

Restoration & Rejoicing

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me to the book of Joel. If you have a Bible, if you're here in the sanctuary, the reading will also be on the screens.

We are looking at Joel chapter 2, verses 18 to 27. If you're looking in a Bible, the book of Joel is a little book, and it's at the beginning of what's called the Minor Prophets, which is the 12 shorter prophetic books at the end of the Old Testament.

So it's after Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and then Daniel, and then Hosea and Joel. So we are looking at this short little book over the next couple of weeks.

We'll be looking at the...we've come to the second half of the book. We'll be looking at the second half of the book over the next couple of weeks. So Joel, I'm going to read chapter 2, beginning at verse 18.

Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

[1 : 0 4] The Lord answered and said to his people, Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied.

And I will no more make you a reproach among the nations. I will remove the northerner far from you and drive him into a parched and desolate land, his vanguard into the eastern sea and his rear guard into the western sea.

The stench and foul smell of him will rise, for he has done great things. Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things.

Fear not, you beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness are green. The tree bears its fruit, the fig tree and vine give their full yield. Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication.

He has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain as before. The threshing floor shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

[2 : 0 8] I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army which I sent among you.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you, and my people shall never again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and there is none else, and my people shall never again be put to shame.

So almost two weeks ago, my wife Jane came down with some sharp stomach pains. We were driving home, and I said, So how bad is it? And she said, Well, the only thing I can compare it to is childbirth.

Now, obviously, I don't really know what childbirth feels like, but I've been there and seen it from the outside three times. It's pretty intense. And I don't think I've ever heard my wife compare any other pain to that.

So she went to the doctor. Doctor said, Well, let's do some blood work. Maybe just a stomach, but it's maybe just a stomach virus. We'll just wait and see if it passes. Well, next day, the doctor calls back, says, Your blood work came back.

[3 : 20] You need to go to the hospital. We think you have appendicitis. Which was the case. She had surgery that night. They took it out. She came home the next morning. It all happened very quickly.

Jane's recovered very well. She was here with my family last night at the outdoor service. But we thank God for his provision and for his care for us in a whole bunch of ways through that, including many of you who prayed for us and cared for us in some many practical ways.

You know, on a normal day, none of us would choose to go under anesthesia, get cut open, have somebody we don't know fiddling around with instruments inside our body, and then have to recover afterwards.

Surgery can be scary and painful, even, at times, dangerous. But some things are even more dangerous, including appendicitis. When the appendix gets infected and inflamed, if you don't do something quickly, the infection will spread, and it will get far more serious.

So in most cases, surgery is the only way to health. Back in 1535, Martin Luther wrote, God wounds in order to heal.

[4 : 32] He kills in order to make alive. In other words, God is like a skilled surgeon who cuts us open in order to remove the infection, but his ultimate purpose is not to destroy us, but rather to heal us.

To put us back together again, whole and complete and fully alive and functioning in him. Now, Martin Luther wrote that in his commentary on Galatians, but he could have said the same thing about the book of Joel.

God wounds in order to heal. He kills in order to make alive. Because the book of Joel, as we've seen in the last two weeks, began with a devastating loss, a natural disaster, a plague of locusts who, like an invading army, had laid waste the entire land.

And in the face of great loss, we heard Joel's call to lament. In other words, to grieve in a direction, to grieve toward the one true God.

And then last week, Joel sounded the alarm about a coming judgment of God that would be even worse, even more terrifying than the locust invasion, the day of the Lord, a day of God's righteous and final judgment.

[5 : 53] And in the face of that coming judgment, we heard Joel's call to repent, to turn to the Lord with all our hearts. So far, the book of Joel has been about present disaster and future judgment, a call to lament and a call to repent.

But this week, we come to the turning point of the book. And today, we hear a message of joy and hope and restoration and newness of life.

So this morning, I want us to do three things as we look at this passage. First, I want us to see God's heart for restoration.

Second, I want us to hear God's promise of restoration. And third, I want us to consider our response. So first, I want us to see God's heart.

And we see God's heart in verse 18. Now, verse 18 marks the transition between the first half of Joel about the disaster and lamenting and repenting and the second half of Joel which is all about restoration and hope and joy and a glorious future for the people of God.

