

## “The Future Looks *Promising*”

*Joel 2:18-32*

Donald Trump has been in the news lately – well, actually every day! Most of it not positive. So he has set off for a Middle East and European tour to build relationships in Saudi Arabia, Israel, Italy and Belgium. His purpose according to White House spokesperson is to “broadcast a message of unity to America’s friends and to unite peoples of all faiths around a common vision of peace, progress and prosperity.”

The world would love to have peace but on its own terms not God’s terms. The world can only be united around a common vision of peace, prosperity and progress if they follow the Only One who can make it happen, Jesus Christ. Sadly, however, we live in a world that believes only if you get rid of Jesus and all His followers can we have real peace. Many people honestly believe or think the future would be a lot more promising if we could get rid of those narrow minded Jesus followers.

Thankfully, God’s promises for His church as well as for Israel still hold true and because of God’s character and Word, will come true. So the future is very promising for those who follow Jesus and believe in God’s promises.

Here in the little book of Joel, Joel the prophet is telling a disobedient Israel to repent of their sins by rending their hearts not their garments. God had sent a horrific locust plague that devoured their crops to show Israel He meant what He said. Back in the days of Moses, God told Israel that if they stopped obeying Him he would eventually send droughts by withholding rain so their crops wouldn’t grow very well. And if they didn’t get that warning then he would send a disastrous plague of locusts. And then even if that didn’t get their attention then He would send them into exile to a foreign country. This would eventually happen, when Assyria would come and take the northern kingdom captive in 722 BC and then the south would fall in 605 BC to Babylon.

And yet, God also promised He would bring His people Israel back and restore them to their land. So as we move from the appeal to repent and return to God in 2:14-17, now we read in 2:18-32 what God will do for Israel if they as a nation truly return to Him and worship Him.

All of us need the reminder from God’s Word now and then of our need to repent of known sin and return to God. God’s promise in 2:13-14 is always true for all of His people:

<sup>13</sup> *Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. <sup>14</sup> Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God.*

V. 18 is the turning point of the book. A prophet wasn't sent just to warn but also to remind Israel God's bright future that awaited them when they would "repent" and "return to the Lord." V. 18 begins with "then". Joel called for the priests and the people to cry out for forgiveness in v.17. Now, v.18 to the rest of the book shows them what will happen "then"; when they turn back to God.

<sup>18</sup> *Then the LORD will be jealous for his land and take pity on his people. <sup>19</sup> Then the LORD will reply to them: "I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.*

God has made covenant promises to His people that He cannot revoke. So when God's covenant people repent . . .

## **They Will Reap the Benefit of God's Faithfulness** **(2:18-19)**

The word for 'jealous' means God is fiercely loyal to those He is in relationship with. God made a covenant with Abraham, the first Jew and all his Jewish descendants that they would be in covenant with Him that included the land He has promised them. As we have seen in Joel so far, Israel's obedience and disobedience affects their ability to enjoy the land. Because of their continual disobedience God sent the prophet Joel to warn them of what He said through Moses in Deut. 28 that they will enjoy the blessings of the land (through rain and good crops) or experiences the curses on the land (lack of rain resulting in minimal crops or loss of crops due to blight or locust plague). God is faithful to his covenant promises to bless the land or harm the land, but all that is whether His people obey Him.

God is jealous and wants to take pity on His people because He loves them. When Israel repents God promises to send grain, new wine and oil. You often see these 3 grouped together. Why? Because they represent the essentials of life. Grain for bread and eating, new wine to drink and enjoy with family and friends, olive oil for lighting lamps to see but also medicinal value. Those 3 products were essential for living. God wants to give them so much that they will be fully satisfied; over-flowing literally. In other words, when the Lord is my shepherd I shall not want because I have all I need.

Joel prophecies that when Israel as a nation repents and

turns back to God, they will never again be an object of scorn among the nations because God will drive all their enemies away. And the enemy usually came from the north because of water to the west and desert in the south and east.

When you read Daniel 11:40-45 that the last battle will happen in the beautiful land (Israel) when the king of the north will invade the antichrist's army in the south. But God says I will drive them into the desert (south) and to the western Sea (Mediterranean) and the eastern sea (Dead sea).

But what about us? The church is also in a covenant relationship with God. He is just as jealous for us as he is for Israel. What blessings do we lose out on when we sin and choose not to repent? We temporarily lose **fellowship with God and each other**.

*1 John 1:6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. <sup>7</sup>But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

Sin disrupts are fellowship with God. We don't lose Son-ship (salvation) but fellowship is broken (joy of relationship). We're not right with God or each other. The longer we delay repenting the more joy we lose and we even start avoiding each other and God. Continuing in a state of unrepentance brings **anxiety** and lack of **peace**.

