

Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist
Sunday, July 19, 2020
Joel 2:12-17 Hope from the Darkness

“What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” (Heb. 11:1).

In the age of the “new normal” and the pandemic, the world is in even more need of hope. Do you know what hope is?

In an article written by Scott Tolhurst on the *Back to the Bible* website (Feb.25, 2016). He does an amazing job of pointing out the differences between the secular and the sacred idea of HOPE. Here are some of his observations.

In a generalized, popular use today, one might say that “hope” is “something that we want to happen.” We *hope* that our favourite team will win, that our lottery ticket will pay off, that we can take the vacation of our dreams. It is often based around what *we* want. The problem with the popular understanding of it is that this kind of *hope* often leads to disappointment. The team didn’t win, the job didn’t come through, the pandemic cancelled my vacation! Our hope has let us down, has disappointed, saddened, and even at time angered us. It is the *random hit and miss of our own powerful wishes.*

Biblical hope is different!

Scott continued on in his observations that *hope and faith are linked!* He continues on:

*Since faith is the trust we place in God’s Word, hand and heart, it gives a foundation for hope. God is our reason for optimism!
Whenever hope is detached from faith, it becomes simply a wish.
There is much in my life I may want, but if it falls outside the scope of God’s promise and plan, it remains a personal preference. Conversely, the faith we hold in the promise of God feeds a spirit of excited expectation.*

Today we continue in the book of Joel. So far, it has been gloomy. I believe that many Christians stay away from reading the prophets because the language is hard, we aren't familiar with much of the imagery, and it seems to be the threat of punishment and destruction. It is all of those...and so much more. God always provides hope for His people. Let's hear from God through the prophet Joel today:

Joel 2:12-17

A Call to Repentance

**¹² That is why the LORD says,
"Turn to me now, while there is time.**

Give me your hearts.

Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

**¹³ Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead."**

Return to the LORD your God,

for he is merciful and compassionate,

slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

He is eager to relent and not punish.

**¹⁴ Who knows? Perhaps he will give you a reprieve,
sending you a blessing instead of this curse.**

**Perhaps you will be able to offer grain and wine
to the LORD your God as before.**

¹⁵ Blow the ram's horn in Jerusalem!

Announce a time of fasting;

call the people together

for a solemn meeting.

¹⁶ Gather all the people—

the elders, the children, and even the babies.

Call the bridegroom from his quarters

and the bride from her private room.

¹⁷ Let the priests, who minister in the LORD's presence,

stand and weep between the entry room to the Temple and the

altar.

Let them pray, "Spare your people, LORD!

Don't let your special possession become an object of mockery.

Don't let them become a joke for unbelieving foreigners who say,

'Has the God of Israel left them?'"

Last week we heard that the "Day of the Lord" isn't just on it's way...it is here. The people's disobedience has forced God to get their attention with the vast army of locust that is descending upon them that foreshadows the eventual vast armies of their enemies descending upon the nation and taking them into captivity. This dark time headed their way is not an act of evil but rather an act of God brought on by the people's sinful, disobedient choices.

To put today's scripture into context, let's remind ourselves how we left off last week in the last verse, verse 11.

¹¹ The LORD is at the head of the column.

He leads them with a shout.

This is his mighty army,

and they follow his orders.

The day of the LORD is an awesome, terrible thing.

Who can possibly survive?

God is bringing the darkness but the message doesn't end there! God's message continues with hope:

¹² That is why the LORD says,

"Turn to me now, while there is time.

Give me your hearts.

Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

Destruction is not inevitable IF the people show repentance! This whole section of the message has nothing to do with the evil acts of the people but rather centers on God's mercy and plan for deliverance.

This section gives us the WHO, WHY, and HOW of repentance and salvation.

WHO – “Return to ME with all your heart!”

WHY – “God is gracious, slow to anger, and will call off the punishment!”

HOW – “Repentance and obedience.”

WHAT IS GOD ASKING OF US?

God was asking the people at the time to live up to their end of the relationship agreement. They were to become the “Children of Israel” again. Sure, the people went to the temple, they went through the motions of being God’s people, but it was pure show. They had the rituals down, but the rituals did not match their heart.

The prophet Hosea’s message to the people was the same when he told the people:

**⁴ “O Israel and Judah,
what should I do with you?” asks the LORD.**

**“For your love vanishes like the morning mist
and disappears like dew in the sunlight.**

**⁵ I sent my prophets to cut you to pieces—
to slaughter you with my words,
with judgments as inescapable as light.**

**⁶ I want you to show love,
not offer sacrifices.**

I want you to know me

God is speaking not just to a community of believers, but also to individuals within the community. In our North American culture, there is an over emphasis on individual experiences and rights. In our churches, we give lip service to what we “believe in” as a body but in practice we tend to act on the theology of Frank Sinatra and claim “I did it my way.”

True repentance and obedience begin in a heart relationship with God. Do you truly have a relationship with Jesus? Do you love Him with all your heart, soul, mind, and Spirit? If you don't, the façade of religious activity will only last for so long before you are unable to keep it up or someone else sees through it. When we truly fall to our knees in an understanding of how unworthy we are to receive Jesus' sacrifice, the inner change will start to shine through and people will see that we are sincere about our faith and sincere about our love for them.

God was so gracious to His people and offered them a lifeline. Repent, turn from your wicked ways, come to ME! Ask yourself today if you are living a shallow life with God. Are you more concerned with your comfort than the fact that your neighbor doesn't know Jesus? Are you more concerned with HOW you do church, rather than the act of worship you have been called to? Do you find that your hope is built around what you desire rather than following God's call on your life?

Joel's message from God is truly a message of hope for those who truly want a relationship with God. Biblical hope is what matters. It is centered on God and provides a foundation for our daily lives in the times of prosperity and peace and in the times of darkness.

"Turn to me now, while there is time.

Give me your hearts.

Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning.

**¹³ Don't tear your clothing in your grief,
but tear your hearts instead."**

Return to the LORD your God,

**for he is merciful and compassionate,
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.**

Let's pray...