

Hosea 6: 1-3; "Let us Press On to know the Lord", A sermon prepared for the 1st Communion Sunday of the New Year, Delivered in preparation for the observance of the Lord's Supper, by Pastor Paul Rendall on January 4th, 2008.

This being the first Sunday of the New Year and a communion Sunday as well, I wanted to preach a sermon that would be appropriate to both. I want to say, as we begin, that it is entirely possible that many of us are not taking notice of the years going by as we should. All of us are getting older every year, and we do not know how much time God has given to any one of us. This applies to both young people and adults. The Lord has given us only so many years here upon the earth, and He expects us to improve upon the time and the knowledge of His word that He has given to us. The meaning of our life, our text tells us, is knowing the Lord. "Let us press on to know Him." These words were addressed to the Old Testament people of God who were being spoken to by the prophet. They were already acquainted with their glorious past; when God redeemed them from physical bondage in Egypt, and brought them out with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, into a land flowing with milk and honey. But over their long history since that time, there had been many in Israel who had not been faithful to God even though He had been faithful to them. They were of the chosen race, chosen to be shown mercy, and given help and deliverance from physical bondage but they had not come to know Him. They were still in spiritual bondage. There were others, who although they knew the Lord, they had not been faithful to press on to know the Lord. They had not lived up to all the grace and truth which God had given to them. They were backslidden. And then there was also a small but faithful remnant, who like the prophet Hosea, were attempting to encourage all of their kinsmen according to the flesh who had been unfaithful, to return to the Lord. So this text, and my sermon to you this morning, is addressed to all of these groups of people. Let us all, as we begin another year take heed to the message. Let us, each one of us, press on to know the Lord. Let this be the resolution that you take upon your lips; that this will be the year, and that this will be the day of the New Year that you will come to know Him if you do not know Him. And if you do know Him, you should pray that this would be the day that you would come to understand more of what it will mean for you in particular, to press on to know the Lord better. Let us not be so sure of ourselves as to think that since we have known the Lord for many years, that we do not need to know Him better. The Scriptures say, "And if anyone thinks that he knows anything he knows nothing yet as he ought to know." (1 Corinthians 8: 2) So the way that I want to open up this text is to ask 3 questions. 1st - How do I press on to know the Lord if I have never been converted? 2nd- How should I press on to know the Lord if I am presently a backslidden Christian? And 3rd - How should I press on to know the Lord if I am presently walking closely with Him?

1st of all - How do press on to know the Lord if I have never been

converted?

The answer is found in the first phrase of verse 3. "Let us know....." To know the Lord, we must come to know Him through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. There is no other way that we can know God. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life," says the Lord Jesus, and "no man comes to the Father except by Me." "There is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven, which has been given among men, by which we must be saved," says the Apostle Peter in Acts chapter 4, verse 12. All other religions in the world are simply fooling themselves. They have no way that they can approach God which would be pleasing to Him because all other religions of the world have come into being through a mere man making up what he believes to be truth. He attempts to convince others of what ought to be believed and done in order to serve that God. It is his ideas or his religious works that he hopes will please the deity which he has created for himself. True Christianity is not like this. In true Christianity, God reveals Himself to men. God does have real expectations of men obeying Him and the law which He has revealed. But He knows that man has fallen from the estate in which He created him. They have lost the ability to live to His glory. They have lost the ability to do and keep His commandments in a way that pleases Him. People who do not believe that the Bible is God's word, do not understand or want to believe that this book is the written revelation of God to all men who would know Him. His glory may be seen in the creation; His glorious attributes and His eternal power are clearly seen there. But God is known, really and savingly known, only through His word the Bible. No man's nature is prone to follow God in accordance with what God has clearly revealed of Himself in His Word, the Bible. If a man or a woman takes any interest in the Word of God the Bible, it is because God is drawing them to consider the state of their eternal soul. He works in their heart so that they ask themselves, "Do I really know the Lord?" "How do I know that I know Him?" And the answer comes back from God's written record and testimony; "because you have believed the gospel", and in believing you came to find life in Jesus' name. God must reveal Himself to you through His word and by His Spirit for you to really know Him.

