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Transcribed Message

Message: What God Desires

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Hosea 6:1-6

My name is Jordan Allen, and I have the privilege of filling in for our senior pastor Carlon this morning. I wanted to share this because I thought it was funny, but last night we were sitting around the table and my 11-year-old daughter asked me, "Dad, when you fill in for Carlon, do you get nervous?" I said, "If I'm being honest, yes, I get a little nervous." Without skipping a beat, she was like, "Yeah, because I actually get pretty nervous too." So that happened. I was wondering. I was like, "Are you saying that you get nervous for me? Or you get nervous because of me?" Now that I'm sharing this story, I realized she never gave me a clear answer. But yeah, it's always good to be filling in. Oh, I should say this too. I did ask her permission to share that story. Because I did, I thought it was funny. Now, I mean, she's still grounded, but I thought it was funny. I said it was kind of funny. I didn't say it was hilarious. But when I fill in for Carlon, not only do I get to potentially make people nervous, I also get to pick the passage. So, that is why we are going to be jumping out of the book of John and into Hosea this morning. We're going to be looking at Hosea 6, verses 1 through 6. The big idea for this morning is that God cares more about your heart and the heart of the next generation than just your works. What I'm going to do is I'm going to read the text one time through, I'm going to pray, and then we will dive in.

Hosea 6, verse 1. "Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, that He may heal us. He has struck us down, and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him. Let us know. Let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth. What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. Therefore, I've hewn them up by the prophets. I've slain them by the words of my mouth,

and my judgment goes forth as the light. For I desire steadfast love, and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”

Let's pray. Dear Heavenly Father, we thank You for Your love. We thank You for Your mercy. We thank You for Your grace. Lord, I pray that You would just be with us today. I pray that we would just, everything that we do, that it would bring glory and honor to You. And Lord, I thank You that You would desire a relationship with us. And I thank You for providing a way for us to spend eternity with You. For it's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Well, I always want to start with a little bit of context as we are jumping into a different book of the Bible. And obviously, I'm not able to give all the context that would be necessary. But there are a few things that we do need to know, and that is that Hosea was a prophet that ministered mostly to the northern kingdom, which was often referred to as Ephraim. And then there was the southern kingdom of Israel, which was often referred to as Judah.

At that time, the nation of Israel was extremely prosperous. And as a result of the increased prosperity, it did not lead the nation of Israel to an increased faithfulness in God. In fact, it had the opposite effect. As things got better from a worldly perspective, the hearts of Israel fell further and further away from God. Hosea is warning the nation of Israel that if they don't return to God, that it will eventually lead to their downfall.

Now, if you're not familiar with the book of Hosea, in the first three chapters, we get this picture of Hosea's marriage. He would share his personal marriage to share God's prophetic message with the nation of Israel. So, in the first three chapters, we see Hosea, and he gets married to an unfaithful woman by the name of Gomer. Gomer would leave Hosea, and she would pursue relationships with other men. There's even speculation that she got into temple worship and possibly temple prostitution. So, as we read this, we recognize that this relationship between Hosea and Gomer would mirror the relationship between God and the nation of Israel. As we're reading this, we see in the imagery that Hosea represents God. Gomer represents the unfaithful nation of Israel. But more specifically, the leaders of Israel, the priests, the kings, and the members of the ruling class. Hosea and Gomer would go on to have three children. And in the imagery, their

children would represent the next generation, but more specifically, the people who are impacted by the culture, the common people.

As I mentioned, Hosea and his marriage, Gomer would leave him, and she would pursue relationships with other men. Even though Hosea had a biblical allowance for divorce, God would command Hosea to bring Gomer home and to honor his covenant with her and to redeem her. And so similar to Hosea's relationship with Gomer, the nation of Israel would quit pursuing God, and they would go to other gods and other nations for their riches and for their security. As a result of that, the relationship with God, with Israel over time, became meaningless if it remained at all. This is what we're seeing in chapters 1 through 3.

Then there is a shift in chapters 4 and 5 where we see God make a direct charge against the nation of Israel. He would do this through the voice of Hosea. And he would point out that even though the nation of Israel would at times continue to make sacrifices to God, that they would never stop pursuing Baal and other nations, specifically the Assyrians, for their political, their economic, and their military security. At one point, the nation of Israel would even go back to Egypt and ask them for help. The same people that had enslaved them, the same people that God had to rescue them from, they would go back and ask them for help. And in that, it showed that Israel lacked integrity, love, and knowledge of God, as they would continue to bring empty religious rituals to God while worshipping Baal and while finding their security in other nations.

