

## God and the Gulf

*Hosea 4: 1-3, 6:1*

***[Note: We use a projection system during worship. Throughout this sermon you'll see the notes we use to communicate with the media team.]***

For over two months now, we have been watching horrible images from the Gulf Coast.

***[slide of the original fire that killed the oil workers]*** Images of an offshore oil rig fire that killed eleven hard working men. ***[slide of nasty oil in the sea]*** Images of massive amounts of oil floating in the sea. ***[slide of a beach covered in oil]*** Images of beaches and wetlands being destroyed by oil. ***[slide of a bird covered in oil]*** Images of birds covered in oil, most of whom will die. ***[slide of a dead fish on the shore]*** Images of dead fish killed by the oil. ***[slide of a fisherman on his boat]*** Images of fisherman losing their lifelong fishing business. ***[slide of a restaurant on the beach]*** Images of Gulf Coast businesses worried about going bankrupt. Last week Time magazine put it this way: ***[slide (oil sea background image) "Birds poisoned, fisheries destroyed, coastline slicked, livelihoods wrecked. The ongoing oil spill is an environmental calamity like none we've ever faced. And it's not just residents of the vulnerable Gulf who will get hit by it. This time we're all going to feel the pain."]*** ("On the Edge" by Bryan Walsh, Time magazine, June 14, 2010, p. 31)

This unfolding crisis is depressing to watch and getting worse by the minute. So as people of faith we need to ask, what might God have to say about the worst environmental catastrophe in US history?

A good place to look for that answer is in the Old Testament book of Hosea. Let's look again at today's text. ***[Slide: (oil in sea background) "Hear the word of the Lord, you Israelites, because the Lord has a charge to bring against you who live in the land." (Hos. 4:1a, NIV)]*** In Hosea's day, God was unhappy with the people of Israel. He had charges against them. Let's read on. ***[Slide (oil in sea background) "There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land. There is only cursing, lying and murder, stealing and adultery; they break all bounds, and bloodshed follows bloodshed." (Hos. 4:1b-2, NIV)]*** God said to Hosea, there is sin in the land. Overwhelming sin. And it's no different today. ***[End slide]*** There is great sin in the land today, sin clearly seen in this Gulf Coast

disaster. So who is responsible? Who is the sinner in this case? There's plenty of blame to go around.

First BP Oil has sinned. **[Slide (oil in sea background) 1. BP is to blame.]** I'm so angry with this company I could scream. Every day another report comes out that shows their gross irresponsibility in this mess. BP cut corners at every point along the way. Safety was ignored for the sake of profit. Men died, and an entire section of the ocean and coast have been devastated, because of a greedy company who puts profits above human life and God's creation. BP Oil has sinned.

But they are not alone. **[Add to slide: 2. Government agencies are to blame.]** The agencies that oversee offshore drilling safety fell asleep at the wheel. The people responsible for protecting the environment from dangerous oil exploration are far too cozy with big oil. From irresponsible deregulation, to ignoring current safety laws, our federal agencies have failed us. But BP and federal agencies are not the only ones who are to blame.

The hard fact is that WE are also to blame. **[Add to slide: 3. We are to blame.]** Every one of us. We have sinned in our over consumption of oil that is not sustainable and is destroying God's earth. As one author said, **[slide (oil in sea background) "You don't think every politician in America, Obama included, hasn't noticed that Americans scream every time the price of oil begins to rise? You think maybe, just maybe, that the needle BP stuck into the bottom of the sea flows straight into our own veins?"]** (Bill McKibben, "It's About the Carbon" *Christianity Century*, June 1, 2010, p. 10).

Americans are addicted to oil. **[End slide]** And let me tell you something about addicts. Addicts will do anything for their next fix. They will destroy their career. They will destroy their marriage. They will destroy their family. They will destroy their friendships. They will destroy their finances. They will destroy their reputation. And they will destroy their health. They will destroy anything and everything to get their next fix, even if it kills them. And that's exactly what we are doing. We are addicted to oil and we are destroying everything, including our planet, to get our next fix.

And what are the consequences of all this sinfulness, from BP, to the government, to all of us who are addicted to oil? Hosea lays it out very clearly in today's text. Let's look at it again.