In order for any person to come to know God, God must take the initiative. He takes the initiative in the gospel that you might know and be saved. This is very true, but there is something which is equally true, and that is, that you must respond to what He reveals. You must know and pursue that knowledge of the Lord. "Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord." Let us press on to really, experientially find Him. God sends forth the revelation of Himself through the creation. Psalm 19, verse 1, states, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows forth His handiwork." "Day to day utters speech, and night to night reveals knowledge." "There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard." "Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world." When you look at the creation; the sun, the moon, and the stars; do you see His majesty and His glory? Do you declare God to be an awesome God in your

heart and mind and give thanks for all that He has made? He has made every created thing including you. And you are fearfully and wonderfully made. But do you come to know the Lord through gazing at the creation? No, beloved, you do not. Your heart may admire the handiwork of God and it may take your breath away. But something more awesome is needed for your soul to reflect upon than even this. It is mentioned for us in the 7th verse of Psalm 19. "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether." "More to be desired are they than gold, yea than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb." Oh, my dear unconverted friends among us. Think of the most wonderful times that you have ever had out in God's creation and multiply them times one thousand and you might begin to conceive of the wonders of knowing and walking with God. Think of the greatest financial advances that you have experienced and they will be very small in comparison to having found the riches of Christ. Think of the purest, coolest, cleanest water you have ever drunk, the most wonderful shower you have ever taken, and it will not come close to the feeling of a clear and clean conscience in the sight of the true and living God. God's blessed word reveals all of this to you. His law, which is what His word is called here, is what performs this work in your soul when the Holy Spirit is pleased in accordance with the will of God and the preachers words, to open your eyes to spiritually see and hear and feel, and really know the Lord. Through the preaching of His word, and then by His Spirit's working, God not only strives with men in connection with the truth of His word, He lets them "taste and see that He is good", and what a precious blessed thing it is to know Him. Do you know this my dear friend or are you coming to church hoping to know it? Salvation is here for you. It is to be found in believing in Jesus Christ our Lord. You must press on to know Him and press on to find Him. You should do it now and not later. It is by Christ's righteous life and His sacrificial death, that He paved the way for you to find Him. Nothing that He did was ever in vain. He died for all of the Elect and only for them. But His sufferings are surely more than enough for the salvation of your soul if you will come to Him to find saving grace. I urge you to come today; come even now by faith.

Now the Second question that I would ask this morning is this - How can I press on to know the Lord if I am a backslidden Christian?

And the answer is found in the in the phrase in verse 1, "Come, and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." God knows that unconverted men will not seek Him without His first seeking them. This is what God's mercy and grace do for sinners who do not know Him. But God is also faithful to bring His erring and wayward people back; His people who have not lived up to all that He has given to them. He will be faithful as their Good Shepherd to bring them back to Himself when they have compromised their

obedience to Him. This is why Christ died. This is what we celebrate in the Lord's Supper today. This bringing back the backslidden assumes that the backslidden person has really come to know Him in the first place. There are people who may say or think that they are backslidden when, really, they have never come to know the Lord at all. A person can only be converted once. It is just like being born. You can only be born physically once. But you must be born again to enter the kingdom of heaven. He who is born once will die twice. But he who is born twice will only die once. When we are born physically into this world we are born dead in our trespasses and sins. It takes God's giving us spiritual life to raise us from that death. When you are born again, born spiritually, you begin a relationship with the true and living God who watches over every aspect of your spiritual life and growth. So He reveals Himself to you by speaking to you, not by an audible voice, but by means of His servants the prophets. When the prophets in the Old Testament prophesied, they were all prophesying in relation to God's greatest revealing of Himself in His Son. Some of their prophecies were written down in books for us. They prophesied of the Christ who was to come; of His glory and His kingdom. But they also preached of His suffering on behalf of sinners. The Lord Jesus became the suffering servant even though He was the King of glory. In the word of God the Bible, God speaks of Christ's glory and He speaks of Christ's sufferings. In Hebrews chapter 1, it says, "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds...." This shows us His glory. Then there are also other prophecies of His sufferings, such as is found in Isaiah 53: 4. "Surely He has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted." "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