At times, when they would come back to God, it wasn't long before they wandered again, taking the next generation with them. As a result, the next generation didn't even know who their God Yahweh was. The next generation would even lose their desire to repent because they didn't even understand that they fully needed to. They were so deep in the cult of Baal and the fertility religions that they had come to believe that Baal was the one that rescued them in Exodus, that sustained them in the wilderness, that delivered them into the Promised Land. They believed that Baal was their father, that Baal was their God. And this was something that even the leaders, the priests, were teaching to the next generation.

So, similar to Hosea's story, as Gomer would leave and she would take her children with her, over time, their children didn't even know who their father Hosea was. They didn't even understand the level of betrayal on the part of Gomer. And as God was commanding Hosea to once again bring Gomer home, He was calling the nation of Israel back to Himself, and He was honoring His covenant with them.

This image of marriage is at the heart of the book of Hosea. You know, as I was prepping for this study, I was reminded of a quote that said, Love is blind, but marriage is the eye-opener. And what that quote suggests is that marriage is a powerful way for us to become more self-aware. Because not only do we learn more about who our spouse is, we also learn more about who we are, or at least we should. Because marriage highlights this shift from this playful, idolized, romantic, and dating love to something that at times can be more challenging, but it's often way more authentic.

And it can be challenging. Marriage can be challenging because it is eye-opening, it is sanctifying, but it's often way more authentic because it provides this opportunity to grow deeper in our understanding of one another and grow in our relationship with one another. And I think that's what's in mind here. I think that's why God is using this imagery of marriage. Because it is something that we understand. It's something that the nation of Israel would have understood whether we're married or not. And from this imagery, we do see that God is wanting this eye-opening, this authentic, this sanctifying relationship with His people. He wants us to have a deeper understanding of Him and to grow in our relationship with Him. And so again, through Hosea's marriage, God is telling the nation of Israel, you are being unfaithful, but I'm calling you back to me.

And that leads us to chapter 6. So, what I'm going to do is I'm going to read verses 1 through 3. And as we read this, the reason is, is because this is often viewed as in one voice. There is some debate about whose voice this is. Some people say that this voice is the leaders of Israel and they're speaking to the nation of Israel. Some people say that this is just the voice of Hosea. If you were to ask me, and I don't know if this is my fear of just getting it wrong, if you ask me whose voice this is, is this Hosea or is this the leaders of Israel talking to the nation of Israel? I would say yes. Because I do think this is the voice of

Israel. But I think we can't forget that Hosea is the author. So, we don't lose his response, his voice either.

We look at Israel's response to God's charge against the people of Israel in Hosea 6, 1 through 3. "Come, let us return to the Lord, for He has torn us, that He may heal us. He has struck us down and He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live before Him. Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord. His going out is as sure as the dawn. He will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth." So, the first thing I want to address is what we've already seen – that God has allowed consequences for Israel's sin.

When Israel was prosperous, they would forget about God. When they were poor, when they were hurting, they would go to God, but they never stopped going to other gods and other nations. And as they would come back, as the blessings would come forward, they would wander again and once again, it would lead to their temporary downfall. But we know God's heart isn't to just punish the nation of Israel. This isn't being allowed to happen so that Israel would be forever pained. God wanted reconciliation. And as we see after each hurt, it was often followed by healing and redemption as He would always be calling the nation of Israel back to Him.

The problem is that Israel knew the routine by now. They knew they could come back to God. They knew and they had faith that God could heal them and heal them quickly. And I think we're seeing that here when they're saying, He tore that He may heal. He struck us down and He will bind up our wounds. The nation of Israel is making a confession of repentance, but we see that their confession is not coming from one of love and a relationship. It comes with only hopes of avoiding further consequences. There doesn't appear to be any integrity here because there's no heart change. What they're talking about is temporary behavior modification. They're talking about making sacrifices. They're talking about offering repentance with only hopes that it will satisfy Him and bring about a speedy response.

