

Joel's Army

Brynmawr Family Church Sermon
Stuart Wheatman, Sunday 25th Sep 2010

Intro-

- Have you ever wondered why the Jews have been so persecuted through the years, or why the Church has been so persecuted, or why the name of Jesus is used as a swear-word rather than Buddha?
- The fact is Satan recognises the people of God and desires to destroy them, however God has other plans.
- I'm sure we can all identify times in our lives where we have felt completely devastated. Satan wants us to stay in this place, but God desires to bring us through. Today we will look at a scene of utter devastation in the Bible and see how God brought His people out the other side. We will look at the book of Joel and read in 3 chunks commenting on each as we go through.

Read Joel 1:2-7

Satan desires to bring devastation

- **Relentless-** v4 series of 4 different locusts one after the other- get up and knocked back down. Devastation locusts bring. One swarm in Morocco in 2004 was 230 km long, at least 150 m wide, and contained an estimated 69 billion locusts. With this outbreak and other outbreaks in West Africa at the time, national teams in some 20 countries treated nearly 130,000 square kilometres by air and ground. The costs of fighting this upsurge have been estimated to have exceeded US\$400 million and harvest losses were valued at up to US \$2.5 billion which had disastrous effects on the food security situation in West Africa. Book of Heroic Failures- Firebrigade running over woman's cat they have just rescued from a tree as they wave goodbye.
- **Locusts=an army** (2:2,11).
- Some say the army is the end-time church or youth (because 2:11 says 'His army'), but this is not a good army here- the enemy (1:6 'a nation has come against My land' attacking 'my vine, fig tree'-v7; Zion- 2:1,15, 'His people'- 2:18-19) and God will remove them & their stench will go up because the army has 'done monstrous things' (2:20)- doesn't sound like the Church. Assyrians. Babylonians. End time army against Israel- see parallels of 1:4 & 2:4 to Rev 9 .
- **We like a gospel without suffering, but not reality. 3 reasons for this suffering: Spiritual warfare, discipline, fallen world**
- **1. Spiritual warfare.** All who live godly will be persecuted-2Tim 3:12. Jesus was persecuted, as was Paul. The land- Satan wants to destroy the harvest- Midianites with Gideon. Assyrian army laid waste to the crops as part of their strategy- their records bost of this: Tiglath Pileser against Suhi- "Their orchards I cut down", Ashurnasipal II says when destroying 2 cities "I reaped their harvest" and at another place "I fought my way inside his gate (and) cut down his orchards" (Hasel:Assyrian Military Practises pg 71). **We must not stop preaching gospel-** the harvest is plentiful but workers are few.
- **2. Discipline.** This is case her, but God is allowing it for a reason- to turn Israel back to Him. Assyrian army in Is 10:5 'the rod of my anger'- used to bring Israel back to their senses as also the Babylonians (Chaldeans) in Hab 1:6. When we go through suffering or witness it, the temptation is to doubt the sovereignty of God and believe that God is not in charge. The gospel does not skirt around the issue of suffering but shows that God is with us in the midst of it, either delivering us from it, or giving us the strength to walk through it. We don't like to think of God's discipline, but in N.T God disciplines Ananias and Sapphira for lying to God, the Corinthians for getting drunk with communion wine and greed at communion. John mentioned at the end of his epistle sin which leads to death. Hebrews says that God

disciplines us for our good. In 1915 there was a plague of locusts which invaded Jerusalem and the result was that many people sorted themselves out with God. C.S. Lewis- "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks to us in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: It is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world". "We're not necessarily doubting that God will do the best for us; we are wondering how painful the best will turn out to be". "God, who foresaw your tribulation, has specially armed you to go through it, not without pain but without stain"

- **3. We live in a fallen world.** Christian life is not a life without problems. Paul's shipwrecks. Parasites originally created good, death and suffering came into the world due to the fall, hence harmful aspect of parasites. Results of mutations in genes

