

Hosea 14.4

**2 May 2010**

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved brothers and sisters, this afternoon is an application sermon. This morning we heard a sermon that prepared us to partake of the Lord's Supper. And now we have a sermon to apply some aspects of the death of Christ to the lives of God's people. And thus, in this sermon, through the death of Christ on the cross, God promises us that he will heal us of our backsliding. In our physical body, when we are easily tired, or when we fall sick so often, it is a sign that all is not well with our body. And we need to consult a doctor who can diagnose our ailment and recommend the right medicine for our sickness. And God, through the prophet Hosea, declares that God will heal us of our backsliding. He does not recommend us to see a certain doctor, neither does he prescribe for us a course of antibiotics that we must complete, instead, God himself will continue to heal us of our sickness of backsliding.

The word of our text is God's reply to Israel. After God has commanded Israel to confess their sins with their mouth in order to return unto the Lord and He will forgive their sins. Israel responded in faith that she will not depend upon the nations, or horses, or their own works to save them. In this sermon, we will dig into the Scriptures to determine the following: What is spiritual backsliding, the causes and results of backsliding? Why does God want to heal us? And the great promise of God that he will heal us of our backsliding. And today, God says to us, "I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely: for mine anger is turned away from you.

The theme is God heals our backsliding. First, we consider the meaning of our backsliding. Secondly, the reason of God who heals us our backsliding. And finally, the certainty of God healing our backsliding.

First the meaning of our backsliding. What is backsliding? Backsliding is turning away from God whom we once loved and now living in the way of continued sin. The result is that we lose our first love. When we first came to know the Lord, we love him with all our hearts and so we loved all the things that belong to God. We love the church because it is the spiritual kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We love the Word of God because we love him and wants to hear what he has say to us. And after knowing Christ we want to witness for him so that others will also come to know this Lord whom we love. And we love God's people and we love to fellowship with them. And with love in our hearts for God, we want to be his disciple, follow him and keep all his commandments. After all, Jesus says, "if you love me, keep my commandments". And this obedience is not conditional but absolute and we obey our Lord unto the extent of laying down our lives for the sake of Christ. We do not obey God because it is convenient for us to do so, neither do we obey Him because it is personally beneficial to do so. This first love is like when we first come to know and love the one who will later be our husband or wife. Whenever you think or talk about our beloved there is a glow on our faces and that is the glow of great affection. And we delight to be in the presence of that person. And we want to do all things to please him, We want

to fulfil even their little hint that they are in need of something. And we want to obey his instruction and command. And in like manner, such is our first love for God when we first come to know and love him. We have a glow and an excitement upon our faces. We rush to be in His presence in worship, in the reading of Scriptures and in the study of God's Word and to obey His word. But, alas, we have lost our first love for God. What are the marks of backsliding? For Israel, she has backslidden because she has forsaken God whom she has loved. She has committed spiritual and whoredom by worshipping Baal and she loved Baal so much that she called him Baali, or my Baal. This shows that Israel has forsaken her husband Jehovah. Israel also committed political adultery. She looked to Asshur to save her, that powerful nation from the north which is Assyria, that powerful nation from the north. She also looked to the surrounded nations for her salvation, instead of putting their confidence only in the Jehovah God. And the reality of Israel's backslidden condition when God calls her to return unto Him and take words of repentance. As for us, we too backslide as no one is exempted from spiritual backsliding. By nature, we are prone to stray from God. Our love for God and our faith in God is often weak. We often love the things of this world and find it sinfully exciting and interesting. And we backslide from God when the glow of our first love for Christ is getting dimmer and dimmer. We are no more zealous for the things of God: losing interest in coming to church to worship Him and giving excuses when we cannot be in church. We also give excuses for not reading the Scriptures or for not serving Him because we do not have the time to do so.

And the result of our backsliding is like a strong man turned weak. Backsliding does not happen overnight but it's a gradual process. It is like a tree that from the outside looks very strong and sturdy but when there is a fierce storm, that tree is plucked out by the roots. And the cause of it is that worms have begun to eat the insides of the tree and therefore could not stand the storms. Or we all know people who are once young, strong and is able to do all kinds of very strenuous exercises: rock climbing, climb Mount Kinabalu, go for marathon runs. But when he has contracted the cancer of the lungs, then all his energy is gone from him. He does not walk nor run and to do a simple chore of walking for a short distance is a great struggle.