Verse two continues to point to the evidence of that here. And this is where a lot of the confusion of where the voice is, which voice this is, whether Hosea or Israel, because

when we read verse two, we can't help but read this through the lens of the gospel. We can't help but read it this side of the cross as we can't help but see the imagery of the resurrection where it says in three days, He will raise us up so that we may have life. So, with Hosea as the author, this may have been one of those moments where we're seeing this futuristic prophetic foreshadowing. That is something that is definitely a possibility. And again, that is something that is amongst debate today.

However, the reason I also think that this is the voice of Israel here is because prior to Christ's death and resurrection, when they would say things like something would happen in two to three days, that was often seen as an idiom, figurative language, to convey a short amount of time. This is the equivalent of us saying today that something will happen in a minute. When somebody asks you, when your kids come into the kitchen, they say, mom, dad, when's dinner? And you say, it'll be ready in a minute. If your house is anything like my house, your kids will be like, oh, it's been a minute. You know, we're not really saying that it's going to be in a literal minute. We're saying it's going to happen soon. So, what they're saying here is they're saying God is warning us of our destruction. But if we can just turn back to Him, He can solve everything quickly. But then He can let us go back to living before Him.

I don't want to miss what Israel's heart is here. Because what we ultimately see them trying to do is just to go offer the sacrifices, to, you know, appease God and just to earn His favor in this moment. But what we really try to see them doing is they're really trying to control by offering an exchange of services. They're really trying to manipulate God. Because notice, nowhere in the passages up until this point, is there an admission of guilt. They're not saying, look, we've really done it. We really need to turn back to God and repent. Instead, it's, hey, listen, if we do this, then God's going to do this. If we go make sacrifices, if we do all the external things, if we present those before the Lord, then He will once again let us go back to live before Him. Once again, revealing this heart of manipulation.

You know, when we read this, we can often be quick to judge Israel. But I think this is something that if we're not careful, we can be guilty of doing today. In fact, I recently

heard the testimony of this woman who's the wife of a big Division I basketball coach. Before I share this story, I do want to say I am somebody who believes that we should pray. We should pray often, and we should pray what's on our heart. But as I share this story, I just encourage you to ask, am I allowing these types of thoughts and actions to creep in? But this lady was the wife of a big Division I basketball coach, and her husband's team had made the tournament. And they were doing pretty well, and I think they were playing to get into the Final Four, if I'm not mistaken. Her testimony is that she was at the game, and she was in the stands, and she was praying the whole time, God, let my husband's team win. She wasn't praying, like, let there be no injuries, you know, God, may you receive all glory and honor. It was, God, let my husband's team win.

And so, the game's going back and forth, and she's in nonstop prayer. Finally, with about 15 seconds left, her husband's team has the ball, they're down by one, they go down the court, and they make a shot with about 10 seconds left, taking the lead. She said in that moment, she thought the other team was going to call timeout and set up a play, but instead they inbounded the ball, and they raced down the court, and they caught her off guard. But they also caught her husband's team off guard. She said she stopped praying, and she got sucked into the game, and they went down and they hit a shot at the buzzer, winning the game and sending her husband's team home and advancing to the Final Four. The woman's testimony was, if I would have just prayed one more time, then God would have let my husband's team win.

Now, I don't tell that story to be super critical of this woman. I tell it because how easy it is that we fall into that way of thinking. I'm going to do this so that God will do this. I'm going to read my Bible so that I will get that promotion at work. I'm going to go to church so that my spouse and kids act in a certain way and treat me better. I'm going to pray one more time so that we'll win that championship. Or sometimes we talk about the things we're not going to do. I'm not going to miss church. I'm not going to miss that quiet time... so that God will do something.

When I am often preparing for a sermon, I will be praying, you know, Lord, search my heart. Reveal in me areas where I do this. Lord, do I make it about my works ever? Do I

try to make it about an exchange of services? Do I try to control or manipulate you? And if you take anything away from today, just take this away – just be careful what you pray for because God will reveal that to you. And that's what He did with me. And He reminded me of moments in my life where that's exactly what I did. They weren't all that long ago.

They were in the last few years where I was there, and my world was going well. Suddenly, my world was rocked. My peace was rattled. And I remember crying out to God and being like, God, why are you allowing this to happen to me? And that's not a bad prayer. That's a prayer of faith. But He reminded me that I took it a little further as I was saying like, Lord, why are you allowing this to happen? And I started pointing to my works as if that should earn me special treatment. Why are you allowing this to happen? Do you not see what I'm doing for you over here? I'm doing what I'm supposed to do. Lord, what is happening over here? I'm doing this so that I should have a peaceful and easy life.