[7 : 05] Now, as with many of the Old Testament prophets, we don't know whether, exactly where and how this message was first delivered. So we don't know if the book of Joel was one sermon that Joel preached all in one day, all at one time, or whether it was more like a compilation of messages that he had given throughout his lifetime.

Because in the book of Joel, there's no narrator that gives us the historical context. Right? If you read the whole book of Joel, it's just Joel's speeches. Except for this one verse.

Verse 18. In verse 18, it's not Joel speaking. It's a narrator's voice giving us a glimpse into the very heart of God. Then the Lord was jealous for his land and had pity on his people.

And this is the crucial turning point of the book. It's the bridge between lamenting and repenting and disaster and judgment and into joy and hope and restoration and fulfillment.

You might say verse 18 is the hinge on which the whole book turns. So I want to park here and sort of sit on this bridge for a little while. What do we see in this verse?

[8 : 28] Verse 18. Well, we see an indication that the people and their leaders had taken the first half of Joel to heart. They had heard his call to lament and repent and they had turned to the Lord.

They had laid everything else aside. They had gathered together. They had wept and prayed and cried out to the Lord for mercy. And we'll see in this passage that God answers the specific prayer that Joel told them to pray in verse 17.

We'll see as we go through this passage. He responds directly to that exact prayer. But even more in verse 18, we see not just an indication of the people's response but we see God's heart for his people.

The Lord's deep feelings for his people. It says the Lord became jealous for his land. In other words, we see God's zealous love, his passionate concern, his burning dedication to that which is his very own.

The Lord saw his land overrun by destructive locusts. Now on the one hand, Joel says very clearly that God sent the locusts.

[9 : 43] Verse 25, the locusts were my great army which I sent among you. The locust plague was not an accident. It didn't come out of nowhere. It wasn't a surprise to God.

God had sent the devastating locusts to discipline his people and to bring them to repentance. But on the other hand, God's desire and God's plan was never to give over his land permanently to the locusts.

God had sent them for a time but ultimately the locusts were trespassers on God's land. God had promised his land to his people, to his children, not to the locusts. And the Lord wanted his land back.

He was jealous for his land and it says he had pity on his people. Now this is a direct answer to the prayer that was prayed in verse 17. If you look up in verse 17, the prayer that Joel tells him to pray starts with spare your people, O Lord.

And this word that's translated have pity can also be translated spare. So Malachi 3.17 God says they shall be mine.

[10 : 51] He's referring to his people. They shall be mine in the day when I make up my treasured possession and I will spare them. Same word as a man spares his son who serves him.

You see, the God of the Bible is a God of compassion and mercy. He is not abstract and distant, uninvolved and uncaring. He is not ruthless and relentless in his judgments.

No, he has deep feelings for his people. The kind of feelings that a good parent has for their very own child. And when we turn back to him, God spares us from the punishment that we rightly deserve.

So brothers and sisters, do you see God's heart for you and for us as a church in this verse? Now Joel was talking to the ancient Israelites who had experienced the devastation of a locust plague.

Our situation is different from theirs in a whole bunch of ways. But whatever the disappointment, whatever the loss, whatever the devastation that you might have experienced, Joel's words still speak to us because the heart of God for his people has not changed.

[12 : 03] God is still jealous for all that rightly belongs to him. In other words, he wants us to be his and his alone. Just like a husband and wife rightly desire each other's exclusive loyalty and affection.

So God does not rejoice when our lives are overrun by things that are not of him. by sinful addictions or destructive temptations or habits.

God does not rejoice when disaster befalls us and when we cry out in pain. Even when he sent hard things into our lives to call us back to him.

God does not rejoice at those things. No, he's passionately concerned for the well-being of his own people who belong to him and who are called by his name and he loves us with a jealous and zealous love.

He won't let us go. And you know what? He's still compassionate and merciful. He spares us from the punishment that we deserve through Jesus Christ our great high priest.

[13 : 05] God hears and answers our prayers when we come before his throne of grace and cry out for grace and mercy and help in our time of need. The New Testament says Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest on our behalf.

God this is the God we serve and we can approach him with confidence because we know he hears because we know he cares. So that's the heart of God that we see in verse 18.

