

The Redeemer
Joel 2:18-27

Philippians 4:1-20

Isaiah 43:1-13

Psalms 130

This morning we are continuing in Joel chapter 2 where again we see another shift in the prophets writings. Chapter 1 was about the plague of locusts, and a call to repentance that God may relent, the first part of chapter 2 was about a future day of the lord, a great and terrible day of judgment that will make this moment of desolation and destruction by the plague of locusts seem like nothing. Then again we see another call to repentance, not for the current issues, but because of the coming day. So this call of repentance here in chapter 2 is a bit different in that it is dealing with a larger issue of sin, not some specific judgment as with this locust, but with the judgment of sin itself, and Joel is imploring his readers to not be caught unawares, but repent today for we do not know when this great day of the lord shall be.

Last week in verses 15 to 18, we see the call of assembly, to bring the people together to pray that God may relent, that God may remember his promises and not bring a reproach upon his name. In some ways, the modern mind doesn't think as the ancient mind did, we see hardships and calamity as a part of life, so I think generally people don't see such things as punishment for sin or rebellion as much as was understood in the time of Joel. There was a greater understanding for the sovereignty of God in some sense, even Pagans gave more credit to their false God's then we give to many things today. The thought was more along the lines if you are suffering then it must be because God is punishing you, and while there are still some who think this way today, I would argue that it is much less then it was in the time of Joel.

The prayer here that Joel is imploring the people to pray, is that God may relent so that his name is not mocked, so that when people look upon the suffering of Israel they don't mock God because he has caused his people to suffer. The core idea, even for the Pagan is that suffering must be because you have angered God...most of the world doesn't think that way anymore, even as believers I think that we understand things in our lives as the consequence of simply living in a fallen world. Now I am not saying that God doesn't use such things, or that God doesn't bring such things into our own lives to enact his purpose, like how we see throughout the entire new testament the pattern of Israel, falling away, suffering judgment, repenting and being blessed. God does allow things within our lives with the intent of driving us toward him, to teach us our need of him, and through such he shows his mercy in deliverance as well.

My point here is that this idea of our suffering bringing a reproach against God I think in many ways is far less relevant today as it was in those days, because this is not the mindset of the world, in many ways we have fallen away from the idea of God, and we have made new God out of science, and so called rational thinking leaving little or no room for the miraculous. In the time of Joel, the other nations who followed various other Pagan Gods would look at what was happening in Israel and would mock their God for treating his people in such a way, that is why this prayer here hes imploring God to not forget his promises, so that his name is not mocked among the nations. In the ancient mind there was basically 2 trains of thought, either your God isn't powerful enough to provide and care for you, or you have angered him...that was the mindset when suffering came..either your God is not powerful enough to keep you from it, or you must have done something to anger him and now he is punishing you.

When I look at these things, I always take the route of warning everyone that your suffering isn't necessarily a punishment of God, it isn't necessarily caused by some sin in your life, but we must also be careful to not fully throw out the fact that God uses such things, and yes, can bring judgment and suffering upon you because of your own sin and rebellion, though I think that is not always the case we must also not go to far in the opposite direction like the world today and dismiss all of it as being natural consequences. Sometimes things are simply because we live in this fallen world, disease, hardship, is simply something that we deal with as humans, and they are not necessarily a punishment, but they are always tools that God uses for his purpose. There is nothing that befalls us, whether blessings, or trials, that God is not in control of, that he has not allowed, and that doesn't serve his purpose. So I think at least personally, that we must balance a fine line in this life of understanding that much of what we experience throughout our life is the simple consequence of living in a fallen world, but all of it is used by God to reach us, to teach us, and drive us closer to him.

We brings us to you passage this morning, so lets go ahead and read Joel, 2:18-27. So verse 18 basically sums on what will be said in the following verses, we see here that God has heard their cries of repentance, and he does indeed turn and relent from the destruction that he brought upon the land. We must remember that the land itself was a promise to Abraham, he said that he would give his offspring a land and they would not longer be sojourners and nomads, he promised Israel a prosperous land, a land of milk and honey and in this judgment upon Israel for their turning from him, he brought locust to devour this land of milk and honey, a land described like the garden of Eden in chapter 1, left in desolation in the wake of the plague. So God's promise to Abraham was two fold, he would give his people a home, and he would provide for them a Messiah, redeeming both the land, and the people. Each go hand in hand, this judgment upon the land, is a judgment of the people, as verse 18 says, "Then the Lord will be zealous for his land, and pity his people."