And it just kind of hit me. It was like, man, what does that say about my heart in those moments? Was I doing that as a result of my relationship? Or did I have different motives? It's just easy to make it about arrangements and our expectations. As I was thinking about this more, the arrangement that terrifies me the most, the one that scares me every Sunday morning is that somebody is in here and they are making the arrangement of salvation. If I go to church, if I'm a good person, then salvation will be mine. In that moment, what we're doing is we're making it about the exchange of services. But what we're really trying to do is manipulate God because we're bypassing the relationship entirely. I think if we are not careful, that is something that we can find ourselves doing. We can be making it about the rituals. We can be making it about the exchanges instead of a relationship when all we want is things that benefit us and make us feel comfortable now.

I think that's what's happening here. But God is not interested in the exchange of services between Him and the nation of Israel. He doesn't need an exchange of services. What He's after is a relationship. He lets them offer their services. And what makes this even more sad is verse 3 because it shows that they understood. Because when we see in verse 3 where it says, let us know, let us press on to know the Lord, it shows that they

understood. So, the reason it was important to give context for chapters 1, 2, and 3 is because of this verse right here. Because we were reminded of the imagery of marriage.

When we see the word “know” here, that comes from the Hebrew word *yada*. We see *yada* being used throughout the Old Testament. But I think it's important that we picture this, again, in the context of marriage. So, what I'm going to do is I'm going to go to Genesis 4, 1 because that's where we'll see it in the context of marriage. You don't have to turn to it. I'll put it up on the screen. But here's what it says. “Now Adam knew Eve, his wife.” Now Adam *yada* Eve, his wife. “And she conceived and bore Cain, saying, ‘I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.’” Now when we read this today, we often associate this form of knowing as just a physical intimacy because of the birth of Cain. Obviously, we all see how we got there.

But that's a shame that's often all we see. Because that's not what the nation of Israel would have understood it as. Obviously, they're not talking about physical intimacy in this moment. The question then becomes then what were they saying here? Well, the definition of *yada* actually means to know and be known, to reveal and to be received, to understand one another and to be found by one another. This knowing, even in the context of marriage, was always meant to point to a more profound and complete connection that went beyond physical intimacy. It points to a deep, personal, covenantal knowledge, a spiritual oneness between two people that was designed to last a lifetime. It was a reflection of the covenant. What is essentially being said here is let's go back to that covenantal relationship. Let's present as if we're all the exteriors. Let's do the sacrifices. Let's do all those things so that we don't face destruction. Let's do like we've done every other time. And when we're in this position again, we know what we need to do. Let's go back to the Lord and we'll just repent and do it again. But sadly, these verses only reveal that they knew the truth. They know the answers. It actually shows that they're without excuse. They know what they need to do and that is for them to turn their heart back to the Lord.

From here, there is a shift in verses 4, 5, and 6 as we see God's response. Now I'm going to look at verse 6 separately. But as we read this, we need to understand that this is

not God rejecting an authentic call of repentance. I never want to read too much into the text, but as we're reading this, it's not hard to imagine grief as God is seeing them doing things, as they may be saying things, but He knows, because He knows their heart, that it's insincere. And that's what's happening here as we see God's response to Israel's empty repentance in verses 4 and 5 where it says, "What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away. Therefore, I have hewn them up by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light."

What's interesting is God isn't saying that their faith in this moment is completely empty. He's saying that it goes away quickly, like the morning dew. The nation of Israel knew the truth. They knew what they needed to do. And they were confident that God could answer their prayers. They were as confident as that as the coming of the dawn. They knew that He could deliver them. But what they're really saying in this moment is they're saying, God, we want you to be our God in the valleys. But we really don't care about you in the mountaintops. We just want to be comfortable. Then let us go back to living before you.

It's just that their faith passed like the dew in the morning. Their faith was tied to outcomes of what God could do for them. In this moment, it's hard for me not to imagine God being nothing more than a waiter to them. We're having a problem, so we're going to call God over. We're going to be very nice to Him. We're going to sacrifice. We're going to give Him a really big tip. And instead of letting Him sit at the table, we're going to send Him away and we'll call Him again when we need Him. God recognizes that and He's saying, look, I've sent my prophets to you. They've spoken truth to you. I have been patient with you. I have kept my covenant with you. I have tried everything and yet you are still being unfaithful.

