



The God Who Restores (Joel 2:18-27)

Lesson 7

God loves to restore broken things. Whether they be broken families, broken lives, or broken people, God is a God who loves to restore. As we come to our Old Testaments and study this theme of the Day of the Lord, it's a theme that should send chills down our spine as it should have sent chills down the spine for early audience. God's judgment is no trifling matter, and his punishments are not a little slap on the wrist. But God does not do what he does out of a malicious desire to make his children hurt because they've hurt him. No, God disciplines with an eye toward restoration and blessing. As Hosea puts it, God breaks us that he may heal us (Hosea 5:14-6:1).

How is God's discipline a reflection of his love? Why do we struggle to believe that this is so?

There is a big difference between the angry father who disciplines because he is fed up with his disobedient children and just wants them to learn a lesson, and the kind but firm father who disciplines his children because he knows that such discipline is truly what is best for them. Too often, if we are not careful, we can think of God in the first category. But the Bible pictures a God who is angry with sin and disobedience, yes, but more than that he is a God who wants to restore people to a place of blessing, joy, and life. And sometimes, to do that, he must bring people through painful events to take care of the wickedness they won't address.

In the section we are studying we will see a great reversal. God gives back what he originally took away. For example, we see:

- That God restores what the massive swarm of locusts eats (2:25; 1:4)
- The shame of previous sections is removed in (2:26-7; 1:11)
- That God will restore the grain, wine, oil, fig tree, and vine (2:19, 24; 1:7, 10, 12)
- That even the animals who were punished will rejoice at God's restoration (2:22; 1:18, 20)

In all of these, we see God reversing the pain and misery that he earlier brought and warned would be worse if there were no repentance. In the passage we are studying today, we see several different things that God plans on restoring: blessings, peace, and a right relationship with him.

I. Restoration of blessing (19, 22-25)

One of the major emphases for the prophets is the fact that God's blessings are conditioned upon obedience. God will not bless a disobedient people. This fact does not, however, arise from some type of stinginess on the part of the God. No, God loves to bless! He can't wait to bless! And as soon as the sin is removed, he delights in bringing blessing!

Why does God refuse to bring blessing on those who are living in sin?

What happens when he does bless those in sin (as he often does cf Matthew 5:45)?

A. God restores the material blessings he had taken.

The restoration of God's blessing is seen first of all in the return of the crops that had been damaged by these locusts. In chapter one, we read in different verses that these locusts had destroyed the vine and the fig tree (1:7, 10) and the corn (grain), new wine, and oil. Now we read a complete reversal, where God promises to bring back the very things that had been lost. The result of all this should be gladness and joy (2:21, 23)!

Why do you think there is such a strong emphasis on the material blessings in this passage?

How do we appropriately emphasize this theme of God restoring physical blessings without falling into a health and wealth prosperity gospel?

We need to remember as we study this passage that this was written to Israel, and that God had made certain specific promises to Israel about the physical nature of blessing (Deuteronomy 27-28). We can still draw general principles, though, that God's blessings are for those who humbly follow him, and that we face great loss when we go our own way instead of following God's Word.

B. God restores the time that has been lost.

A passage that has provided comfort for many is Joel 2:25, which tells us that God will restore the years which the locusts had eaten. God has an amazing ability to make up for lost time. This does not mean that sin doesn't have long lasting consequences, or that at times our sin results in a permanent loss. It does mean that God can bring beauty from ashes (Isaiah 61:3) and that no matter what you have lost due to sin, God can have a wonderful future in store for you if you are willing to follow him and obey his Word.

What are some ways, in Scripture or in life, that God has made up for lost time due to someone's sin?

II. Restoration of peace (20-21)

Sin brings loss of blessing, but sin also brings chaos and conflict. Israel's sin in particular meant that powerful nations from the North like Assyria and Babylon came against them in battle. God promises, however, that these threats will be taken away and removed when the people repent and get right with God.

A. God will bring justice on Judah's enemies.

God will deal with those who have taken advantage of his people. One of the tricky questions the prophets of the faithful followers of God in the Old Testament had to wrestle through was how God could use the wicked to judge those less wicked (see, for example, the whole book of Habakkuk). Part of the solution God gives is that the success of the wicked will be short lived. Those who wickedly abuse the righteous will not be tolerated forever. Rather, God will one day right the wrongs and address the injustice.