That's our first point. But then starting in verse 19 we come to our second point. We hear God's promise. Now what did God promise to the people of Israel back then?

Well he promised that everything they had lost in the locust plague would now be restored. What are some examples of things that they had lost that God was promising to restore?

Well he promises to restore their food. Chapter 1 verse 10 and 12 Joel laments the grain is destroyed the wine dries up the oil languishes and gladness dries up from the children of man.

[14 : 15] But now chapter 2 verse 19 the Lord speaks and says behold look I'm sending to you grain wine and oil and you will be satisfied. The threshing floors verse 24 will be full of grain.

The vats will overflow with wine and oil. Many of us don't fully appreciate the promises of abundant food in the Bible. Because for some of us we've always had plenty of food on the table.

We've always been able to go to the supermarket. The shelves have never been completely bare. There's always plenty of things to choose from. But people who have experienced hunger or famine or extreme poverty if you've been through any of those things if you've not known where your next meal is coming from you know that food isn't just something that we can take for granted.

Food is a gift from God. It's a daily reminder of his provision and kindness toward his creatures. And for the Israelites in the Old Testament food was also a sign of their covenant relationship with God because God had promised them in Deuteronomy that if they would obey his commands that he would send the early rain and the later rain and it specifically says he would give so they could harvest their grain and wine and oil the sort of staple foods that sustain them throughout the year.

You know in the New Testament food is also a sign of our covenant with God when we share the Lord's Supper when we eat the bread and drink the cup those are signs that God continues to sustain us and nourish us physically and spiritually by his grace.

[16 : 07] But it's not only their food that God promises to restore, God also promises to restore their honor. Again, in chapter 1 and 2 they were full of shame.

Chapter 1 verse 11 Be ashamed O tillers of the soil because the harvest of the field has perished. All their work had amounted to nothing. You know for many people we can feel a deep sense of shame when our work seems to amount to nothing.

We feel like we've got nothing to show for ourselves, nothing to take pride in. You know if you found yourself unemployed for an extended period of time or stuck in a job where your efforts go unrewarded and unrecognized it's not uncommon to also feel worthlessness, rejection, anger, depression.

Those are manifestations of shame. And in chapter 2 verse 17 we see it wasn't just the workers who were feeling shame because they had nothing to show for themselves.

The whole nation was on the brink of utter shame, utter embarrassment. And so they pray, make not your heritage a reproach, a laughingstock, a byword among the nations.

[17 : 21] Why should they say among the peoples, where's their God? God? They were all feeling completely ashamed. But look at what God says here. Chapter 2 verse 19, I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

Chapter 2 verse 26, my people shall never again be put to shame. He repeats it again at the end of verse 27. And this is a promise that the New Testament picks up on.

Both Paul and Peter in their letters to early Christians write this, whoever trusts in Jesus will never be put to shame.

And why is that true? It's because everything that belongs to Jesus is now ours. And everything that belongs to us is now his.

You see, Jesus has taken our shame and our regret, our failure, our futility, glory. And he has included us in his accomplishment, in his victory, in his glory, and in the work of his kingdom.

[18 : 30] In Jesus, we have something to rejoice and be confident in and glory in because of our connection to him.

So God would restore their food, he would restore their honor, he also promises to restore their peace. The locusts were like an enemy invasion. In fact, some people wonder, are the locusts a metaphor for an enemy invasion or is an enemy invasion a metaphor for the locust plague?

Or is it both? Maybe they were experiencing some of both. Either way, look at what verse 20 says. I will remove the northerner. Perhaps the locusts had come from the north.

Many of Israel's enemies came from the north. I will remove the northerner far from you and drive him into a parched and desolate land. Most likely that's a reference to the south of Judah, which is a desert. His vanguard into the eastern sea, the dead sea, and his rear guard into the western sea.

In other words, God clears out the enemy, sort of like sweeping something out down east west, clears out the land from these destructive enemies.

[19 : 40] The stench and foul smell of him will rise. In the ancient world it was well known that when locusts came to the end of their devouring and they would all die, their corpses would stank horribly.

So ancient writers talk about this. It sometimes even poisoned the water supply or contaminated it when they all died at the edge of a sea or something like that.

God promises to drive away the hostile locusts and restore peace to their land. And finally, God promises in verse 25 to restore their lost years.