Even though it's not God's desire to punish, here He's saying, like the light, there will be consequences. You know, as we've talked about light in the book of John and Carlon's talked about it multiple times, we see that light doesn't have to give testimony to itself. It's obvious. And that's what He's saying here. Like the light, everyone is going to know that your downfall and the consequences are what I have allowed because I have sent my

prophets to you. But again, it's important that we understand that's not God's desire, that He is constantly calling His people back to Him.

And we see what God's desire is in verse 6 where it says, "For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice. The knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." I love the NASB version so I'm going to read that one as well. It says, "For I desire loyalty rather than sacrifice. And the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Here is where we see what God's desire is for the people of Israel. I think it's important that we see that. Notice that He doesn't tell them to stop making burnt offerings and sacrifices. We know from the rest of the Old Testament that God is not saying to be done with that. What He is saying is He wants them to understand why they do it. He wants them to understand that they don't offer those things to earn the covenant. They offer them as a result of the covenant.

In the same way with us today, we don't go to church or read our Bible or serve to earn salvation. We do it as a result of salvation. So, He's not saying that He doesn't care about their works. Our works are an expression of our faith. It's how people will know us. Our works have been predestined for us before time as part of our sanctification process. Our works are so that people could see our good deeds, so then we could then direct them to our God in Heaven. So, He's not saying that we're to be done with our works. He's saying that they just don't mean anything if our hearts aren't attached to them. Works can be empty.

He's also not saying that we should be done with works just because we might not feel like it that day. And that's what I like. I love the imagery of marriage here because when we think about our marriages, I know that I am called to love my wife as Christ loved the church. I'm going to be honest. This is a moment of confession, and this may shock you, but I'm not perfect. There are days when I wake up and I want to be selfish. I don't want to love my wife as Christ loved the church. But true love is waking up and choosing to do it whether I feel like it or not.

I think the same goes with our faith. I think the same goes with our relationship with God, with our works. It's not always going to be based on how we feel. But as you know, it's whether we choose to do that. So, I'm not saying that we neglect our works at any time.

What I am saying is we don't build a relationship off it entirely and think that we're good. What he's saying is that God wants all our hearts, not just on Sunday mornings. He doesn't want to share what belongs to Him with the Baals of this world. He doesn't want us to go out and act a certain way six days a week and then come in here and offer up a sacrifice for a Sunday morning time slot. Those areas throughout the week where we find ourselves saying I know I shouldn't do it. I know I shouldn't do it, but it's really not that bad. And yeah, I'm just going to do it.

Are there areas where we're saying, I know what I should do. I know I should do it. I know. I know what scripture says, but I'm just going to be honest. This is hard and I don't want to. What we're saying in those moments is, Lord, I'm going to hold on to this. You can't have this part of me. But we see that God's desire is for our entire lives. It's a fully committed relationship with Him – all our hearts and not just on Sunday. Carlon has given the imagery of this but going back to marriage. Can you imagine spending an hour a week with our spouses and thinking that we have a wonderful and thriving relationship? We would never do that in the context of marriage. We would never do that in the context of work or really anything. But if we're not careful, we can do that in the context of our relationship with God because we make Him just a box that we check. We're offering the sacrifices, but our hearts can be far from it.

Verse 6 shows that God wants a fully committed relationship with his people and that is what's at the heart of this passage. God doesn't want our hearts just sometimes. He's not interested in arrangements. He's not interested in rituals. He's not interested in exchange of services. He doesn't want our empty religion. He wants us to know Him and to be fully committed to Him all the time. That's what God wants for us.

