

CCH Sermon 9th June 2019 Joel 2:18-32

V18. PRAY.

▲ On Thursday we marked 75 years since the D-day landings. They have been described as the real turning point of an extraordinary crisis: the Second World War.

Well v18 marks a real turning point in the book of Joel, and in the crisis they were facing of a locust plague. But the book of Joel isn't just a history lesson. It's God speaking to us today...

Whether it's a national crisis, such as knife crime epidemic or Brexit, or whether it's a personal crisis like a health or a relationship breakdown, Joel has taught us to do two things...

1) To take stock. To look around and mourn the devastation that sin causes. In Joel's day a plague of locusts sent by God as punishment on the land for the people's sin.

2) To take action. All crises are a foretaste (or harbinger) of the ultimate crisis that will come at the end of time when Jesus returns to judge on the Day of the Lord. Last week David showed us that Joel calls us to turn back- coming back to God in **repentance**- that is to say, 2v12 returning to God, v13 engaging our hearts in real / urgent / corporate turning from doing what is wrong, and starting doing what is right.

The Christian life begins with turning to God from sin. And it continues with ongoing turning to God, our gracious and compassionate God who is so quick to welcome us back.

Well now we move from the *judgement* part of the book more towards *hope* for the people of God, as we see God being jealous for his land (that means committed to its people) and making 2 major promises... 1) restoration 2) communication

1) God promises restoration following repentance (v18-27)

The people have prayed and sought the Lord, pleading his honour, and reputation, and wonderfully he answers.

V18.

1) rpt. ▲ Incidentally when we say restoration, don't think an old antique chair that needs patching up. Think more of a wall of bottles and cans in the drinks aisle of the supermarket that have been completely knocked over and smashed up by a stray trolley, and now they are being completely replaced and renewed in a total cleanup RESTORATION operation...

Well in these verses we see, God promising complete restoration in three ways...

First it is agricultural.

Remember, it was a locust plague that took away the crops (even from the grain offerings in the Temple) and now God promises to replace devastation with abundant crops V19.

And the reason for that v20 is that the locusts have been blown into a big stinking pile in the sea (just like they were in Pharaoh's day). V20.

It's wonderful- there's going to be new crops, new fruit, new wine, new oil, and everyone will have plenty to eat.

But it's not just a restoration of crops, it's a restoration of gladness. It's an **emotional** restoration.

Now after the gloom of the last 2 weeks it's important we don't miss this.

Look at verse 21-23.

The people are happy, they are thrilled! And even the animals are unafraid in verse 22. It's like some scene in a French village where the whole neighbourhood is rejoicing in the harvest. Or in an African village at the first rains! They're celebrating, they are having a feast- even the cows are rejoicing!!

Yesterday at our away day, John Hindley mentioned that because of Jesus, we can be a church known for it's happiness.

And that's what we have here.

"Be glad people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God!" V23

And the real reason it's a time of gladness is because behind the agricultural and emotional restoration is a **spiritual** restoration.

Do you remember the locusts came (as promised in Deuteronomy) as a punishment because the people had turned away from the Lord?

But now that they have turned back to him, there's new relationship with him: v25-27.

And I love that that note of shame overturned? It's there twice (v26, 27) it's so important. God's people won't be a cause of scorn among the other nations.

▲ It's a bit tragic that the MP from Peterborough who was imprisoned for perverting the cause of justice was a Christian.

And sadly sometimes God's people cause shame to come on them and the name of Christ.

But Joel is pointing forward to a day when never again will God's people be put to shame. It's a wonderful promise.

Well what does this first point mean for us...

I've made a little timeline which I hope will help...

- Here's the coming of Jesus- dividing AD & BC.
- Here's us 2019.
- Here's the day of the locust, a few centuries BC
- Here's the day of the Lord- sometime in the future.

And the people repented. And God promised restoration following their spiritual renewal.

But the message here from Joel is that when **we also** repent, we can be assured that God hears us and he will restore the situation.

That may happen now or it may happen in the future.

We live in the blue bracket – the time of restoration following repentance, and so we may see changes in the here and now. But we look forward to the time of complete restoration in the new heaven and the new earth.

Perhaps I can illustrate from v25 with an example.

▲ I once met a lady in a different church who had become a Christian as a teenager growing up. But in her student days she drifted from Jesus, she married a non-Christian man, and she was living really not as a Christian.

But when they moved to South London, she started going back to church, and she heard the good news again, that though like the locusts, her life had been devastated by sin, Jesus had died for that sin, that it could be completely paid for, and that all those years of compromise had been taken away.

Well she took off as a Christian. She was serving in different ways at church, she was bringing friends to Christianity Explored. It was as if in the 3 years that I knew her since she returned to faith, she had more than recouped the 10 years of drifting- the years the locusts had eaten. V25.

So my message for you today is first Return!

If you are not a Christian, do so today. Don't delay.

If you have been backsliding- return to God. Maybe you have been living in compromise or sin. Perhaps sex outside marriage. Perhaps gossip or a particular addiction that you can't shake. Perhaps the common but ugly middle class sins of materialism or selfishness. Well Come back to God.

Maybe you feel that a time of your life has been wasted. Well don't despair- bring it to the Lord in prayer. Return to God. 2:12

Blessings will follow. Who knows how God might restore your fruitfulness now, and of course bring you to the new creation where there'll be an abundant banquet with Jesus.

And having repented, and trusting God for the future (as all Christians are doing), be glad!

