

The Book of Joel Series **Preservation in Hard Times (1.1-20)**

Introduction:

- This morning we begin a new series on the Book of Joel.
 - For the next 5 weeks we will be looking at the book of Joel to discover God's message of preservation.

- Joel was a prophet in 9th Century B.C.
 - The name Joel means "Jehovah is God".
 - His name also gives us insight into the overarching purpose of Joel's prophecy was to show that Jehovah is God no matter what!
 - And because Jehovah is God – He will preserve His people no matter what!
 - A word about the interpretation of prophecy

DIAGRAM

- Particular to the current audience
- Redemptive Significance (present and future)

T/S:

- Joel opens his prophecy by describing a devastating disaster that had come upon the land through an invasion of locust.

I. The Locust Invasion – a Devastating Disaster:

- This locust invasion was unlike anything the people had ever experienced.
 - Joel makes this point when he asks the elders and all the inhabitants of the land if *anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days.* (vs.2)

Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days?

- Starting in verse 4 he describes the process of the extreme devastation that came upon the land because of the locust:

*What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten;
And what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten;
And what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.*

- It is difficult for us to imagine what a locust invasion would be like.
 - The adult locust would fly in such a massive group that it would look a thick cloud blocking out the sun.
 - The females would dig holes in the soil and deposit up to 75,000 eggs in concentrated areas throughout the land.
 - In a few weeks the eggs would be hatched and the small ant-like insect would begin moving forward swarming along the ground like fleas devouring all low level vegetation along the way.
 - As the insects would develop they would begin creeping up to higher vegetation and within a few months the insects would develop wings that would enable them to fly – stripping the high vegetation.
 - So after a few months the locust would have gnawed through the land devouring everything in their path.
- In verse 6 and 7, Joel compares the locust invasion as a foreign army that had invaded the land leaving it stripped and barren.

*For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number;
Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.
It has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters.
It has stripped them bare and cast them away; their branches have become white.*

T/S:

- Everything was lost and Joel wants to make it clear the proper response to such a devastating disaster.

II. A Proper Response:

- The people of Judah had grown accustomed to the extreme prosperity they enjoyed during the 52 year reign of King Uzziah (II Chr.26) creating a high sense of entitlement and superiority
 - Joel first calls all the inhabitants of the land to remember this terrible time so that they would *tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation.* (vs.3)

- Joel doesn't want them to lose this opportunity to make an impression on the children, their grandchildren and their great grandchildren.
- This message is so important to our day – the day of positive thinking and “everybody is a winner mentality,” we often fail to tell our children about the hard times and by doing so give them the false impression that everything will always be o.k.
 - By neglecting to tell our children about the hard times we create in them a sense of entitlement – and for children growing up in the church – a sense that God owes them utopia.
- Joel then appeals to the drunkards in verse 5 saying, *Awake, drunkards, and weep; and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.*
 - The low laying vines of the vineyards would have been one of the first to be eaten by the locust making the production of wine impossible for decades.
 - But the drunkards aren't the only ones who need to wake up, weep and wail.
 - Joel points out that the fig trees have been destroyed (vs.7); the grain has been devoured (vs.9, 10); the olive oil has been lost (vs.10); the fruit trees are ruined (vs.12).
 - Joel wants them to wake up and realize that their happiest, their contentment, their joy has been contingent on their access to these things and now that these things have been taken away and as a result *the joy of the people has withered away.* (vs.12 –NIV)
 - As I mentioned earlier the people had grown accustomed to the extreme prosperity they enjoyed during the reign of King Uzziah (II Chr.26) causing them to find their significance in stuff instead of Christ.
 - Their found joy in things and when the things were gone their joy withered away.
 - Jesus taught us not to store up for ourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But rather we should be storing up for ourselves treasures in heaven. (Mt.6.19-21)
 - We must continually remind ourselves that anything we build our identity upon becomes our god (success, possessions, people) this is the core idea of idolatry.