Well as we begin to wrap up, we ask the question: what do we do with this? What do we take away from this? And I think it's this. I think it is God's desires for us to strive to know Him better, to submit to Him, and to give Him every area of our lives. Again, we don't do this to earn salvation. We do this because of it. I just want to say yes, at times, of course, we're going to fail. But the beauty is that God is okay with our sanctification taking a lifetime. Our sanctification is not always about perfection. We're not always going to get

it right. Obviously, our sanctification is about progress, and I don't say that to give us a pass. We are always grateful for the grace that goes along with it. My heart in bringing this up today, and I just look internally at me, and I'll make this personal to me, is that I'm always taking an inventory of my actions. I'm always taking an inventory of my heart and I'm always sitting there praying, Lord, search my heart. Reveal in me areas where I make it about rituals, areas where I am holding back, areas where I'm just making it about an exchange of services, areas where maybe I'm not accepting grace and that's why I'm prioritizing my works, areas where my heart is divided, maybe places where I'm not loving others. What are the areas where my anxiety, my fear, and just the desire to control or that I'm trying to manipulate you? From there when God reveals it, we just confess: Lord, reveal in me how I can continue to press on to know you better today and to trust you more.

When we say that we are the people of Covenant and that we want to know God, love others, and live the gospel it's very intentional. It starts with knowing God because if we don't know God, then we're not going to be able to love others and live the gospel. Those things can't conflict with one another. We can't sit there and say, you know, I don't love this person. I refuse to love them. But I know God really, really well. In those moments I would argue. Either we're in disobedience or we're not as familiar with God's Word as we should be. The question is: is that knowing God better? It can only come by spending time with Him regularly.

I'm going to say it. I think the goal needs to be to spend time with God daily. I don't say that to make us feel terrible and to make us feel convicted. I just do it by looking again at the context of a marriage, because if I stood up here and said hey, we need to strive to spend time with our spouse daily. That might mean getting up early. That might mean calling them on our lunch break. That might mean connecting with them at the end of a long day. The goal should be daily, and we should look for times to get away – to go on dates, to do weekend trips, to do anniversary trips. We should be fully committed to them and a hundred percent faithful only to them. If I said that, everyone would agree and understand that was what was necessary to maintain the thriving and intimate relationship

with our spouse. I think that goes for every relationship, and I think that goes with our relationship with God as well.

Again, there is grace when life gets busy. There is grace when our quiet times with the Lord have been interrupted by our kids for the thousandth time. As I said earlier, we don't do it to earn salvation. We do it as a result of it. I'm talking about sanctification and again, I'll make it personal to me. I'm talking about my growth. I'm talking about my heart to spend time with the Lord daily, to know Him, to grow in my covenantal knowledge and my spiritual oneness with Him. I'm talking about prioritizing my deep, deep need and my desperation for Him daily. I don't know about you, but I do know me and I do know that I need Jesus daily. I cannot do this without Him. There are days that I have tried and those are the days that I have failed. The amazing thing is not only is daily time with the Lord beneficial for me, it's what God also desires. My God, my Savior, my King, my Lord wants a relationship with me. And yes, my relationship started at my salvation. It was secure in the blood of Christ. But growth and sanctification happen for the rest of my life.

I do want to say this as I wrap up. That can only come by first saying yes to the relationship. If you are here and you've never placed your faith and trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, that is something that you can do today. It is by believing that we are sinners and that sin separated us from a perfect and holy God. While we were still sinners God had a redemptive plan that He sent His Son Jesus who came and lived a perfect and sinless life. who willingly went to the cross. who died for your sins and for mine. But scripture says He didn't stay dead. He rose again, conquering the grave, conquering sin, taking my shame and my debt. And if we believe He is who He says that He is, and if we believe that his death and resurrection is enough and we accept the free gift of salvation, then scripture says that we can be saved. In that moment, we realize that it's not about the rituals. It's not about the sacrifices that we could offer. It's not about the exchange of services. It's about Jesus and only through a relationship with him can we be saved. And then we're blessed to press on to know the Lord for the rest of our lives and grow in our sanctification.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you for your patience. Thank you for your unending love. Thank you that you pursue us and call us back to you. Thank you for your redemptive plan for us. Thank you that you did not leave us in our sins but that you pursued us all the way to the cross. Lord, we thank you for resurrection Sunday. We thank you for that reminder. We thank you for what was accomplished on that day. Lord, I pray that here at Covenant we would be people of the Word, people who strive to know you better. Lord, reveal in us areas where we are holding anything back from you. Show us areas where we've made it about rituals. Show us areas where we've made it about works. Show us areas where we have made it about exchanging services and areas that maybe we're striving to control you. Holy Spirit, help us to be people who know you, to love others, and who live the gospel, it's in Jesus's name we pray, amen.