

Joel: A Future Hope
Sermon 6-2-19
Pastor Curtis Dehmey

Joel 3:15-21

¹⁵The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. ¹⁶The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the LORD is a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. ¹⁷So you shall know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

¹⁸In that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Wadi Shittim. ¹⁹Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood. ²⁰But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. ²¹I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the LORD dwells in Zion.

Message:

How many of us love road construction and detours and construction traffic jams? Yeah...I didn't think we'd have any takers on that one. When I served at the National Church of the Brethren office in Elgin, IL for a summer as an intern, they said that out there they have two seasons: winter season and construction season. When we focus just on the construction project, we become grumpy and crotchety. I mean I thought that that Armand Hammer project on 422 was never going to be done. Every time I drove through there I thought for sure I was gonna get in an accident because of how crazy people were driving through those cattle shoot lanes. But now, it's actually a pretty nice and smooth drive through that section now that it's complete. I can't say the same for the rest of 422, but Armand Hammer is a nice section now. When we just focus on the burden of the rehab and construction, we miss out on the grander plan. Like, for instance, that those roads will be smooth and nice to travel through one day. If we think about what the end product might be, maybe we start to dream and have visions, we start to be less disgruntled by the inconvenience of the project. We are a little more willing to endure. Another perfect image of this was on Tuesday morning when I was driving out of downtown Royersford and the road was semi-blocked on one side of the road with a crane truck. What were they doing? They were dismantling the

old neon lit metal “Lebow” sign. Why were they dismantling it? Because the building has been renovated and it is no longer going to be Lebow’s Furniture. It hasn’t been so for many years. In favor of a future hope for downtown Royersford, they had to put the past behind. Now, I don’t say that flippantly. I don’t mean to imply that Lebow’s Furniture didn’t mean anything or serve any purpose. As if it meant nothing. It did mean something for the time period that it thrived. And I’m sure for those of you who were around for the peak of it’s day, you really appreciated it. But in order for something to be re-born, re-purposed, re-used, the old had to pass away. In order for there to be a future hope for Royersford, the old needs to be dismantled or rehabbed to make way for a new future hope to be born for our generation and generations to come. Honestly, Christine and I wouldn’t have bought a home in Royersford, if we didn’t believe that it was on the rise. We have hope that there will be downtown shops and restaurants to walk to and enjoy. One glimpse of that was “Sweet Aloha” opening the other weekend on the strip. They took over the old McKissick’s hardware store. It was packed full all weekend and no where to sit. There was a line out the door. Royersford is making a comeback, but it won’t be the same as it used to be.

For the Israelites to make a comeback, they had to endure construction season. They had to endure the pain of facing their reality. They had to endure the pain of facing their failings. They had to endure the pain of facing their sin. And when they surrendered to the Lord, God came to their aid. God restored them and brought dreams and visions. He brought MORE hope than they could ever hope for. When the future day of the Lord happens. When God brings judgment again, it will be a different story for the Israelites. ¹⁵“The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. ¹⁶The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake. But the LORD is a refuge for his people, [so he will protect them from judgment] a stronghold for the people of Israel. ¹⁷So you shall know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.” With one hand, God judges the earth in the future of all unrighteousness and sin and with the other hand God provides refuge for those who see His vision, who submit to Him, who recognize their sin and repent. Part of trusting God, vulnerably with our hearts, is trusting that He will protect us from future judgment. So there is future hope, but there is also future judgment. Where do you want to stand? In the shade of His refuge or under the barrage of His judgment. God promises us here that if we submit to Him and we repent, not only will He restore us and give us dreams and visions, but he will protect us from future judgment as well. Again, God wants your heart. Nothing else.

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forth from the house of the LORD and water the Wadi Shittim.¹⁹ Egypt shall become a desolation and Edom a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood. ²⁰But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations. ²¹I will avenge their blood, and I will not clear the guilty, for the LORD dwells in Zion.” “...Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.” Joel is saying that if you choose the way of God, you will not only be blessed now with restoration and dreams, but you will bless your children and future generations. God will be with you not just in your lifetime, but for future generations as well. Joel is talking about paradise. If you seek the way of God, paradise you will have in the end. Haven't we suffered enough Providence? Isn't this what we want to see for future generations of the church? We want them to experience paradise and God's blessing and refuge in the midst of heartache and judgment. But what we are doing now, in avoiding this death reality, is seeking what we want for our generation NOW. We are seeking what we need now rather than thinking about what future generations need. They need something better than what we can provide now. See, Joel makes it very simple, are you on the side of God and fall under his refuge? Or are you willfully disobeying God and therefore subject to judgment? Are you willing to give up what you need NOW in favor of future generations having God's refuge? Having God's paradise? I am calling you to take the selfless road in favor of God's grander vision.

Yes, there is division among us right now. And that division is between what is the truth of God, what is reality, and what is falsehood? You may not see it this way, but I am trying to love you well. Just like a parent does with their child, they do not let them continue to live in falsehood, in a false reality, they do not let them continue to go down the wrong path, because it leads to harm to themselves. They do not let them continue to believe that everything is fine. I bring this death reality to you so that we can face-off with that reality and have the needed conversation that will unleash a brighter future. A brighter future for future generations. The more we deny reality, the more we wither and die. To choose this path of denying the death reality will lead you down a path that is so much worse than accepting it. And you can do that. You can do that financially. But it will not lead you to life. I want to lead you to life more abundantly. I want to lead future generations to life more abundantly. You deserve better. Future generations of the church deserve better. They deserve a future hope.