The stink here is probably a reference to the rotting flesh of dead bodies. In powerful terms, God warns that those who have abused his people will be slaughtered so badly that their carcasses will be lying around unable to be taken care of because of the vast numbers of them. The reason for this is that he has done great things. Here the "he" is clearly a reference to the enemy, the northerner. Because of his arrogant (i.e. "great") actions, God will wipe him out.

How should believers wait patiently in the present for God's promised execution of the wicked in the future?

B. God will demonstrate his power over Judah's enemies.

One question that believers often struggle with is the ability of God to do something about evil. "Why does God not just finish them off now?" many wonder. Satan loves to come along and whisper in our ear "Because he can't." But in Joel we read a different message. Joel tells his audience not to fear, because God does great things.

There is an interesting play on words here. "The Lord does great things" (2:21) sounds just like the end of verse 20 "he [the Northerner] has done great things." There is a contrast set up here. Whereas the enemies of Judah and Israel had done great things in the sense of acting arrogant and haughty, the Lord had truly done great things, in the sense of powerful and amazing things. Israel may have feared powerful nations like Assyria and Babylon, but their "great things" was no reason to fear them. Rather, they should be glad and rejoice because God was the one who truly could do great things.

In what ways are believers tempted to be impressed and even fearful of the "great things" that those of the world who reject Christ accomplish? In what ways is God's power greater than even the most impressive structures here on earth?

III. Restoration of relationship (26-27)

While perhaps not the first thing Judah would have considered, but certainly the most important, was the fact that their sin had led to a rupture in their relationship with God. The worship of God had been broken off, their shame had brought him shame, and his presence had in some ways been withdrawn. The good news for these people was that when God brought healing and restoration, one thing that would be restored would be their relationship with their God.

A. God's worship will be able to resume again (26).

One judgment that develops throughout the book of Joel is that because of their sin they aren't even able to worship God. Their regular sacrifices have been cut off (1:19, 13), because the food has been so completely destroyed. Part of the hope of the people when they repent is that God will give them blessings in part so that they can then go back and serve him (2:14). Now we read that when the people "eat in plenty, and [are] satisfied" the result will be praise.

In what ways should God's blessings lead to praise and giving? Why do we so often fail to thank God for his goodness and give back to him when he gives to us?

B. God's people will not be shamed (26-27).

In chapter one, God told the farmers to be ashamed (1:11) because of the dried up fields and crops. In chapter two, God twice reverses the shame of his people. This shame comes when those who are the people of God must face his discipline rather than his blessing. It is shameful to claim to worship the God who created all and then not be able to feed your family. It brings shame on the individual, the society, and ultimately on the God whose name the community bears.

In what ways does God's discipline today bring shame? How should believers respond to this shame?

C. God's presence will be known once again (27).

This passage presents a challenge for modern day believers. Does God's discipline mean that he is not with us? On one hand, we are told that God will never leave us nor forsake us. On the other hand, we are told that if we draw close to God he will draw close to us. We will never be separated from the actual presence of God, but we may for a time find ourselves relationally distant from him. James 4:8 is written to believers, but it encourages them to draw close to God, who will in turn draw close to them. God is always with us, but we can enjoy his presence or we can push him away. Those who repent of their sin and accept God's discipline will find themselves closer to God as a result.

How does God make his presence known in our lives? How does God withdraw the sense of presence when we sin?

No matter who you are or what you have done, God's not done with you yet. And he can do far more through you than you could possibly imagine. Near the end of Deuteronomy Moses offers the people a choice, a choice between life and death.

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them. (Deuteronomy 30:19-20)

The good news in this offer is that God leaves the offer on the table even after we've made the wrong choice. Israel and Judah chose death over and over, and God brought judgment upon them for that wicked choice, but he also challenged them to choose life. And he continued to offer them the option of life. And beyond that, he even promised to restore the life that they had given up.

Sin is devastating. We saw that in chapter one. But God's grace is greater, we see that here in chapter two. No matter what your sin has cost you, there can be forgiveness, healing, blessing, and life. Because while God is a God who brings judgment, he is also the God who restores. And our God loves to restore!