

“Nothing’s Changed”  
Text: Joel 2:12-19  
February 17, 2021

You ever notice that, when things stay the same, it can be comforting? We experience that comfort in tonight’s O.T. lesson from the book of Joel: the comfort that comes from knowing that God has always been the same. That’s right, the God of the O.T. and the God of the N.T. are one and the same. God is the same now as He was then. Nothing’s changed. Let me show you what I mean ...

We begin by returning to tonight’s O.T. lesson, where we hear again the prophet Joel say:

“‘Yet even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to Me with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.” (vs. 12-13)

Those words are a repeat of what God had said about Himself centuries before in the book of Exodus, when He was in the process of reaffirming His covenant with Israel after she had committed idolatry against Him with her worship of the golden calf. God said to Moses on that occasion that He was:

“... compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving-kindness and truth; ...” (34:6)

Those words make clear that the God of the O.T. – the God of the books of Exodus and Joel, Whom Israel knew by the Name of Yahweh – was loving and forgiving, just as He is today. Nothing’s changed.

Nothing’s also changed in terms of how God’s love and forgiveness are received: *by faith*. And when Joel wrote his book, the people of Israel had been UNfaithful. That’s why, in spite of the verses I just read to you, the book of Joel contains quite a ‘bit of judgment.

You see, in the first chapter of his book Joel describes the effects of a locust plague that had befallen the land of Israel. From what he describes, the devastation was total; it was as if a foreign army had fallen upon God’s people, leaving them, and their land, for dead. What you see as you read throughout the book of Joel is that the locust plague was representative of God’s judgment of Israel’s sin, and that judgment was a mere type of the great judgment yet to come upon all mankind in response to its sin.

Joel isn’t very specific with regard to Israel’s sin, so it’s hard to try and apply whatever it was exactly to us. But we can apply it to ourselves in general terms, for as “Ash Wednesday” – along with its ensuing season of Lent – reminds us, we are all sinful and in need of forgiveness.

Without forgiveness we'd all be in the same shoes as ancient Israel – deserving to be judged by God.

I just mentioned Moses and the book of Exodus, and when we turn to the Commandments which God gave to Moses as part of His covenant with Israel, we find that we do not live life any better than they did. We do not fear, love, and trust in God above all things; we value wealth, material possessions, and prestige more. We don't call upon God's Name in every situation, nor pray, praise or give thanks as we should; we fail to turn to God at all in the midst of our daily lives. We don't hold God's Word sacred and gladly hear and learn it, but instead despise it by not partaking as we ought in family devotions, avoiding Bible class, and at times even skipping church. And that's just looking at our lives from the perspective of the *1<sup>st</sup> three* Commandments; there's seven more after that!

We do well to remember the words of Joel tonight when he writes, at the beginning of tonight's text:

“... return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness and relenting of evil.” (v.13)

Those words remind us that, as God made a covenant with Israel ‘of old,’ so too has He made a covenant with us: His “new Israel” of today. That covenant is one of love, moving Him to be compassionate with us and forgiving of us. In faithfulness to His covenant, God relents of the evil we deserve for breaking every one of His commandments.

The old covenant God made with Israel was based on His Word to her, and that covenant was ratified in blood – the blood of the sacrificial system of the Tabernacle/Temple, which we see referred to by Joel when he goes on to mention the grain and drink offering; he writes:

“Who knows whether He will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind Him, even a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” (v.14)

Those offerings were what Israel brought forward to fund the sacrificial system, as from those sacrifices blood was provided to cover their sin, bestowing the blessing of God's forgiveness.

In fulfillment of His Word God later sent His Son: Jesus Christ, to ratify His *new* covenant for *all* time and for *all* people by shedding *His* blood on a cross. As we and Christians everywhere bring our offerings into the “Tabernacle/Temple” that is Christ's Church, we fund not the sacrificial system, but the *sacramental* system of Jesus. Through the Sacraments that are the gifts of God's Word, the blood of His Son: Jesus Christ, is provided as a covering for *our* sin, and *we too* receive the blessing of God's forgiveness.

And so we see that the God of Joel's day and the God of our day are one and the same, full of love, mercy and forgiveness. As in Joel's day, so too in ours, God keeps His Word even

when His people do not keep theirs. The God of Joel's day, the God of Moses' day, the God of our day are one and the same: the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing's changed.

Not only that, but nothing *will* change. For there is coming a Day when God will once and for all deal with sin and all lack of faith, on the Day of Jesus' glorious return. That's a major theme throughout the book of Joel: "the Day of the LORD," as he calls it. What Joel does is use the locust plague as a warning – not only to Israel, but to *all* people – to prepare for that final Day.

Joel writes just verses before those of tonight's text:

"... the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. The LORD utters His voice before His army; surely His camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out His Word. The day of the LORD is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it?" (vs. 10-11)

Who can endure it are those who repent and return to the Lord in faith, as Joel goes on to say:

"... return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil." (v.13)

We *can* return to the Lord our God because He *is* gracious and compassionate; He *is* loving and kind.

Joel goes on to speak of that further in the last verse of tonight's text, where he says:

"The LORD will answer and say to His people: 'Behold, I am going to send you grain, new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied in full with them; ...'" (v.19)

The Lord sends us grain, as in the bread broken on this altar He provides the very body of His Son – given into death for our sins. He sends us new wine too, as from this altar flows the blood of His Son – shed that our sins might be covered forever. As we eat and drink those precious gifts sent to us from above, we are indeed satisfied in full, and we are prepared for the final judgment yet to come.

My dear friends in Christ, one day, unless the Lord returns first, you will be reduced to dust in the sleep of death, and that will be as a result of your sin (as were the locusts for the land of Israel). But there will also come a Day when that will be reversed, and the dust of death will be replaced with the new creation that is eternal life in Christ. On that Day – which Joel refers to as "the Day of the LORD" – you will receive grain, new wine and oil, and the Lord's abundance will satisfy your newly created body forever.

That is the promise of the God of Joel – the God Who is also our God here tonight: the Lord Jesus Christ. Just as in days of old, so too now, and in the future, God judges sin that's not

repented of, but forgives sin that is. He kills those who reject Him, but saves those who don't. My dear friends in Christ, repent and be saved, and be confident in God's love for you. When it comes to that, nothing's changed –

– In Jesus' ✠ Name,  
Amen!