*Phil. 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

When we sin and don't repent we'll slowly realize **our prayers aren't getting answered**.

*Ps. 66:18 If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened;*

*1 John 3:20 If our hearts condemn us, we know that God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. <sup>21</sup>Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God <sup>22</sup>and receive from him anything we ask, because we keep his commands and do what pleases him.*

Our sin grieves the Holy Spirit (Eph. 4:30)

*<sup>30</sup>And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*

While Israel lost the material blessings of the land there is something else we can lose if we live with very little repentance in our life and that is future eternal rewards.

<sup>1</sup> Cor. 3:12 *If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, <sup>13</sup>their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. <sup>14</sup>If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup>If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

God is always willing to get right with us when we need to repent of sin. *“Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.” (James 4:7)*

God has many promises He wants to keep for His people so that His people enjoy Him and enjoy the blessings He deems to give us. Notice how often we read here in Joel 2:18-32 of Joel telling us ‘The Lord will . . . the Lord will.’ When God’s covenant people repent . . .

## **They Will Know His Joy and not Fear their Enemies** **(2:21-27)**

<sup>20</sup> *“I will drive the northern horde far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land; its eastern ranks will drown in the Dead Sea and its western ranks in the Mediterranean Sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice. Surely the LORD has done great things! <sup>22</sup> Do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the open pastures are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches. <sup>23</sup> Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains in righteousness. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before. <sup>24</sup> The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.*

While God would eventually deal with the Assyrians by sending the Babylonians and then deal with the Babylonians by sending the Medes/Persians and deal with the Medes/Persians by sending the Greeks, etc., Joel is talking about the end time future restoration of Israel to their land when Jesus their Messiah returns to rule and defeat all the nations who are coming together as we read in Zech. 14 to wipe Israel off the face of the map once for all. The future blessings being prophesied here have not happened on the scale Joel is talking about yet. Even today Israel does not have full control over their land and especially Israel has not returned to the Lord as a nation.

But even now, for the few that have and for us who know Jesus as our Messiah when we’re right with Him we experience His joy and we are afraid less of those who can hurt our bodies but not our souls. When we see obstacles and enemies against us and pray for God’s help we grow in joy and out of fear . . .

***Because we believe only God can do these things (vv.20-24)***

Joel directs the Israelites to watch God do the impossible in the future, but also every day. If we're unrepentant we'll try and do everything in our own strength and we won't see God work. We'll get in His way. When we repent of known sin and trust Him to deal with the things we are afraid of, we'll see Him do things we can't. This results in strengthening our faith, increasing our joy and growing in fearlessness. God wants to do these things for us when we trust Him,

### ***So that only God will be glorified (vv.25-27)***

*<sup>25</sup> "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten— the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you.*

*<sup>26</sup> You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.*

*<sup>27</sup> 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.*

We know this is still speaking of the future because God speaks of finality; '*Never again will my people Israel be shamed*'. Israel hasn't shaken their shame yet. Their enemies surround them geographically and globally. The enemies of Christians are everywhere too. Until Jesus returns we will continue to be disgraced and abused by those who hate God. But one day Jesus will return, defeat all God's enemies and His people will enjoy peace in their land for a millennium according to Rev. 20:1-6.

But even on a smaller day-to-day scale God is always desirous for us to repent so we will trust Him and see Him work in ways we can't. His overall purpose in us and through us is to glorify Himself. And if we see it hopefully we can show those who don't know Him what God is doing.

The whole context of this chapter and most of ch. 3 is on the future promises of God as related to His promises for Israel. But what the prophets did not know, because the apostle Paul calls it a mystery in Eph. 3 was that the covenant people of God would one day include Gentiles. The prophets could only prophetically see the promises to Israel as if they were the tops of a series of mountain peaks, unaware of large valleys in between. Because Israel would continue as a nation to rebel against God, God set His promises to them temporarily aside and began a new work called the Church through faith in Jesus. Jews were still included – because the early church was all Jewish at first – but Gentiles would now take part and experience God's promises. In Joel 2:28-32 we read about part of that:

*<sup>28</sup> "And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. <sup>29</sup> Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. <sup>30</sup> I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. <sup>31</sup> The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and*

*dreadful day of the LORD. <sup>32</sup> And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.*

