineveh. And often times we think, "Well, of course, that was the message," but I want you to think about that for just a moment, Israel in the north, Judah in the south and a little bit of Nineveh. When you read the book of Jonah, it's only four chapters in length, it's this incredible story about their sin and their repentance thereof, but what you discover about the book of Jonah is the message may be more about Jonah than it is the Ninevites, which means this, where did the Lord speak these words? It's more than geography, it's more than the map, he spoke them to what we just read in chapter 4, to the people of God.

I want to remind you back in chapter 4, verse 6, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you shall be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children." Verse 8, "They eat up the sin of my people." Verse 12, "My people." Verse 15, "Though thou, Israel, play the harlot." One thing the minor prophets are going to communicate that is so relevant to our day today is this: that if we, the people of God, don't live the life of God, how dare we get mad at the lost world for doing so. In other words, it's easy to throw the rocks through the proverbial stained glass of the world and say, "I cannot believe they're making those decisions. I can't believe they're making those statements." Every day I wake up to somebody who has some type of notoriety and I am blessed with realizing that humanity is getting stupider by the day. You think, "Is there any way that we can be any more stupid?" Oh yeah, just wait until tomorrow morning, somebody will trump it, I promise it will happen.

That being said, Peter, one of the apostles, makes this statement in the New Testament, "Judgment must begin at the house of God." You see, the minor prophets are going to speak a very strategic message. Notice what Hosea has done just in the first few chapters: my children, my people, Israel. In other words, he doesn't call out the sins. When we get to Amos, there's this great section where Amos comes into what we would call a church setting, and I can't wait for this Sunday, he comes in and he says, "I'm here to talk about the sins of these folks." Amen. "I'm here to talk about the sins of those folks." Oh, amen. And then he gets in and he goes, "And I'm here to talk about your sins." And you go uh-oh. In other words, how easy it is to get upset with how the world is living and forget that the Lord has called us to be the light, the Lord has called us to be the salt. Our lives if they are not distinct or different, how dare we expect that from the lost world.

The next question is this: how? How does God do it? If you have not begun to read Hosea yet, let me implore you to do so. The Lord does not beat around the proverbial bush in the minor prophets. He calls it what it is. Within the first few verses of the minor prophets, we see very explicit language describing not just the behavior of Gomer, Hosea's wife, but eventually what we discover as us, the people of God. What we just read, the children of God have played the harlot, guilty of whoredoms, and this is just the first of the 12 minor prophets. You're not going to have to wonder, "What is the Lord thinking about

this?" In fact, none of us are going to sit back over the next few weeks or months and say, "You know, I just don't really understand what the Lord means by this." He calls it out.

I, as many of you, have been through one of those procedures in life that we call surgery. Now one of the interesting things about having a surgical procedure whether it's "major or minor," is that when you're in the OR typically, at least in my experience, I hope this is not unique, that the surgeon comes in and we have a little conversation just clarifying what we're doing surgery on, in other words, today we're going to be in your abdomen. Correct. Today we're going to be on your foot, your right foot. Correct. Whatever it may be. Can you imagine if the surgeon came in, there you are on that, and by the way, is it just my imagination or is that surgical table just the coldest place in all the world? But nonetheless, you're on that surgical table, can you imagine if he just walks in and says, "Do you know what? I know it's your knee that hurts but over the next few hours I'm just going to open up everything to see what I find." I can tell you what you'd do, you would run out, would you not? What do you do when you're hurting and you're in the OR? You make sure that it's the right item, on the proper side, for the proper reason. Surgeons are so good because they are strategic with their scalpel. If you've got a blown knee, you don't need your shoulder operated on. That's not going to fix you. What are the minor prophets going to do? They're going to show us what our problems really are and you and I have the privilege of walking through and not having to say, "Well, it might be this or it might be that."

No, the Lord is going to show us very clearly which leads to the very last question today, the what. What is Hosea, what is Joel, what is Amos, what are these prophets, what are they going to communicate? There are three very simple things that I not only want to leave you with today but lead us with these next few months in the minor prophets.

