

Joel: Dream Dreams
Sermon 5-26-19
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Joel 2:25-32

²⁵I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. ²⁶You 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. ²⁷You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

²⁸Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit. ³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

Message:

This is a tough text for me to preach about at this juncture. Not that I don't believe in restoration, but that we're not there yet. We're in the middle of heartache and conflict. I believe we all feel the tension of this moment. But I would encourage you all to endure in this season. I would encourage you to be bold and to have courage in this moment. I would encourage you to be honest with yourself, with me and with your church. This is not the time for passivity, but the time to share our hearts with graciousness and love. I would warn you against fleeing because wherever you flee from this pain and tension, the pain and tension will carry with you to that next place. It will go unresolved. Also, don't jump ahead of the process. All of us likes the good feelings of restoration, but if we don't face the underlying issues with courage, humility and honesty, restoration will be built on a false foundation and it will quickly crumble again. As I've said to some of you, "it's gut-check" time. It's a time to ask, who are we? And, where do we want to go from here? If we're seeking restoration, what does that look like for us? And are we ready to go there?

After Joel's harsh talk in chapter 1 and half of chapter 2, Joel finally gets to the good stuff. The stuff that we all like. The stuff that makes us feel good. The stuff that gives us hope. Yes, you might not believe it, but I am going to preach about hope today. One of the many questions that the Book of Joel, as a whole, evokes is, what do we hope in? What do you hope in? Do you hope in your family? Do you hope in your job? Do you hope in your money and your possessions? Do you hope in your children and grandchildren? Do you hope in the church? This church? Where do you place your hope? One of the challenging things of our society is that we can easily place our hope in good things that are the wrong things in the end. We can place our hope in the good things that are the wrong things in the end. At least, they are things that we hope in that aren't rightly ordered. I imagine that before the exile of the Israelites from Jerusalem and Judah, they had hope in good things. They hoped in the innocence of their children. They hoped in the temple worship. They hoped in their kings and queens. They hoped in doing good work on behalf of God. If you recall much of the Old Testament and especially the chief issue that the book of Judges hammered home to us last year, we can easily put hope in gods or worship other things. Lesser things than the almighty God. Sorry Keith, I know I keep picking on Philadelphia Eagles fans, but it's just so apparent, admittedly how much we put our hope in our Eagles. I can be guilty of this at times. We pin our hopes every Sunday on our Eagles winning the game that it dictates our moods. We pin our hopes on Carson Wentz making some spectacular play. We pin our hopes on that kicker hitting that 61 yard field goal against all odds. Christine, admittedly, has a hard time watching Eagles games with me because she always feels bad and compassionate towards the loser. And she hates being disappointed. But man, when they win against all odds, it's thrilling and sweet. And if you've ever been to a game, the fans are incredibly thrilling to be around. Now, there are some really vulgar fans, admittedly. We don't know anyone around us in the stands, but when the Eagles succeed that person in front of you and in back of you, even though you don't know them, is your new best friend in the flash of a moment. Although we love and sometimes hate our Eagles, it is a good thing (sometimes) that is the wrong thing to put our hope in. The Israelites can hope in good things that are the wrong things. WE can hope in good things that are the wrong things. We can hope in gods that are not the almighty God.

Let's assume that the Israelites grieved the loss of being conquered by the Babylonians. Let's assume that the ministers of the Lord and the elders got on their knees and cried out to the Lord. Let's assume that the leaders AND the people in one accord repented before the Lord for worshipping good things that are the wrong things. Good things that are lesser things than God. Because God is merciful. Because God is good. Because God is steadfast in His love. How does

God respond? “²⁵I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you. ²⁶You 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. ²⁷You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.” All the things that the people have formerly experienced because of God’s judgment upon them, He will restore to them. “...my people shall never again be put to shame.” I don’t think God likes His judgment or bringing judgment upon a people, but God also knows that without any judgment or corrective action, people also will not understand restoration. Restoration will be cheapened if there is no judgment. So God on the one hand, wants to be merciful and gracious with each of us, but we also need to understand that there is judgment for our sin. There are consequences for our sin.

After repentance of sin though, restoration can be really sweet. And I believe God restores more here than what the people could have ever imagined. Not only does he restore all the ways they’ve been afflicted or hurt, but He gives them something more than just making things back to the way they used to be. “²⁸Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. ²⁹Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.” God is saying that the people will see a whole new reality, a refreshing reality that is good and pure. A new reality that blows away all expectations of hope. God will give us hope beyond hope. We may hope small, God gives us hope that is big and even grand. It’s interesting here in Joel that God promises to pour out His Spirit to all those who turn to Him because Peter uses this same exact passage in Acts 2 on the heels of Pentecost. This is a major reason I’m preaching on Joel because of how it is used in Acts. Peter speaks to the onlookers, the “devout Jews” that gathered around the disciples and all those who believe in Jesus. Because these believers in Jesus just experienced the first supernatural manifestation of the Holy Spirit. They spoke in different tongues and they understood each other. So these “devout Jew” onlookers are witnesses to the incredible power of the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us, “All were amazed and perplexed saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said ‘They are filled with new wine.’” I wish witnessing to others about Jesus were this easy today because things are perfectly teed up for Peter to share about Jesus. Peter then first declares that these people are not drunk and then he begins by quoting our Joel passage. And then Peter goes on to accuse these people of crucifying Jesus. Which we know now they’re guilty of, but can you imagine the guts Peter had to accuse these onlooking Jews for killing Jesus? I mean Peter could