In Acts 2 on Pentecost the apostle Peter quotes this passage from Joel and says what was happening at Pentecost was what Joel was talking about. But there seems to be a problem here because some of this stuff didn't happen at Pentecost. Outside of the little flames of fire there were no blood, fire and billows of smoke. Nor did the sun go dark and the moon turn to blood. Nor did the dreadful day of the Lord happen. Peter also left out the last part of v.32 which speaks specifically of Israel's restoration and repentance by the Spirit on all the survivors of the day of the Lord, which we read about in Zech. 13 and which is what Paul is talking about in Rom. 11:25-27 when he writes at Jesus' coming 'all Israel will be saved'. The "All Israel" is the 1/3 of Israelites who survive the 7 year Day of the Lord tribulation right before Jesus' return. We get the 1/3 from Zech. 13:8 agreeing exactly with what Joel says here that it is the only the survivors of Israel who will be delivered and who call on the Lord.

However, we know that many prophecies have a partial fulfilment before a complete fulfilment to tell us that God has begun a work now and will complete later. Like here with the Holy Spirit. While we'll explain that we need to know why God sent the Spirit on individuals who believe at Pentecost and will send the fullness of the Spirit on all Israel's survivors at Jesus' return. When God's covenant people repent . . .

## **They Will Be Restored so They Can Minister to Others** **(2:28-32)**

You and I can't serve God or people in our own strength; we do it . . .

### ***Through the power of the Spirit (vv.28-29)***

What would have caught the audience's ears about the coming of the Spirit was that the Spirit was coming on "all people". Men and women, young and old. Before Pentecost the Holy Spirit only empowered leaders; kings and judges and prophets. And sometimes the Spirit wouldn't necessarily remain with the king, judge or prophet if they rebelled against God, like King Saul. That's why David prayed in Ps. 51 after repenting of his sin with Bathsheba that God not take His Holy Spirit away from him and give it to another king.

Joel is talking about an outpouring of the Spirit that will one day come on all the surviving Israelites not just leaders. And the Spirit coming at Pentecost is now outpoured on every individual who calls upon the name of the Lord; sons and daughters, old men and young men. This is how the kingdom has started now spiritually but will be consummated physically and fully when Jesus returns. The kingdom exists now for those who have made Jesus their king. They get the Holy Spirit

and now we are equipped even more than the kings and prophets to declare God's Word to each other (for doctrine, reproof, correction and training in righteousness) so that we are thoroughly equipped to do God's work. We show we are serving in the Spirit's power when the outward evidence (the fruit of the Spirit) is plainly seen (loving, joyful, kind, patient, etc.)

Joel can only see the mountain top beyond our time when the Day of the Lord's judgment will come and just prior to Jesus' return the sun will be darkened and the moon turn to blood (vv.30-31). Jesus Himself quoted Joel 2 in Matt. 24:29-31. If we are in the last days as Peter said in Acts 2, then we always need to be reminded that we can only serve others in the power of the Spirit . . .

### ***While there's still time (vv.30-31)***

While the world may be improving technologically it is not improving morally. God used the Joels and Amoses and Isaiahs to warn their generations of a time of punishment from God. Eventually Assyria came. Eventually Babylon came. Later on it was Rome. Jesus already came the first time. Jesus will come again soon. And we can only minister to people as long as they are alive. I have shared the gospel with people, including my parents, who are no longer alive. Time runs out on everyone. And we will die too one day so our opportunities to serve will be limited once we are gone. I didn't say ended, I said limited. We can leave behind a faithful testimony to our kids and grandkids and to those we lived and worked with. And I believe our prayers don't die when we die because prayer is the work of God and since He always lives He can answer our prayers even after we die. So let's never give up serving God or praying to God for lives to be changed.

And that's the goal in v.32. We serve God through the power of the Spirit during our time . . .

### ***So people will be saved (v.32)***

While Joel could only see what God was going to do for Israel when the Day of the Lord came, the coming of the Spirit to us resulted in our sharing the gospel so that, as Paul quoted and applied this verse to his own day (as we can ours)

*"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."*

God no longer just sends prophets He now gives His Holy Spirit to all who call on His name for salvation. All of us are now supposed to communicate God's Word to those God brings into our life. The people we live with or beside, the ones you work with, play sports with, belong to the same group with; all of them are our ministry and need to hear the gospel. And similarly, all of us who now have the Spirit have the responsibility of making sure each one of us are walking with God. If someone needs

to repent it's up to us to point each other in the right direction. James 5:19-20 reminds us,

*<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back, <sup>20</sup> remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.*

If we want the world to find peace with God through Jesus, we need to be right with Jesus ourselves. If the world often uses the excuse not to follow Jesus because there are too many hypocrites in the church, lets live such lives in obedience to Christ not to give them that excuse.

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If you have any questions or comments about this message please  
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