

Promises of Restoration and Gladness

Lesson for January 29, 2023

Unit II: God's Promises

Scriptural Background: Joel 1:1-4; 2:18-31

Printed Text: Joel 2:21-27

Key verse: *"Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed."* (Joel 2:27)

A few years ago, an angry man rushed through the Rijks Museum in Amsterdam until he reached Rembrandt's famous painting "Nightwatch." Then he took out a knife and slashed it repeatedly before he could be stopped. A short time later, a distraught, hostile man slipped into St. Peter's Cathedral in Rome with a hammer and began to smash Michelangelo's beautiful sculpture The Pieta. Two cherished works of art were severely damaged. But what did officials do? Throw them out and forget about them? Absolutely not! Using the best experts, who worked with the utmost care and precision, they made every effort to restore the treasures.

By His sovereign grace, God can bring good out of our failures, and even out of our sins.

Swindoll, *The Quest For Character*

This is Joel's message to Israel and to each of us this week – by His Sovereign grace we can be restored from our sins.

Key Terms

1. **Locust** (verse 25) – An insect that invades and destroys. The locust is called an insect, as well as the ant and the bee, but instead of being harmless, as they usually are, it does a great deal of injury. It is also much larger than they; for it is generally three inches long, and sometimes as much as four or five. The plague of the locusts was the eighth that God sent upon the Egyptians because they would not let the children of Israel go, as he commanded; and it was a very terrible one indeed.
2. **Shamed** (verse 27) – Put to shame; utterly dejected; to be ashamed.

Lesson Background

The author of the prophecy is identified only as "Joel the son of Pethuel." His name combines the names Yahweh and El and means "Yahweh Is God". The author is one of 14 men in the Old Testament who shared this name. Joel was a contemporary of both Hosea and Amos, though he ministered to the southern kingdom while they ministered to the northern kingdom. Joel's frequent references throughout the prophecy to Judah and Jerusalem indicate that he was not a priest, though he was an inhabitant of Jerusalem and was a prophet of the southern kingdom.

Joel was one of the earliest prophets of Judah. The specific place from which Joel wrote is not known. Since he was a resident of Judah and Jerusalem, he likely wrote his prophecy from there. His frequent calls to blow a trumpet in Zion, to consecrate a fast, to proclaim a solemn assembly, and to gather the people together to come before the Lord lend credence to the view that the prophecy was issued from the temple court.

Two events are compared in the course of Joel's prophecy:

- (1) The locust plague upon Judah in the days of the prophet; and
- (2) The far greater coming Day of the Lord.

Tyre, Sidon and Philistia had made frequent military incursions into Israel (3:2). An extended drought and massive invasion of locusts had stripped every green thing from the Land and brought severe economic devastation (1:7-20), leaving the southern kingdom weak. This physical disaster gives Joel the illustration for God's judgment. As the locusts were a judgment on sin, God's future judgments during the Day of the Lord will far exceed them. In that day, God will judge His enemies and bless the faithful. No mention is made of specific sins, nor is Judah rebuked for idolatry. Yet, possibly due to a calloused indifference, the prophet calls them to a bona fide repentance, admonishing them to "rend your heart and not your garments" (2:13).

Joel is a highly emotional prophecy, rich in imagery and vivid descriptions. In it two unique events, not to be forgotten, are compared. These two events are to be communicated to the descendants of the people.

In the first section (1:2-20) the prophet describes the contemporary Day of the Lord. The land is suffering massive devastation caused by a locust plague and drought. The details of the calamity (1:2-12), are followed by a summons to communal penitence and reformation (1:13-20).

The Second section (2:1-17), provides a transition from the historical plague of locusts described (in chapter 1), to the eschatological Day of the Lord (in 2:18-3:21). Employing the contemporary infestation of locusts as a backdrop, the prophet, with an increased level of intensity, paints a vivid and forceful picture of the impending visitation of the Lord (2:1-11), and with powerful and explicit terminology, tenaciously renews the appeal for repentance (2:12-17).

In the third section (2:18-3:21), the Lord speaks directly, assuring His people of His presence among them (2:27; 3:17, 21). This portion of the book assumes that the repentance solicited (2:12-17), had occurred and describes the Lord's zealous response (2:18-19a), to their prayer. (Joel 2:18-20), forms the transition in the message from lamentation and woe to divine assurances of God's presence and the reversal of the calamities, with (2:19b-20), introducing the essence and nature of that reversal. The Lord then gives 3 promises to assure the penitents of His presence: material restoration through the divine healing of the land (2:21-27), spiritual restoration through the divine outpouring of His Spirit (2:28-32), and national restoration through the divine judgment on the unrighteous (3:1-21).

This week's lesson begins with the promise of deliverance and restoration by a loving and merciful God.