The first one is this: the character of God. You do understand that God does not change. The God before the exile was the same God after the exile. The God of the Israelites in Egypt was the same God as the Israelites in the wilderness and in the Promised Land. And you and I are so guilty of saying, "Well, that was then." We don't have that privilege with the minor prophets because when the Lord calls out their sins just as if he were doing the ticker on the news today, we don't have the privilege of saying, "Well, I just don't think God sees it that way anymore." I'm going to tell you something that just gets in my backside. Can I be honest with you? We hear all these pundits today saying this, "Well, that's not the God I serve." Too bad, that's who God is. Think about that for just a moment, "That's not the God I serve." I've got a question: maybe you're not the child of his you think you are because you're making God in your image. I've got news for you, you were made in his and we need to reverse the course, so to speak. The character of God.

Here's the second thing: the consistency of Scripture. Now this is where it's going to hurt. This is where the Lord is going to get the scalpel. How many times have you read in the Bible about something you didn't like to read and you said, "Well, that was just in those days. It's a different day today." I've got news for you, 2 Timothy 3 says God inspired and breathed the Scripture, and Psalm 12 says he preserved the Scripture. You

would never open up a can of peaches and say, "Wow, these are amazing apples." They didn't change who they were, they just got a little more sugar in them. That being said, you and I don't have the privilege of opening up Zephaniah and Habakkuk and Jonah and saying, "Well, that's what the Lord said back then. It's a new day today."

And last but not least in light of the character of God that doesn't change, in the consistency of Scripture that we don't have the privilege to manipulate or twist, is God's cry for repentance. We were sinful creatures before exile, we were sinful during, and sinful after, and we've been sinful ever since, and even though the Lord is going to call out the sins very strategically and specifically, even though he's going to be very clear about what the problem is, I want you to understand the endgame has not changed. Whether it was Adam and Eve on the backside of the garden of Eden or whether it's you and I today, in light of his character and the truth of his word, he calls us to be what we were just challenged with, to be honest, be honest with yourself, be honest with the Lord, be honest with others, "I'm the one, you are the one who has fallen into sin and messed up and he is the only one that can heal, forgive and restore us." You see, the message of the minor prophets isn't just to call out our sin but to call us to repent from our sin.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today, maybe you're that individual, maybe you're that person, maybe that person who finds yourself whether in this room or on the other side of the camera realizing as you walked through the first few pages of Hosea or maybe just in light of the last few moments, realizing that what the prophets say is true, that you and I and all of humanity, we are the ones with the sin problem that only Jesus Christ can fix. Maybe you're here today saying, "I'm tired of walking on this path. I'm tired of dealing with this heartache and this struggle. I'm ready to be released and be relieved of this rebellion." I've got great news for you, the Bible says in Romans 10:13 whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Or maybe you're that person today that says, "I need to call on the Lord. What does that look like? What do I need to do?" I've got great news for you, you don't need to jump through a bunch of hoops, you don't have to sign up for a bunch of classes, you don't have to go every night for 12 weeks. No, you just need to call out to him.

You say, "Well, what does that look like? What does that sound like?" Can I encourage you just to have a conversation with the Lord? It's not a conversation you would necessarily need to have out loud, nor one which you would have to say the exact same words that maybe I might say, but maybe the conversation would go as little something like this. "God, today I realized the truth of your word, I am the problem and I believe today that Jesus Christ is the answer. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was actually willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a slimness life on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross. God, I believe that three days later when the tomb was discovered empty, Jesus Christ made it possible for me to be forgiven and for me to be saved. So God, today I don't have all the answers to all the problems of life, I don't even have the answers to most of my problems, but I do know that Jesus Christ is the only answer to my sin problem, so the best way I know how

I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me, I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today, you know, Luke 15 says that when one person turns to the Lord, all of the heavens rejoice and celebrate, we just would love to celebrate with you today. Or maybe you're that individual like many on our campus today that will follow in believer's baptism, that needs to be the next step of your journey of faith. Or maybe you're like people we meet every week who say, "This is our spiritual home. This is the church the Lord has been leading us to." Whatever, we just want to celebrate with you this morning.

Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you, O God, that in spite of our sinful condition, in spite of our consistent rebellion, that your desire is for us to repent, for us to believe in you and to allow you to turn our lives around. Help us, O God, just to be honest with you this morning. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.