have died in this scene if it went the other way. But despite their efforts to kill Jesus, He was raised from the dead. Conviction came upon their hearts. The text says in Acts, “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what should we do?’ Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.’ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.” I can imagine that before this entire Pentecost scene the disciples are pacing around wondering “What should we do?” “What should we do?” Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come after his ascension. Jesus told them to make disciples in His name. But the disciples must have been thinking “How do we do that?” Maybe we understand that Jesus calls us to make disciples, but we’re asking, “How do WE do that?” And the first thing they did after the ascension is they spent time in prayer in the upper room and then felt the need to find Judas’ replacement among the disciples. Why was this so important? Doesn’t this seem trivial among all other things? This is included in Acts because, like Joel, this is about restoration. To call a new person to be an apostle is about restoring the twelve. And upon their restoration, Pentecost happens. And this keeps happening over and over again in Acts. Repentance, acceptance, restoration. Repentance, acceptance, restoration. Repentance of sin. Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Restoration with God.

If we return to Joel, our next section focuses on this acceptance piece. “³⁰I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. ³¹The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. ³²Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.” There is God’s judgment again. He’s talking about a future day in which He will judge the earth. Only those who accept Him and call upon his name will survive that day. Our only hope to survive sin, to survive pain and suffering, to survive conflict, is to call on the name of the Lord. Do we find our joy, our hope, our fulfillment and our satisfaction in Him alone?

If you do, you will start to see glimpses of what God has for you. “...I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.” Again, God doesn’t want to just restore. He wants to give you restoration. But He wants to give you MORE than just restoration upon your grief and repentance. He wants to

give you dreams beyond dreaming and visions beyond visions. I'm sure many of us can't even comprehend that. What can we understand that we can't see? Exactly. We may need to trust in the Lord in what we can't see. What if...the vision we have is too small? What if...the vision we have is not God-given, but human-given? What if God has a grander vision than we could ever imagine, but we're settling for a smaller human vision? What if we're settling for our love for each other as the vision because we're afraid? We say "we love one another" so that's good enough. It might be "good enough," but it's not the grander vision God has for you. And I'd hate for you to miss out on the beautiful grander vision of God because you're settling for lesser things. That would sadden me. And I believe it would sadden God. What if we're settling for surviving as a church instead of thriving because we're afraid? Afraid of losing our loved ones. Afraid that we won't find loving and caring Christian relationships again. Afraid that new people might steal our beloved friendships and relationships here. What if surviving as a church isn't God's grander vision at all? What if we are where we are because we've lost God's vision for Providence? In Proverbs 29:18 it says, I'm reading from the Message paraphrase, "If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; But when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed." Another example of this is in the Lord's prayer, we say, "...thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Do you really believe that? It's gut-check time. Do you really believe our God is faithful? It's gut-check time. Do you really believe that his ways are higher than our ways? It's gut-check time. Do you really trust in the Lord when you can't see what He's doing? It's gut-check time.

I'll ask this again, what if we're hoping in a good thing, but it's the wrong thing to put our hope in? What if we put our hope in good things that actually are lesser things instead of putting our hope in the almighty God? You know...Peter settled for a lesser thing until the Lord brought him a vision. Peter thought that the good news of Jesus Christ was just intended for the Jews. So all of his ministry, at the beginning, was directed towards the Jews. Until he had a vision in Acts 10 where the Lord called him to minister to gentiles. Peter had a small vision. Peter was doing a good thing, but was settling for lesser things. When Peter reluctantly received the word from the Lord and met with Cornelius, his relatives and close friends, the vision of God expanded and forever changed the Western World. Peter preached the word of God to them and guess what happened? Some call this the "Gentile Pentecost" because "While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers [the Jews] who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God." And of course this becomes a heated conversation throughout Acts and the rest of the

New Testament. And by the way, this call to minister to the gentiles is also confirmed independently through a vision to Ananias about Paul being called to minister to gentiles. Once Peter and Paul saw the vision, saw God's vision, to minister to the gentiles, Christianity exploded. We wouldn't have this faith in Jesus today if Peter and Paul didn't see the grander vision of God.

I was at another Netzer meeting this past Thursday and something intriguing happened. One young woman, probably around my age, shared that her church was closing down. This was a young church. People probably in their 30s or 40s. A church that probably has just as many people as we do. And as she was telling us these words tears were streaming down her face. This definitely saddened her. As it should. The main reason that they're closing though is because they don't have a vision for the future of their church and they didn't want to just keep it going to simply exist. I found that to be a very courageous and mature thing to do as believers in Christ. Even as it pains them. When there is no vision, the people perish. Do we have a vision Providence, a God-given vision?

God has a grander vision, Providence. A vision that is grander THAN Providence. A vision that will restore each and every one of you. A vision that will give you a renewed sense of hope. Dreams upon dreams and visions beyond visions. I'm about to show a video clip that comes from the Dr. Seuss story, "The Lorax." If you recall in the Lorax all the trees were destroyed over one man's greed. The air was becoming polluted and the earth quickly uninhabitable. This one boy was searching for the last tree on the earth in search of hope. Through a series of stories, the Lorax leads this boy to the last hope. (Play video at <https://www.wingclips.com/movie-clips/the-lorax/let-it-grow>) The other month when we were going through the 40 days of prayer, Christine and I would spend Thursdays praying together. When Christine prays, she prays in images. So the image she received from the Lord was that of a plant that looks dead and barren, but has one small shoot of growth. What is our last seed of hope Providence? What last seed of hope will cause us to see God's grander vision? I can at least name one, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.