Lesson In Depth

I. Rejoice (Joel 2:21-23)

Fear not, O land: O land of Israel, as the Targum, and the inhabitants of it; neither of the locusts, who had so terrified them, and had done so much mischief, and threatened more. Or of their enemies; the Assyrians or Chaldeans and their powerful armies, or any other.

Be glad and rejoice: At the removal of the locusts, and at the destruction of their enemies.

for the LORD will do great things: Good things, in opposition to the evil things done by the locusts. With the blessings of God upon the land, it will bloom again. The crops will be abundant. It will rain at the needed time, and they will prosper. Joel looked forward to the restoration that God promised, and he told Judah to look forward in faith, and to praise God for the restoration He promised – even before they saw it with their own eyes.

Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: Which before groaned, and were perplexed for want of pasture, and cried because of the drought (Joel 1:18).

For the pastures of the wilderness do spring: Grass in abundance springs up in them, and covers them, so that there was plenty of food for the beasts of the field. With the eye of faith, Joel could already see it happening. All around him were the lush, fruitful pastures and trees that God had restored after the destruction of the locusts.

For the tree beareth her fruit: Brings forth and bears fruit suitable to it, agreeable to its nature.

The fig tree and the vine do yield their strength: Send forth their branches, put forth their buds, their leaves and fruit. This and the preceding clause cannot be understood as a reason why the beasts of the field should not be afraid, for they relate not to them, but to men. All natural vegetation springs forth to feed the beasts of the field. The fruit trees will abundantly produce fruit, and the vines will bring forth in strength.

Be glad then, ye children of Zion: The people of the Jews, and especially the spiritual and believing part of them. Such as were born again, that were born of Zion, and born in Zion, and brought up by her, and in her. The children of that Zion or Jerusalem that is the mother of us all. And who were looking for the Messiah, and to whom it would be good news and glad tidings to hear of his coming (Zech. 9:9).

And rejoice in the Lord your God: Not in any creature or creature enjoyment, but in the Lord.

He has given you the former rain faithfully...and the latter rain in the first month: At the end of Joel 1, the prophet saw the destruction drought brought. Now with the eye of faith, he sees God restoring both the **former** and the **latter** rain to Israel.

Ancient Israel had no irrigation system and relied on rain to water their crops. In a time of drought, nothing grew. God promises to restore both the **former rain** (falling in autumn) and the **latter rain** (falling in spring).

There is probably a double meaning here. In the natural, there will be two rains to make the crops grow. This, however, is also speaking to the church (Zion). The former rain was the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The latter rain happens at the end of the age. This is a mightier outpouring of the Holy Spirit on all flesh.

II. Receive (Joel 2:24-27)

And the floors shall be full of wheat: When God restores these rains, Judah will have full threshing floors and wine vats. The churches of Christ, which will now be in Judea, and in the Gentile world, which are his “floors” (Matt. 3:12). And which will be set up everywhere through the preaching of the Gospel.

The descent of the former and latter rain; these will be full of precious souls gathered in. Compared to wheat, and of the choice and excellent, doctrines of the Gospel, and of all spiritual provisions (Matthew 13:30).

And the fats shall overflow with wine and oil: With the wine of Gospel doctrine, and the oil of true grace; there shall be a flow, an overflow, a redundancy of these. Both in the ministers of the word and private Christians, in whom the grace of God shall abound (see Rom. 5:20).

In this, we see the results of the abundant rain on the crops. This is also speaking of the abundance of the Spirit bringing many into the kingdom of God. Wheat symbolizes the Christians. Wine and oil symbolize the Holy Spirit of God.

And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten: Or “I will repay to you the years”; give you fruitful ones, as a full compensation for those in which the locust ate up the fruits of the earth for some years running.

My great army which I sent among you: Nature has not gone awry; the locusts are not beyond God’s control. They move at His specific command. And I will recompense unto you good years, instead of the years in which the people, nations, and tongues, the governors and kingdoms of vengeance, spoiled you, my great army which I sent among you.

And ye shall eat in plenty: Or, “in eating eat”, and in great abundance. Which Hebraism not only denotes the certainty of a thing, but the increase and abundance of.

There are plenty of spiritual provisions held forth under the Gospel dispensation. Much in God – in his goodness, grace, and love, truth, and faithfulness. In his covenant – the blessings and promises of it; much in Christ – who is compared to many things edible. And is called the Lamb of God, the fatted calf, the hidden manna, the tree of life, and the bread of God. Everything in him, and that belongs to him, is food for faith.