I will restore to you. Literally the word is I will pay you back or I will make up to you the years that the swarming locusts has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter.

And again, this echoes chapter 1, verse 4, where those four kinds of locusts are mentioned in succession. You see, all that we see, all these promises in verses 18 to 27 are gradually reversing all the destruction that we saw in chapters 1 and the beginning of chapter 2.

[20 : 49] Everything the people had lost, food, honor, peace, years of their lives would be restored. Now, notice that this restoration Joel promises does not happen instantly all in one day.

Joel seems to be speaking at least partly about things that have not yet happened. That's why most translations translate most of the verbs in the future tense. I will do this. You shall have this.

But there's an interesting feature of the Hebrew verbs in this section. Now, this gets a little technical, but it's worth digging into. Most of the verbs in verses 19 to 27 are in what is called the perfect tense.

So, normally in Hebrew, the perfect tense refers to an action that is seen or portrayed as a completed whole. So, it's not describing an action that might happen in the future or might not.

It's not describing something that's still in process and still unfolding and still a little up in the air. No, it's describing an action in its completeness, in its wholeness.

[21 : 58] That's why it's called the perfect tense. But here's the thing. The Old Testament prophets, including Joel here, sometimes use the perfect tense to refer to events that have not yet happened.

But God promises that they will. And why do they do this? The point they're making is even though these events have not yet unfolded in history, God has promised that they will happen and so they are as sure and certain and complete as if they had already happened.

you can be as sure and certain that these things will come to pass as you can be sure about what happened yesterday. Joel never lays out a definite timeline, but he promises that everything the people had lost would one day be restored.

Now, of course, we need to ask, how does this promise apply to us today? Well, in the New Testament, the main principle still holds.

Because the New Testament tells us that Jesus Christ came into the world to restore everything that had been damaged and destroyed by sin. And if you have come and placed your faith and trust in Jesus as your Savior and Lord, every part of your life is included in that promise of restoration.

[23 : 30] every hunger and thirst you have experienced, every rejection and defeat, every attack and betrayal, all the squandered opportunities and all the devoured years.

Jesus Christ is big enough to redeem all those. If you are a Christian, what Martin Luther said is true for you. God wounds in order to heal.

He kills in order to make alive. on the other side of every death and every loss that you experience in union with Jesus is a resurrection and a renewal.

Now, some of you have experienced devastating loss, traumatic loss, with long-term consequences, and you can't see how you could fully recover. Some of you are in the middle of loss.

You're reeling. You're overwhelmed. You're depressed. You can't see a way forward, or can hardly see a way forward, much less a way through. That's normal. When you're in the middle of a loss, you can't see what the resurrection is going to look like on the other side.

[24 : 44] You know, when Jesus Christ died on the cross and his followers took his body and wrapped it up and laid it in a tomb, they had no idea what to expect.

And all of their expectations would have been wrong. But three days later, Jesus rose up from the grave. And if he can do that, he can restore and heal and renew us in ways that we would never have thought possible.

You see, when you're in the middle of loss and pain and hurt and shame and all of this, sometimes all you can do is hold on to Jesus one day at a time.

You must not determine in your own mind how and when God must fix things. Because God works in his own way and in his own time and some of our healing and restoration will come in this life and some of it will be granted in the age to come.

You know, when you're recovering from surgery, you have to follow the doctor's instructions and not trust your own feelings and instincts.

[26 : 02] Because when you're recovering from surgery, some days you feel horrible and you want to stay in bed all day. But the doctor's orders are do physical therapy. Get up, move around, exercise your muscles because that's the only way you're going to heal.

And other days you feel great and the doctor's orders are take it slow, don't lift anything, and don't overdo it. And in the same way, when we're recovering from loss, we need to not let our feelings and instincts be in the driver's seat.

Our feelings and instincts are always going to be in the car with us. You can't throw them out the window, right? They're always going to be there. But don't let them be in the driver's seat. Let God's word be in the driver's seat.

Trust his commands. Again, what did Jesus' followers do when they laid him in the grave? When they were grieving, they thought the whole thing has ended in failure.

What did they do? They rested on the Sabbath day. Because guess what God had told the Israelites to do in the Old Testament? Rest on the Sabbath day. It was clear. That was the only thing they could do.