Read Joel 2:12-17

A close walk with God is our strength- especially in tough times

- A British nurse tells about the time she was attending to Rudyard Kipling, the British poet. He was terribly sick. He tossed and turned on his bed. His nights were spent in restless agitation. Do you want anything? she asked him quietly one morning. In a very weak voice, he said, I want God, I want God! **2 choices when tough times come- resist God, or surrender to Him.** Some choose the former- 'eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die' mentality in wartime. Misapplying the 'make love, not war' slogan- excuse for living for pleasure (hedonism). Opposite here- prayer and fasting and repentance- sound the trumpet, alarm (2:1,15). Seeking God's face. Satan will give us every other possible place to turn- the bottle, someone else's arms, suicide, pornography, drugs, staying in bed, throwing ourselves into work, watching DVD's. Columnist Herb Caen in the San Francisco Chronicle: "Every morning in Africa, a gazelle wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will be killed. Every morning a lion wakes up. It knows it must outrun the slowest gazelle or it will starve to death. It doesn't matter whether you are a lion or a gazelle; when the sun comes up, you'd better be running." Spurgeon wrote likewise: "If you are not seeking the Lord, the Devil is seeking you. If you are not seeking the Lord, judgment is at your heels."
- 2:13- 'Rend your heart and not your garments'- we need to get real with God in the secret place, not for show. Do we settle for looking spiritual rather than the reality?
- 'God is our refuge and strength- an ever present help in times of trouble'- Ps 46- Jesus is our hiding place, our shelter from the storm. Jesus is to be our 'crutch' the one we lean on.
- Need for grief- pour out heart to the Lord. Hezekiah when Assyria threatened to take them. Unblock the cork- catharsis. 'Jesus wept'. My experience in Day Hospital- people bury grief and it comes out as anxiety/depression later. Give Him your pain. He knows what it is to suffer- He is well acquainted with it. In our suffering we identify with Him. The German theologian Jurgen Moltmann expresses in a single sentence the great span from Good Friday to Easter. It is, in fact, a summary of human history, past, present, and future: "God weeps with us so that we may someday laugh with him."-Philip Yancey in Christianity Today
- Cast your cares on Him for He cares for you. Unburden yourself. Bring it to the cross. Exchange our ashes for his beauty, our mourning for His oil of joy, our spirit of heaviness for His garment of praise.
- Seek Him for revival in the land- Satan is trying to decimate the harvest- we must reach out to the lost and pray for the harvest. 'The Hub'- please pray. Seek Him for personal revival and be prepared to pay the price.

Read Joel 2:25-32

God restores more to us than the enemy decimates

- The way locusts devastate the land. The relentless barrage from new challenges- swarming, crawling, consuming, chewing locusts. God cutting off the curse- us standing against the curse and believing for better. We can't suffer more than God will repay us for- He is our generous loving Father. If Satan can send a series of

different locusts to have a go, how much more can God send a barrage of blessings one after the other to counter it. If you have had a barrage of problems get ready for the blessings.

- There are **rewards coming**, both now and in heaven. Ever lost all your work on a computer and started from scratch again and done it better and in a fraction of the time? The 'years' of hard work which have been decimated- God will restore the years- reward you above and beyond for the work you put in. Church planting- sowing into people- God will reward you.- Mark 9:41 -cup of cold water given to another Christian will be rewarded (yesterday me at prayer breakfast). Matthew 5:10-12, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you, when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." **Matt 6:1-18- secret piety=public reward from Jesus.** "I tell you the truth," Jesus said to them, "no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life." Lk 18:29-30. Don't throw away our confidence- it has great reward-Heb 10:35. We are training up to be entrusted with heavenly things- parable of talents.
- And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Rom 8:28.
- The sufferings we have now are nothing compared to the great glory that will be shown to us. Rom 8:18. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 2Cor 4:17
- Job restored
- Gospel is our cure. The work of Jesus to destroy the works of the evil one- God's grace in our hour of need- footprints in the sand.
- The pouring out of God's Spirit brings the refreshing. The move of God's Spirit (see Acts 2) is tied in with the breaking of the curse of barrenness. Revival coming at toughest times. Time to get back in the river.
- Coming out with a testimony and the tools to help others.
- We have authority through the gospel to plunder the enemy. Be more than a conquerer in Christ. Bring in the harvest.

Summary

- **Satan desires to bring devastation**
- **A close walk with God is our strength- especially in tough times**
- **God restores more to us than the enemy decimates**

Songs: *O let the Son of God enfold you*