And be satisfied: Eat to gratification; eat and be full, so as to be entirely contented, and desire no other sort of food. Thus, as we currently are satisfied with the favor and love of God, having a delightful sensation of it, and a full persuasion of interest in it. With Christ as the bread of life, so as not to hunger after other. With his righteousness, as not to seek any other. And with his salvation, being so suitable to them. And with the goodness and fatness of the Lord's house, his word, and ordinances.

And praise the name of the Lord your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: Acknowledge him to be the giver of all this spiritual food, and that they are unworthy of it. Ascribe it entirely to the grace of God, who has done wonders for them; in wonderfully setting them apart for himself in eternal election. In making such a well-ordered covenant with them in Christ; in sending him to be their Savior and Redeemer. In calling them out of darkness into marvelous light; in bestowing such love upon them, as to call them and make them his children, and also heirs of him and eternal glory (see Psalm 22:26).

And my people shall never be ashamed: Because they shall always have food to eat; shall never be disappointed when they rightly apply for it in proper places and times; and not be like the troops of Tema, and companies of Sheba (Job 6:19).

They shall not be ashamed of their faith and hope, and expectation of good things promised them. Nor of the word and ordinances, and the profession they have made of Christ in this world. Nor shall they be ashamed at His coming; but shall be placed at his right hand, and received into his kingdom, and shall be led by him to fountains of living water. And be satisfied with pleasures for evermore.

Romans 5:5 *“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.”*

Philippians 4:19 *“But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”*

And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: The presence of God among his people shall be so manifest, the tokens of it so clear, that it shall be easily known. By the impressions of his love upon them; the teachings of his Spirit in them; the usefulness of the word and ordinances to them.

This return promised a reversal of the Lord's departure (Ezekiel, chapters 8 to 11).

And that I am the Lord your God, and none else: That he is their covenant God and Father, and acknowledge none else.

And my people shall never be ashamed: Which is repeated for the certainty of it (see Joel 2:26).

Lesson Summary

The overriding theme of the Book of Joel is the Day of the Lord, a day of God's wrath and judgment. This is the Day in which God reveals His attributes of wrath, power, and holiness, and it is a terrifying day to His enemies. In the first chapter, the Day of the Lord is experienced historically by the plague of locusts upon the land. Chapter 2:1-17 is a transitional chapter in which Joel uses the locust plague and drought to renew a call to repentance.

Today's lesson answers the call to repentance with prophecies of physical restoration (2:21-27). The people were to *praise the name of the LORD* because the LORD *has dealt wondrously with* the people of Judah. At this time there will be a full recognition by Judah of the true character and nature of their Suzerain ruler, the LORD their God.

Once God restored Judah's fortunes, the people would *never be put to shame*. The word translated *never* is "owlam," which means "for the age." It is translated "of old" referring to the age prior to the flood. It is also translated "perpetual", "everlasting" and "forever". Joel here predicts that after the anticipated restoration, for the rest of the age, Judah will not *be put to shame* through the judgement of being dominated by other nations.

It is clear that Judah will soon be put to shame as they are defeated and exiled from the land. So this likely refers to Judah's final restoration, in the last days. This fits with the picture of the four kinds of locusts representing the four kingdoms that will dominate the earth prior to God raising up a kingdom not made with human hands (Daniel 2:44-45). This will be the kingdom of God come to earth.

Earlier in this passage, Joel asked the priests to pray that the LORD spare the people, lest they become "a byword among the nations" (Joel 2:17). Here, the LORD answered His people. He would no longer cause them to suffer shame and defeat. Thus, the other nations would not think that the God of Judah had abandoned them (2:17). We should note that the call for repentance in 2:16-17 references articles related to temple worship. Therefore, it seems likely that this time of repentance will be after Temple worship is restored in Israel. This is predicted in Revelation 11, which occurs at the end of the age.

God spelled out the purposes for which He would restore Judah's blessings in being restored from the waves of locusts (invading kingdoms) in four parts: (1) *Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel*, (2) *that I am the LORD your God*, (3) *there is no other*, and (4) *My people will never be put to shame*.

First, the covenant people would recognize that God had not abandoned them. They will return to God and know that He is the LORD. They will recognize that He is *in their midst* among them, in part because He is faithful to His promises. Even though

God is merciful, He is always faithful to keep His part of the covenant with the Israelites, including the tribes of Judah and Benjamin that make up the southern kingdom of Judah.

Second, Judah would acknowledge the *LORD* as their *God*, the one who has a covenant relationship with them and the one who sees to their wellbeing when they are faithful to honor their part of the covenant.

Third, Judah would acknowledge that God alone is the true God. Besides Him, *there is no other*, because no other so-called gods could restore the people's blessings.

Fourth, God's people *would never* suffer *shame* and humiliation for this plague of locusts. God would take care of His covenant people and restore their reputation with other nations when they genuinely turned to Him in faith.