- And when the success, the possessions, and the people are taken or don't perform the way you expected then your joy will wither away.
 - It is easy for us to place our happiness and joy on our access to the finer things of life instead of the things of the Lord.
- Joel then calls the priests to lead the people in mourning in verses 13-15 saying, *Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, O priests; Wail, O ministers of the altar! Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.*
- Joel knew that the temple sacrificial offerings had become ritualistic and void of any redemptive value.
 - People were just going through the motions and had little desire for spiritual things.
 - Their spiritual apathy and ritualism had made their sacrifices void of any true spiritual significance
 - And now the locust invasion had threatened the sacrificial system – the very core of what God had established to Christ so Joel calls upon the priests to gather the people and *cry out to the Lord.*

Application:

- It is interesting that Joel doesn't waste his time trying to answer the question "why did this happen?"

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- But rather acknowledges that it happened and it was devastating!
- Joel takes advantage of the moment to challenge his readers to consider how they have taken the Lord's blessing for granted.

- Joel shows them how they were building their lives on the enjoyment of life's pleasures and had drifted away from building their life on God.
 - For Joel the invasion of the locust forced them to consider how their identity was on the enjoyment of things instead of the sufficiency of God.
 - Joel will remind his readers that if they think the invasion of the locust is bad just wait until the Day of the Lord. (the locust invasion was just pre-season game)
- So, instead of wasting time trying to figure out why something bad has happened, Joel challenges his readers to use the opportunity to get their lives right with God.
 - The Apostle James said it like this, *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."* (Js.1.2-4)
 - Joel accepts the fact that we live in a fallen world and that we will experience various trials so he turns his heart towards God for the perfecting of his faith.

*¹⁹ To You, O LORD, I cry;
For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness
And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.*

*²⁰ Even the beasts of the field pant for You;
For the water brooks are dried up
And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

- As the Apostle Paul does in Romans 8, Joel tells us that creation itself, *even the beast of the field*, groans and suffers waiting eagerly for redemption. (Rom.8.22-23).
- But until that great day of redemption that the animals know that the proper response to the brooks drying up and the pastures being devoured is to pant for the Lord.

As the deer pants for the water brooks, So my soul pants for You, O God. (Ps.42.1b)

- This type of reaction does not come natural to us.
 - When the person with no religion, the irreligist, experiences a devastating disaster their natural response is fatalistic, concluding that there is no God or by chance there is He certainly is not in control or at best taking a nap.

- When a religious people experiences a devastating disaster their natural response is superstitious concluding that God is judging me for some act of disobedience I have done either consciously or unconsciously.
- The when a true believer experiences a devastating disaster they allow the Holy Spirit to massage their heart to come to the conclusion that we live in a fallen world therefore bad times will come but God has given us His grace to endure and this endurance will have perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Js.1.2-4)
- The Bible does not attempt to “sugar coat” the results of the Fall.
 - But it also does not hold back from explaining the greatest of God’s grace in the heart of true believers.

John 16.33

In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

- Jesus is clear that we will have times of trouble.
- Jesus knows that being discouraged will be our first reaction
- But Jesus challenges to embrace the truth that He has overcome the world and through Him – by His grace – we are over-comers.
- That as we go through the bad times we will allow our faith to be perfected knowing that Jesus Christ was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
- That our grief’s He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried.
- It was for our sake He was stricken, smitten, and afflicted.
- That He was pierced. He was crushed. He was oppressed. He was cut off.
- And as a result of the anguish of His soul, the Father was satisfied and will bring preservation to those who place their faith in Christ. (selected from Is.53)

Conclusion:

- I want to challenge you to embrace the fact that will live in a fallen world therefore everyone will go through bad times

- I want to challenge you to use situations in your life to burn away the things you cherish more than God
- I want to challenge you to embrace that the God knows weak you are and is mindful that you are like dust and He has demonstrated His loving-kindness towards us by giving us Christ who has overcome the world. (Ps.103)