Now think about the setting of this chapter in Hosea Chapter 6 in comparison to what I have just read to you. It is the judgments of God which had come upon Ephraim and Judah for their unfaithfulness. If we were to take the time to read the chapters before this one, and the ones following, we would see that God was highly offended with Israel's playing the spiritual harlot with false gods. Here were the very people to whom God had given covenant promises of how He would be their God and provide for all their needs, but most of all, that they would be given the inestimable privilege of knowing Him in accordance with the revelation of Himself, and they were not faithful to come to Him. Instead, they worshiped the idols and the false gods of the peoples around them. In verse 1 it says, "Come and let us return to the Lord; for He has torn, but he will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up." What reason do these sinful backslidden people have for thinking that they will continue to receive grace? It is because of the promise of God. All those who have backslidden; all those who have not been walking closely with their Lord in their hearts or minds, or even in their words and actions, if they will return to the Lord,

He will return to them. Notice that it says that "He had torn them" and "He had stricken them." This was a part of His covenant faithfulness. This is what He does with all of His Elect who wander from Him spiritually and morally. If they are sinning presumptuously, if they are sinning secretly, if they are not manifesting the fruit of the Spirit which is love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control; then they will be torn and stricken in their souls, if not in their bodies, by God Himself. This is not His hatred. This is His love. He will bring them back to walk upon the path of righteousness with an undivided heart. If they have other gods before Him, if they love images instead of Him, if they are taking His name in vain, if they are not remembering the Sabbath Day to keep it holy, if they are angry, forceful, self-serving people, if they are secret adulterers, if they are secretly thieving or lying, or covetous; God is right there to observe it and to patiently and firmly do what is necessary to pry our fingers off of our sin and to be renewed to a righteous mindset. Praise God that this is so. Do you know the reality of this, or do you excuse yourself in your sin. "This is just the way that I am." "God understands that I cannot change my bad habits." Oh, yes, beloved, God does understand the way that you are in your sinfulness and He does not approve of it. He is too holy to approve of it or allow it. He is too loving to let you love or wallow in any known sin. He will tear you, He will strike you, but He has also promised to heal you and to bind you up.

How does God do these things out of love without harming our souls, but rather healing them? Notice what the text says in verse 2? "After two days He will revive us; and on the third day He will raise us up." There were many backsliders in Israel at the time that this prophecy was given. They could go to the priest and have him offer up sacrifices and sin offerings unto the Lord and hope that by these that they would be forgiven. But how could they ever be renewed to a new obedience? Well, look at verses 4-6 of the text. "Oh Ephraim, what shall I do to you?" "O Judah, what shall I do to you?" "For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew it goes away." What a good definition of those who are backslidden, or perhaps even of those who do not know the Lord at all, although they are religious. "Therefore I have hewn them by the words of My mouth; and The backslider's hope of mercy being shown to Him is a sure one when He is trusting in Christ. It is based upon the death and resurrection of the backslider's Savior. He was crucified for our transgressions. He was wounded and torn for our iniquities. The backslider may be hewn, that is, he may be cut to pieces by the conviction that comes to his soul from the preaching of the word of God and his own conscience realizing that he has not been living and doing what God wants him to be doing. He may have been receiving the grace of God in vain for some time. But God will faithfully deal with him according to His wisdom and grace in Christ. "After 2 days He will revive us." As a backslider from God we may feel as though we are dead in our heart. We know that God has given us great and abounding grace. But we know also that we have not thought and said and done the things which God has wanted us to do. We may even

look alright to other people, from all outward appearances. But God and we ourselves if we are sensitive to Him, know the true state of our hearts, unless we are fooling ourselves. The Christian who is backslidden, who is not deceiving himself, realizes that there is a very great work of mortification of sin that he is engaged in every day. And he realizes that he is not making good headway against it. It grieves him, and he mourns over it daily. He has not been mortifying his many heart sins which he is guilty of. He may have even gone as far as those Christians at Corinth which Paul mentions in 2 Corinthians 12: 20 to engage in contentions, jealousies, outbursts of anger, selfish ambition, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, and tumults. He may have been harboring uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness in his heart. But if he knows the Lord, and is going to pursue the Lord to know him better, all this will have to change and go, and the good attitudes which grace produces in the heart and upon the lips, and in the behavior, will come to pass in his life. A backslider knows, if God is dealing with him by His Spirit, that he is under the discipline and disapproval of God because of these things. And worst of all, He also realizes that his communion with God is almost non-existent.

