

Joel 1; Joel 2:12-19; The Day the LORD Visits I. A Day of Wrath II. A Day of Repentance III. A Day of Restoration

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what will the Day of the LORD be like? For most of us, when we consider the Day of the LORD we tend to think about the day of Judgement when Jesus Christ returns to judge the living and the dead. However, Scripture speaks of various moments and times in history when God visited His people- and some of those visits were times of great calamity! Today we come to the prophet Joel- whose name means the ``LORD is God!`` He likely wrote around 600 BC- shortly before the Babylonian army returned and carried the Judean captives away. One of the central themes of this prophetic book is the “Yom Yahweah” or the Day of the LORD. Would the day that God visits His people be a day of joy or a day of sorrow? A day of restoration or a day of retribution? One of the main images of this book is that of the locust. The locust in chapter 1 not only speak to a literal invasion, they come to represent a human army’s path of destruction and are sent as a response to the spiritual state of Israel. As we continue our series through the minor prophets, Joel brings 3 points to mind- rebuke, repentance and restoration. Today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ calls His people back to God as the Day of the LORD approaches.

I. A Day of Wrath

In our first point, we see that the Day of the Lord will be a day of wrath, judgement, destruction and rebuke. It will not, first of all, be a day of joy and gladness because the Israelites had become complacent in their sin. They had rebelled against their God- committing spiritual adultery as we saw last week. The focus of this wrath is going to be a call to repentance as we will see in our next point. So chapter 1 opens with this swarm of locust- described in frightening and chilling detail. As also found in Rev. 9:3- the locus will come to be a symbol of God’s justice and wrath poured out on the rebellious people. The coming of this swarm will be unlike anything the Israelites had ever seen before- as v. 1 says- such a thing had never happened before. This was not just a normal, seasonal occurrence. It was

not the by-product of environmental changes. No, this army of locust was sent by the Lord as v. 15 explains- it was destruction from the Lord Almighty. Now the locust is a humble, small creature. It looks like a large, brown grasshopper. Locust swarms had been seen in Egypt over the years- and more recently the Rocky Mountain locust decimated the central plains of the US in the 1850- and currently the locusts are swarming and devouring huge swaths of East Africa. So it was for the Israelites- these little bugs were coming- being sent from God- to strip the land bare. These locusts eat anything that is plant material- stripping off every green thing and even the bark from the trees. This would be a sure sign to the Israelites who had been promised a land flowing with milk and honey- a land of great prosperity with vineyards and orchards that were well established freely given to them. But these locusts were sent to consume and destroy as v. 4 puts it. Children, imagine for a moment walking outside after church- and there would be a black, moving cloud of bugs headed your way. They would be in everything- on everyone. And tomorrow morning, when you got up you would not see a single green thing! Every flower, every leaf, every blade of grass gone! Well, that is what happened in Israel as judgment for their sinful rebellion. But this was just the first- later in 2:2 Joel speak of a people- a nation – an opposing army that would come and devour just like these locusts. This army could be a reference to Babylon or the Egyptians or the Greeks- but their arrival was just as terrible! Like Gideon experienced at the hand of the Midianites- when they came into the land, they ate everything- they stole and pillaged until there was nothing left! And the final blow was that of a drought in 1:17- until even the beast groaned and the seeds on the ground shrivelled up. All men and all animals suffered. Now remember that there is a reason for all this coming upon the land. This was the LORD visiting His people- He had come to them in Wrath- because He loved them- because He was disciplining them! He was teaching them the futility of idols- the vanity of the strength of man's hands. In the book of Hosea the northern tribes experience a time of great prosperity. Now, in the southern tribes a time of great

want had come. All this was to stir the hearts of the people- to awaken their sleeping hearts! When God removes blessings from the Land it is always for a purpose! He was turning their hearts back!