I am delivering this harsh message to you so that you can contend with the truth, with reality, and find a brighter future. So that you don't just settle for a small human vision, a vision born of grief, of pain and fear, but that you see the grander vision of God that redeems all things and gives hope beyond hope. That you see the love and compassion of God in this.

Let's say for a second that you buy into this death reality for Providence. Some of you may be asking, what would happen? First of all, I'd like to spend some time as a church doing legacy work. For instance, how can we celebrate the life of Providence before it dies? Many of you shared some touching stories of powerful and great ministry that came from Providence at the listening forum. I was moved by them. You have definitely done great ministry over the years. I would like to lift those up, not as reasons to continue to go on, but to celebrate the wonderful ministry that came out of this small church over the years. This is the spiritual work that I'd like to do with you all as we approach the end. I'm equipped for this work through my chaplaincy training. I'd like to see you die with some honor and dignity. We would have to go through a process with the Church of the Brethren and we'll honor that, but I would think we would set an end date and do this spiritual work that would lead up to that point. In the midst of that, I'd like to spend some time discerning how we can be a blessing even in the midst of our death. That this would be the grandest gesture of our blessing calling. Like, explore what happens to this building, property and our finances. I believe there is redemption, there is blessing, in our death. I believe there is life after death. It doesn't get any more gospel-like than that. So the redemptive options I've referred to in previous sermons, I've tried to share with our elders. I'm not sure if they shared them with you, but I'll share them with you. Revitalization is one option, but I'll ask you again, what are you willing to give up for revitalization? Are you willing to make it a priority in your life? Are you willing to give up your leisure activities? Are you willing to spend deep time in prayer and study of God's word? CAN you, physically, supply the effort and energy that's needed to make that a reality? It's long-haul work. Church experts will tell you it can take, at the very least, 5-10 years for a church to revitalize that lasts, at the very least. It's not for the faint of heart. I don't see that for you all when I look at things objectively and the resources that we have on hand. And that's not just coming from a negative Nancy here. I'm looking at this as objectively as possible. Money will not solve this problem. Paid staff will not solve this problem. It has to come from each and every one of your hearts. If you can't make that long-term deep commitment, then we shouldn't bother. Although...of course anything is possible with God, but God doesn't always exercise huge miraculous works. Sometimes God says no. Another option, is of course, merging with another church. I'm not suggesting that that is necessarily with Abundant Life. It could be with another COB church. And by the way, I'm not assuming that I'm apart of any of these redemptive options. I understand that I may not be the person called to serve in any of these options. Another option is to simply close-up and give our assets away, with the blessing of the denomination. We could bless non-profit ministries of our choosing with our investment funds. We could gift our building and property to another church and

bless their ministry to success. The last redemptive option that I can think of is the most appealing to me. It's an idea that keeps spinning around in my head and keeps coming back to me with a level of excitement. What if we re-planted this church? Entailed in a re-plant would be a total end to our current church. We would wipe the slate clean. We would not hold any worship services or anything else in this building for a period of time. We would effectively close down for a season. But in that period of time there could be a Pastor, I'm not expecting that it's me, that is planning with a team of people for re-planting Providence. And when it would start back-up it would be a clean slate. Leadership would not be the same. These walls would not look the same. This church would not look the same. A whole new church would be birthed. And so there would be re-birth on the heels of our death. And if some of you like the idea, but don't want to be part of it and want to go to another church, that's fine. If life circumstances are leading you in another direction, that's fine. No hard feelings. When I look at this re-plant idea, I see purpose in our willingness to die as a church. In this re-plant idea, I see blessing for the Kingdom of God. In this re-plant idea, I see opportunity for future generations that brings future hope to us now. This is a picture of paradise on the other side of our death. This is a picture of dreams and visions. This is a picture of a future hope. The re-plant may not entail any of us sitting here today, but it will glorify God and serve His Kingdom. And in that we can take comfort and joy. In accepting our death, some of us may be relieved to not have to carry the burden of this church any longer. And by the way...that's another good indicator of where we're at, is keeping this church afloat a burden to you? If it is, then it's time. Ministry and church life should be a joy not just for some, but for all. Some of you bear too much of the burden for this church and you shouldn't have to. You deserve better. Your children deserve better. Future generations deserve better. The Lord is giving us a future hope beyond our death, but as long as we deny this death reality, the future hope is non-existent.

Prayer: So Jesus, we surrender the future of this church to you. It is not mine. It is not ours. As much as we love our church and as much as we've invested in it, it is not ours. It is yours. Even though we may have some strong feelings one way or another, we surrender our visions for this church to you in favor of your vision. We surrender our fears and our love to you. We understand that the only true love relationship is with you. No other love compares. Would you weed out and expose falsehood and stand by the truth? Make it clear to all of us. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus Name we pray. Amen.