Now, what is the cause of our backsliding? Our sins: we have fallen by our sins (Hosea 14.1). Does that mean that every sin we commit we are backsliding? No, every sin that we commit must be immediately confessed to God. And that we are indeed sorry for our sins and we want to leave our sins and not commit it again. And the good news is that God stands ready to forgive us of our sins and we need not another to cover our sins. And when we have fallen by our sins, we love our sins in our hearts and refuse to give it up. At every opportunity, we would want to feed our own lusts to satisfy ourselves in our sins and the result is that our sins develop into other sins. And sometimes we get very upset when others point out our sins and we do not know the reason why we are so angry? Is it because that we feel guilty of our sins? Is it because this is our darling sins or our treasured sin that we want to protect it from any attacks? And we continue to walk in our sins we know that God forbids it in His Word and we continue in this sin. This is not

only disobedience to God but also rebellion against God. And we live in that sin moment by moment, day and night. And when we want to serve our lusts rather than to be pleasing in the sight of God, when we only want to ply with our toys and not share them with others like our brothers and sisters and others in the church. When we are only concerned about our own needs of having as a family and forgetting that God has given to us the church as the family of God. And doing our own pleasure on the Lord's day and forgetting that is the Lord's day, a day that belongs unto the Lord. In our sinful pride, we imagine that our opinion is the most important and everyone must agree with our opinion. And when others do not agree with us, our pride is hurt and we give them a silent treatment or worse still, we leave church or we lose interest in the church. But the good news is that God heals us of our backsliding. And why would God even bother to heal us?

And answer is because God loves us freely. God loves us because God is in a covenantal relationship with his people. In God's love for us in Jesus Christ, God embraces His church as his husband and the church as his spouse. The church is married to Christ. And Christ loves the church to the extent of giving himself to the death of the cross. Christ binds himself to the church and will be faithful to her. And though we may turn away from him in spiritual backsliding, yet Christ is faithful to us. He will not leave us nor forsake us. Though we prove unfaithful to Him and go after other gods of this world, he continues to be faithful and calls us back to himself. Furthermore, God loves us freely. God love us without restraint, nor forced or without reservation but willingly. And so by this we know that God loves us and accepts us. Where does God demonstrate his love for us? At the cross when God sends his only begotten Son to die for us on the cross. This love is great because he gave to us someone who is very dear and precious to Him – his only begotten Son. And God did not merely give him to us for a while for us to see and admire but to die on the most cruellest way of dying every invented by men. How many of us are willing to give our children to die or to give something very precious to others? This love of God is demonstrated before our eyes in the Lord's Supper, which is to commemorate his death on the cross. But, this is no comfort for me if he did not die for me. And so the Lord's Supper demonstrated that Christ died for me. As I see the broken bread and poured out wine is given to me by the hand of the minister. And I receive the bread and wine as symbols of the body and blood of the Lord. And what I receive are the spiritual blessings arising from the death of Christ, namely, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the assurance that I belong to this covenant of grace. And I receive these blessings by faith. As I am nourished physically when I eat the rice, fish and vegetables and so, by faith, when I take the bread and wine I am nourished spiritually and my faith strengthened and ready to serve my Lord.

And as a result of the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, God anger is turned away from us. When we sin against God, He is angry with us because of who God is. God is holy. He cannot stand sin in his sight and he must separate himself from sin and it is against his nature. God is also just. And his justice demands that every sin committed against him are punished with condemnation. And God's anger against our sins is just. And God's anger

abides us if we continue in our sin, especially when we know what God expects of us from His Word. And in his just judgment over us, he hardens us in our sins because we refuse to turn from our sins. God's anger is appeased or turned away from us because of the death of Christ on the cross. By our sins in Adam, God is angry with us. And the only way in which God's anger is appeased or satisfied is by the sacrifice of his son. That Christ took upon his body the wrath and punishment of our sins that is due unto us. And so Christ in his death appeased the wrath of God forever. And we no longer receive the wrath of God and in place of it is the grace of God that is shown unto his people. The grace of God is God's favour that is it is certain that he will heal us of our backsliding.

God says, "I will heal your backsliding". It is certain that God will heal your backsliding. God himself, the almighty God who created this beautiful world by his mouth and it was created at an instance. He is the sovereign God who rules in all the affairs of men. And even the wicked deeds of men serve the sovereign purposes of God. And you can take God at his Word – his promises are certain. God does not deceive us or lie to us. But, God always means what he says in his words because he always fulfils his word. God says His Word will not return unto him void but will accomplish what he has purposed. And to be healed of our backsliding means, firstly, that we will be forgiven for our sins, cleansed and declared innocent in his sight. That God no longer holds our sins against us for Christ has already dealt with our sins on the cross. And to be forgiven of our sins means without any work of mine, imputes unto me perfect satisfaction righteousness and holiness of Christ. And as if I have not committed any sin and I have fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me. Secondly, the harmful effects of our sins are removed: the pollution and the guilt of our sins. And finally, replaced backsliding with perseverance, godliness and love for the Saviour. And from the language of the text, God continues to heal us whenever we need healing. And should not this truth cheer us that when we sin and we do sin, God promises us that he will heal us and forgive us of our sins? And it does mean that we are always in need of God's healing of our souls. There is no time in our lives even as we grow in godliness in which we not need cleansing from our sins except when we are in heaven.

And finally in this healing comes in the way of returning unto the Lord. And this is the manner in which we come to the table of the Lord. In confessing our sins, pleading with tears in our eyes, saying, "take away all my sins and receive us graciously and we will praise you with our lips". And confessing that we will not rest upon our won power and the strength of horses nor say any more that the work of our hands will save us. May the healing of our backsliding be a reality in our lives, that we cease from backsliding and grow in grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. God promises to each one of us, "I will heal your backsliding, I will love you freely; for mine anger is turned away". Amen.