[27 : 17] So they stopped. They didn't do anything for a day. They observed the Sabbath as they normally would have. And then after that, they went to the tomb. And then Jesus was resurrected. And then it was crazy.

And it was great. And it was amazing. And all the healing and restoration began. But in the meantime, they just had to obey what God had told them, even though they didn't understand. Jesus Christ has blazed away from death and loss and devastation into resurrection.

life and power. His resurrection from the grave is greater than your most devastating losses. His healing hands are more than able to mend your deepest fractures.

His voice continues to speak honor and hope in the place of shame and despair. Even though it hasn't yet happened, his promise is as good as if it already had.

I am making all things new. God is speaking to God's God's God's promise. That brings us to our third point.

[28 : 23] We've seen God's heart, we've heard God's promise, and finally, let's consider our response. Verses 21 to 23 call us to respond to the Lord's promise.

And interestingly, these verses are sandwiched in the middle of God's promises. So God is speaking to his people, verse 19 through 20, and verse 24 to 27, God speaks to his people, and the first person, he says, I will do this for you.

I will make this happen for you. But then in the middle of verses 21 to 23, there's a call to respond. And it's actually addressed to the whole creation, to the land, to the animals, and finally to the children of Zion, to the people of God.

The fate of all creation ultimately hangs together. Right? The land, the animals, and then the central piece, the people of God, who God's image bearers.

But what's the response that Joel calls for? He says two things. Fear not. This is repeated in verse 21 and verse 22.

[29 : 33] And second, rejoice. Be glad. Verse 21 and verse 23. Sometimes God repeats things in the scripture because we need to hear them over and over.

And these commands to fear not and to rejoice in the Lord are repeated over and over to God's people in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. On the night that Jesus was born, what was the message the angel brought to the shepherds?

Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Because unto you this day in the city of David is born a Savior, Christ the Lord.

And the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans picks up these same themes. He says, fear not if God is for us, who can be against us? If God did not spare his own son for us, how will he not also graciously give us all things?

And Paul says, rejoice in the Lord. He says, we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. In other words, Paul says, we don't just rejoice in what we already have and what we already experience in full.

[30 : 42] We've tasted the goodness in Jesus that we're going to experience for all eternity and there's joy in the anticipation. Because God's promises can be counted on.

One Christian writer said, in earthly terms, hope is certainty of time and uncertainty of event. So we say, I hope it will be a pleasant day tomorrow and we can have a picnic in the park.

Guess what? Tomorrow's going to come. It might or might not be a nice day. Certainty of time, uncertainty of event. But he says in the Bible, it's the reverse.

Hope is uncertainty of time, certainty of event. event. I will make all things new.

Right? Certainty of event. Jesus doesn't tell us the time. But we can be confident in his promise. Finally, the book of Hebrews echoes these themes in chapter 12 when it says that God disciplines those he loves.

[31 : 53] In other words, God trains us even through painful trials. He says, discipline is always painful in the moment. But on the other side of it, there's a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

You know, some of you have done these sort of crazy workouts. Maybe you've done CrossFit or those insanity workouts. Maybe you've trained for a 5K or a half marathon. Right? It's hard.

It's painful in the short term. When you're in the middle, especially when you just start those routines. But there's satisfaction on the other side.

There's joy on the end of it. And Hebrews is saying, yes, there's pain in the short term. But on the other side, there's a harvest of righteousness and peace that God works in us.

Even when he brings us through hard seasons, through loss, pain, and even devastation, but he's bringing us into hope and restoration and a future with him.

[33 : 07] Let me close by reading the last two verses and hear this promise from God to us.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of you and that I am the Lord your God and there is no one else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. Let's pray. Father God, we thank you for these promises of restoration and this call to rejoice in you.

We thank you for sending your son Jesus to accomplish this work of restoration and healing on our behalf through his death, taking on our sins upon himself and through his resurrection, granting and bestowing upon us his life forevermore.

We pray that we would take hold of these promises. We pray that we would be able to taste the joy and healing and restoration that you promised.

[34 : 22] We pray that we would experience that more and more even in our daily lives, even in the present age, even as we look forward to the completion of that in the age to come when you return.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.