In the text that we are looking at in Hosea, we can see how God dealt with their backslidings and apostasy. In Chapter 5, verse 13, the prophet says, "When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jareb; yet he cannot cure you, nor heal you of your wound." "For I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to Judah." "I, even I will tear them and go away; I will take them away, and no one shall rescue." "I will return again to My place till they acknowledge their offense." "Then they will seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me." This, I say, is the faithfulness of God, to bring His Elect people to complete repentance and acknowledgement of their sins. His grace will bring them to the place that they earnestly seek His face. Let me ask you if this is something that you have been brought to? This is what this ordinance of the Lord's Supper is for. It is for us as Christians to remember why our Lord Jesus Christ had to die for us. It was not only that our sins may be forgiven, but also that we would make progress in holiness. That, if we have been wandering away from Him that He would revive us and bring us back. What is the state of your soul at this time? Are you happy and joyful in your obedience and realizing in a greater and greater measure just how faithful God has been to you to show you yourself and show you your sin, and to show you a better way to live? What a great, and merciful, and gracious God we serve. I would like to ask that you would come down to the front now and partake of the emblems of Christ's sufferings, knowing that He will feed your soul through this means. I will have a few more words for you there as we gather around His table.

The 3rd and last question that I will pose to you as we think about the Lord's Supper is this: How should I press on to know the Lord if I am presently walking closely with Him?

The answer is still found in verse 3. "Let us know, let us press on to know the

Lord." "His going forth is as certain as the dawn; and He will come to us like the rain." "Like the spring rain watering the earth; let us press on to know the Lord." What do these words tell the mature and faithful believer? Keep pressing on. You have surely known the early rain. The early rain comes just after the seed has been planted in the ground. And that seed grows up to become a mature plant which bears fruit. It is a picture of what happens in the life of the Christian whose most earnest desire is to please God. But sometimes even the mature believer becomes weary and dry in his or her spirit and a general discouragement sets in because as they look at their life; they do not seem to be accomplishing everything that they desire to accomplish for Christ's kingdom and His glory. What is to be done? I believe that you have to do 2 things. And those things are found in Philippians Chapter 3. They are to maintain a heart's attitude of faith and perseverance in looking for and finding Christ. Listen to these words. Verse 8 - "Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ." As you take the supper think of the great excellence of Christ. If you have Christ, and if you are seeking more of the influences of Christ to be manifest in your life; you will be finding everything necessary for life and godliness. But do not be satisfied with what you already know both in terms of Bible knowledge and your level of present experience. There is more yet to learn. What was Paul looking for? In verse 9 and following he tells us. "...to be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead." "Not that I have already attained or am already perfect; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me." What has He laid hold of you for, Paul? To know Him better and to be conformed to His blessed image in love, and holiness, and truth, and spirit-filled living. He laid hold of Him to fulfill a ministry of preaching and teaching and proclaiming Christ by his life and by his death. "Brethren," he says, "I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." "Therefore, let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal this to you." Here are the two things that Paul considers as one. Forgetting the things which lie behind. Do not look at all your failures, or all the disappointments of things that have happened to you or that others have done to you. This will only weigh you down. And then you should be pressing on to know the Lord. He is your sufficiency. He is your strength. He is your righteousness. He is your peace. He is your happiness. He is your wealth. He is your pleasure. He is your everything. And then remember that all of your pursuit of him here is only the preparation for your meeting him at the very moment of your

death. All will be clear then. Then there will be no regrets and no shame at His coming for you when you have spent your life pressing on to know Him. Let us ask him to work in us so that this mindset will be evident in our lives in this coming year and all the time that God gives us in the rest of our stay here upon the earth. As we draw near to Christ, and He draws near to us in this ordinance, let us remember that God, through Him, not only gives us the early rain, those times of refreshment which come from His presence around and after our conversion to Christ; but He also gives us the latter rain; those times of refreshment and blessing which lead us on to bear fruit and that there might be a harvest of righteousness to be yielded to Him on the last day. May this ordinance be to each soul here, just such a time.