II. A Day of Repentance

As we come to our second point, we find that the Day of the Lord is not only a Day of Wrath it is a Day of Repentance! In our second reading from 2:12-13 we read of this call for repentance very clearly. Return to the Lord and repent from your sins. Rend your heart in sorrow! Mourn over your rebellion! The times of trouble have come so that you might know your sins and acknowledge your rebellion! The good news, is that even now the Lord is slow to anger and abound in love as v. 13 puts it! Or as we read in II Cor 6:2- now is the time of God's favor- today is the day of salvation! What is pleasing to the Lord is this- a broken and a contrite heart as Psalm 51 put it. This calamity was to drive the Israel away from their sins- to show them the futility of their idols- to remind them of their need- to expose the fact that man and his hand cannot save! What the LORD calls for here is a return- we could say a godly sorrow and repentance that leads to life! A circumcised heart- hearts broken in their humble confession. God is not done with His people- He will not allow them to be totally consumed and wiped off the map- even now He is at work in their midst. But this raises an important question, how is it that fallen, sinful human being will return and repent? If they are dead in their sins- enslaved in their idolatry- what supernatural work will take place by which they might turn, seek and live? Well, ch. 2:28 gives us this answer. The LORD is going to visit His people on the day of Repentance- by sending His Spirit of repentance and revival! There will be turning to the LORD because the Spirit of life will fall upon the hearts of His people! The Spirit will be poured out on all flesh- and this Spirit will give life just as water causes the grass of the field to grow! The Spirit will soften hard hearts- just as water softens the rock- hard earth and makes it fruitful! So in this point, the Day of the LORD is the day when the LORD visits His people to soften their hearts- and as we know this day was fulfilled in Acts 2 when Jesus poured out the Spirit upon the church on Pentecost! It is God's presence that brings life from the grave- that rends

the hearts of man and brings life and deliverance. A change in heart is not only possible but attained because God visited His people- and continues to visit us as He dwells with us by His Spirit! The wonders and signs in the heavens and on earth for 2:30 were seen on that day- and will be seen again when Jesus our Lord visits His people again. So Joel is prophesying a time when God's people will repent and return- and this has and will happen because God visits us on the Day of the LORD! And when the Spirit of God visits us- there is a change that leads to a restoration.

III. A Day of Restoration

In our final point we see that Joel speaks of a coming restoration which follows upon the Day of the LORD. This comes in 2 level- on the first level Joel speaks of a physical restoration and returning of God's blessings. If the Israelite would but repent in dust and ashes- truly humble themselves- then the LORD would again richly bless them in the land. We see this in 2:18 and following. The LORD will have pity on them- He will remove the invading armies- both the locust and the invading soldiers. He will heal the land and send His refreshing rain- and He will cause the beasts and man to be glad and rejoice. As 2:19 illustrates- there will grain, wine and oil where there was once only barren land. And in v. 20 the northerner or the invading army will be removed. The rain will also return in v. 23. So there is a direct parallel between chapter 1 and chapter 2- but in reverse. What had been taken away because of their hard hearts would be returned. Their sorrow would be turned to joy and their weeping to laughter. Their shame removed and they would be a people with whom God would dwell with at peace. But there is a second level or layer of this restoration found in 2:32. This layer of restoration is really about revival- or spiritual renewal and life! Not only will the land be healed- but their hearts will be healed! All who call upon the Name of the LORD will be saved! Salvation is promised and freely given to all who call upon the LORD! When the Spirit is sent and His work evidenced in the hearts of His people, there is a blessing that goes beyond and is greater than any physical restoration. It is the restoration of life and fellowship between God and His people! It is this verse that is quoted by Paul in Rom. 10:13- where it is

our Lord Jesus Christ who is the one upon whom we call- His word being heard- His Spirit being received. And now those who call upon Him are promised and given life everlasting- including all the benefits that go along with it! It is no accident that the pouring out of the Spirit as we found in 2:29- and the promise of salvation to all who believe as found in 2:23- are both linked to the person and work of our Lord Jesus Christ! For it is Christ who sent out the Spirit- and by the Spirit's work we have faith in Jesus- so that we might also enjoy the restoration and revival. That is the blessing of coming of the LORD our God!

To conclude, Joel speaks of the Day of the LORD in various aspects. The Day of the LORD is a reference to any time when God visits His people- sometimes in His wrath to discipline and sometimes to bring healing and restoration. But the end result is that God will have His people- and they will be richly blessed with a glorious future. I close with the image of Joel 3:18- a fountain will come forth from the house of the LORD. In Rev. 22 we find this same image of a fountain being opened- of water flowing from the throne of the God and of the Lamb. This water brought life to all – and healing to the nations. The same life and healing that we read back in Joel 2. The realization comes that the Spirit of the LORD is the one who brings life- both on the earth and in our hearts. As the Spirit goes forth- so comes both the LORD'S presence and the LORD'S blessings. Praise God for this wonderful prophecy of the Spirit who brings life to dead hearts!