There is a place for mourning over sin (ch2:12,17), but there's a place for celebration and happiness. Be glad. (ch2:23)

Picture the time of the locust devastation being over and the crops growing back. And that's you! We live in the time after the Cross where Jesus has taken the curse for us.

We live in the time of gospel restoration.

And we look forward to the new heaven and the new earth.

God has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing.

- In Jesus he has taken our sin away. REJOICE!
- He has given us a church family to care for one another. BE GLAD!
- He has adopted us so that we can call God ABBA, Father. CELEBRATE!
- He has promised us a new heaven and a new earth. HOORAY!
- He has promised to be with us even in the hard times. HURRAH!
- He has given us his Holy Spirit- the Spirit of Jesus.

And on that note, we move to the second part of the passage and to the second promise v28-32.

1) God promises wonderful restoration following repentance.

2) God promises wonderful communication following Pentecost.

Let me explain!

V28-29

Joel is promising as part of this renewal and restoration by God, a specific new era of the Spirit.

Afterwards, or Acts 2 "in the last days!"

A time of wonderful blessing. V28

And here's the special thing.

Everyone is included!

Look at v28. Sons, Daughters, old me, Young men, male/female servants. Joel promises a time where all of God's people are flooded with the Holy Spirit.

In the OT, God's Holy Spirit, God himself present with people, would come upon individuals like Gideon the judge, Zechariah the priest, Moses the prophet.

This Old Testament filling with the Spirit would be in a short term way for a particular purpose. But here God is promising that all of his people, male or female, black or white, living in plenty, living in poverty, will have the Holy Spirit with them permanently, and enabling them to do what....?

Well the Holy Spirit enables us to know Jesus, and to become more like him. He equips us to serve and love other Christians, and he one day will take us to be in heaven (have a look at the handout on the way out!). But here he is given to prophesy.

Joel is promising a new era where all believers will be able to communicate about God intelligibly.

Now prophets were those who were given God's words and they were to speak them accurately. People like Moses, Elijah, Joel himself. A few special individuals acting as God's mouthpiece.

But now all of God's people are being able to communicate for God, and act as prophets. This is not in a writing the Bible way, because the Bible is now finished, and it doesn't need anything added to it.

But it is the speaking of God's truth one to another in all sorts of ways. Taking that finished word and applying it to one another's lives. Communication.

When will that come?

Well it could only come once sins had been forgiven. Because how could a Holy God dwell with a sinful people?

But Jesus Christ died for sin, and so after he returned to heaven, he sent his Holy Spirit to take his place to fill

This happened on the day of Pentecost- you can read about it Acts 2- our second reading. It was in the earliest days of the church after Jesus had left and gone to heaven. He sent his Holy Spirit to enable the gospel to go out.

And the coming of the Holy Spirit in this way meant that we are living in the last chapter of God's timeline- with the day of the Lord the next thing to happen- which could come at any time. V31.

It will be a time of calling on the Lord, and being saved.

Well what does this mean for us.

Look at the time line- do you see that we live in the blue bracket- the time of restoration has begun. But also we live after Pentecost- the time of communication has come.

So again two things for us to do. **First speak!**

God has given us his Spirit. Today is the birthday of the Church- we timed this sermon to be at Pentecost where around the world Christians are celebrating the coming of the Spirit.

And now all Christian brothers and sisters have a role to speak about Jesus, to speak God's word.

That happens in **bible teaching** where in a sermon or a bible study, someone speaks God's words given to the prophets and apostles of the Old and New Testament. In fact the puritans used to call preaching the art of prophesying.

It also happens in **evangelism**, when the good news of Jesus is spoken to someone who isn't a Christian. After all, Acts 2 was the day that people spoke in different languages about the rescue in Jesus.

And it happens whenever a Christian is seeking to **build up another Christian**, with some particular application of God's word for their situation, sometimes in a way that includes amazing God given insight into their situation.

As it says in 1 Cor 14:3 "But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort".

▲ A short while ago we named the coffee area the "BBC area". The place for *Bible based chat!* Where we can encourage one another and speak the Bible into one another's lives.

There's much more that could be said about prophesy, and it's an area of debate in the church today. I'd be happy to talk more about it afterwards if you have questions.

But the first lesson is to **speak**.

How can you speak:

- A word of encouragement to another Christian. People here today need strengthening, encouraging.
- Life groups (homegroups are a great place for this) where with open bible we can encourage one another, and test what we're saying to one another against Scripture.
- Also A word of gospel to someone who isn't a Christian.

So speak! Speak for Jesus.

And the final lesson is to **Call on Jesus**.

Do you see that Joel promised the Day of the Spirit would come before the day of the Lord. And now it has come.

We live in the era of the Holy Spirit, living with each Christian, enabling them to grow, to understand the Bible, to serve.

And if you are not a believer here this morning. You need to turn to Jesus. He is who Peter proclaimed in the Power of the Spirit on Pentecost.

He is the one who 3000 people turned to that birthday of the church.

He is the only one who can save you from your sins before the day of the Lord comes- the day when he returns.

Call on Jesus.

According to sermon Peter preached on Pentecost in Acts 2, Jesus is this Lord that we can call upon.

And the promise of v32 is that you will be saved.

So come to Jesus. Call on him. If you've never done that before, why not now, in the quiet for the first time, call on Jesus, turning from your sins, and trusting him to rescue you.

Let's have a moment of quiet.

Pray.

Apostles Creed. I bel in HS.