***[Slide: (image of a bird covered in oil on an oily beach or marshland) “Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away; the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying.” (Hos. 4:3, NIV)]***

Hosea could have written this yesterday. The land mourns. And not just the Gulf Coast. The land mourns all over the planet. Why? Because we poison it with every kind of toxic chemical you can imagine. Because we regularly ravage it with bulldozers and dynamite. Because we fill it with billions of tons of solid waste. Because we are destroying its forests faster than we can replace them. The land mourns. Hosea also says the birds of the air are dying. We see dying birds everyday on the Gulf, covered in oil, dying by the thousands. But the birds aren't just in trouble around the Gulf Coast. They are in trouble everywhere. Why? Because of massive levels of air pollution and ozone depletion. Hosea also says the fish are dying. They are certainly dying around the Gulf. But they are also dying all over the world. They are dying because of water pollution. Many of today's rivers have become running sewers, many lakes are virtually dead, and we are rapidly killing the oceans. Today, as in Hosea's day, the land, the sea, the birds and everything else on the planet mourn and are dying.

When God looks at what is happening right now on the Gulf Coast, and what is happening all over the planet, I believe he has the same feelings we have including anger and deep sadness. God created this beautiful planet to sustain us, and to sustain all generations. But our modern selfish generation is destroying it. As Matthew Sleeth says, ***[Slide (oil in sea background) “The earth was designed to sustain every generation's needs, not to be plundered in an attempt to meet one generation's wants.”]*** (*Serve God Save the Planet*, J. Matthew Sleeth, Zondervan, 2007, p. 18) ***[End slide]***

Clearly, as in Hosea's time, the land mourns, along with the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. And just as clearly, as in Hosea's time, sin is causing the mourning and the dying. Thankfully, that's not the last word in Hosea, nor is it God's last word for us today. If you read on in Hosea, you will find these words. ***[Slide (oil in sea background) “Come, let us return to the Lord ... he will heal us .... he will bind up our wounds.” (Hos. 6:1, NIV)]***

God has a word for us today in the midst of our environmental crisis, both on the Gulf and elsewhere. And that word is repent. To “return to the Lord” means to repent. And

repentance includes turning away from our sins and turning towards God. If we will do that, God will heal us and bind up our wounds. What would it mean today to return to the Lord on this issue of environmental responsibility? At the very least, it would mean the following three things, as you can see on your listening guide. (***Listening guide can be found at the end of the sermon.***)

First, we can [***Slide (beautiful and healthy nature scene in background) 1. Make Lifestyle Changes.***] The hard fact is—our American consumerist way of life is hazardous to the health of our planet. Our worship of consumerism must end if we are to be responsible stewards of the earth. We must learn that bigger isn't always better, that a higher standard of living doesn't buy happiness, and that true peace and contentment comes from a more simple life which does not take such a toll upon the environment. There are numerous lifestyle changes we can make to help conserve God's creation. For example, we can reduce air pollution by driving less and walking, biking and carpooling more. If you work in Nashville you can even ride a train. Another thing we can do is recycle. And all of us need to use less energy. For example, we can make our homes more energy efficient. Just changing our light bulbs to energy efficient bulbs would make a big difference. We can leave our house warmer in the summer and colder in the winter. And the next time we buy a car, we can purchase a fuel efficient car that is easier on the environment. And the list goes on and on. If you would like some help in this area, I've listed an excellent book in the bulletin called *Serve God Save the Planet*. The good news is that a more simple life, a life of less consumption, a life that is easier on the planet—is a far better and richer life. Less really is more. Less stuff, less consumption, and less energy wastefulness equals a better life for us and for God's earth.

Second, we can [***Add to slide: 2. Get Politically Involved.***] I'm not speaking of partisan politics but of good Christian citizenship. The Bible is clear. We are called by God to be good stewards of the earth. In Genesis 2 God told Adam and Eve to care for and tend the garden. Earth care is not a liberal agenda—earth care is a biblical mandate. Therefore, you and I need to be advocates for earth care in the political arena. Environmental issues are constantly debated in government at the local, state and national level. Concerned Christians can write letters to our elected officials, encouraging them to protect and conserve the environment. In short, we need to demand that our elected officials get serious about caring for God's creation.

Third, we can **[Add to slide: 3. Partner with Others.]** Environmental problems cannot be solved on an individual level alone. People must work together in order to protect God's creation. Numerous environmental groups exist. We would do well to join one of them. For example, I'm a member of the Sierra Club. But there are dozens of good environmental groups out there we can work with. A good Tennessee environmental group to partner with is the Tennessee Environmental Council. Their Web site address is in your bulletin. Making lifestyle changes, getting politically involved, and joining others are just a few beginning steps, but they can make a real difference. **[End slide]**

Hosea is right. The land mourns. And the birds of the air and the fish of the sea are dying. But Hosea also said healing and renewal are possible. If we will repent, and return to the Lord, and be good stewards of creation, healing CAN come for planet earth. Dear God may that be true.

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## LISTENING GUIDE

### *God and the Gulf*

### *Hosea 4:1-3, 6:1*

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1. Make \_\_\_\_\_
2. Get \_\_\_\_\_
3. Partner \_\_\_\_\_