I find it interesting the order of which this was given, and the words used, Zealous for the land, and pity for the people. Some I think go a little to far in their support for Israel today, treating them as a country and a people who can do no wrong because they are "God's people" but we also should not discredit the fact that God promised his people that land, there is a significance there in that earthly promise. And we see here in our text this morning that God is concerned about the land itself, and goes on to speak to the people through Joel telling them of the blessings he shall return to them, the return of their crops, their trees, the rain and a restoration to how things were before, for behold, I will send you grain, new wine and oi, and you will be satisfied by them." A promise of provision, a promise of restoration, a promise of salvation from certain starvation and death. In restoring the land, he is keeping his promises, and providing for his people. God knew from the start that once the locusts had gone through and the suffering that would create would drive the Israelites back to him, this was the purpose and goal of it to begin with. He knew exactly what was needed to provide the exact outcome he was seeking.

This is something to keep in mind as we go through this life and deal with various things. There is a common saying, that God will not bring you more then you can handle...I personally reject that statement, I think that God will bring you more then you can handle, and that is entirely the point, he bring you more then you can handle so that you are driven to rely upon him and him alone. Sometimes we are driven to a point where we can do nothing more then to sit quietly at the feet of God, and this should always be the first place we go, but often it can be the last, after we have exhausted our own means and driven to nothingness, then we turn to him. And just like Israel, this is a lesson that we seem to need to learn over and over again, repent, and turn to God.

Everything that you are experiencing in your life has meaning, and has purpose. And though we may not see it, nor understand it, God knows exactly what is needed to accomplish his perfect plan for you. And that includes moments of hardship, that includes moments of suffering, that includes moments of loss, all of these things are ministers to remind us of our frailty, and God's sovereignty and mercy. Life always has a seasons of drought, and seasons of rain just as Ecclesiastes 3 states, which is the passage used in the famous song performed by the Byrds in the 1950s, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. The point here, is that all these things, our entire life serves the purpose of God. Jonah, in his reluctance to go to Nineveh as God commanded, still served God's purpose in showing his power to the sailors, showing us today as the readers God's sovereignty in the lives of his people, and his mercy upon a people that were quote, unquote, "not his people" outsider, pagans, being given the gospel message to believe, there is no mention in the book of Jonah to establish a temple, to start the Jewish rituals and traditions, no the message is repent and believe and I will relent from your destruction.

That is the message here in Joel, repent and believe and I will relent from your destruction. And we see in our passage this morning that he does indeed do so, and not only relent but restores as he says in verse 21, "fear not, o land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things! Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears fruit, the fig tree, and the vine yield their strength." There is much talk about the restoration of the land after the desolation of the locust here, even a mentioning peace for the animals I am reminded of Jesus teaching, where he says in Matthew 6 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more then food, and the body more then clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value then they?"

God is concerned even of the little things, even the land, even the cattle, even the birds, and if he is not concerned of such things, will he not all the more be concerned about you? Especially his own children? There is hope in the desolation, there is redemption in the aftermath and I think that is entirely the point, God can destroy, and he can create, he can kill, and he can make alive, his power is the ultimate power which he wields to enact his perfect purpose. Think of your own life, of past trials, hardships, and how God has provided in them, and through them and often times we come out better then we went in, trusting more, loving more, having our faith built up and fortified as we turn to him in reliance since it is he alone who can offer comfort, and salvation. He knows who you are, he knows what you need, and he knows exactly how to reach you. And sometimes it takes locusts, and desolation, sometimes we are so stubborn, we are so blinded, so caught up in our own ways that God needs to bring us down a few pegs before we will look up to him.

We read about the Israelites, and we think..wow, how could they do some of the things that they do, they had the very presence of God with them and they turn to idols, they moan and complain, the rebel.....yet, isn't that what we do too? We have more then they, we have the full revelation of scripture, we have the fulfilled promises in Christ, we have the risen savior, the promised Messiah, we have the holy rit, yet, yet, we fail, yet we fall short, yet we complain, we get distracted, we sin, and we rebel and God does what is necessary to bring us back. He promises that none of his sheep will be lost, he is the good shepherd who will not even leave one lost and alone...and we are the dumb stubborn sheep who wander off, and he has to go seek after us and draw us back in. I say all this because it gives meaning and purpose to our life, to our struggles, to our trials and hardships, that God sends our way to draw us back to him. Such things are a reminder to us of his sovereignty, and of his faithfulness, then while we may be unfaithful, God is always faithful, God always restores, and God will redeem his people