

## God Promises His Presence

It was one of those days replete with ups and downs. That Saturday began happily with my officiating a late morning wedding. The young couple starting off their life together were a precious pair.

After an hour at the couple's reception, I left the scene of this happy occasion for the scene of a sad one. Both my mood and countenance nosedived on the way from the church to the funeral home. There I officiated another ceremony—speaking the eulogy for a dear and faithful relative who had lost his battle with pancreatic cancer. Several times through the course of the service, I merely choked out words of consolation.

Back in the car after the graveside service, I turned my phone back on. Moments earlier I had received a text from an attending nurse at the hospital: "Pastor, thought you needed to know that Dixie's life-support will be shut off at 5:00." And so I drove straight from the cemetery to the hospital to be at the deathbed of this dear old saint whose long life had been marked by trouble and tragedy. An hour after her ventilator was removed, she passed into the arms of Jesus as her caretaker held her right hand and I held her left. But just as she breathed her last, the lullaby bells at the hospital announced the birth of a new baby—as if God were saying, "With Me, life goes on and on. For I will restore all things."

Such swings of feelings throughout the day! But in every single moment I had sensed the Lord's presence—and had been reminded of His promise.

**1.** *When was a time in your life that you felt helpless and out of options?*

**2.** *Have you ever faced a dire situation such as hunger or homelessness? What did you do?*

**3.** *What is your initial reaction when you feel like your world is falling apart?*

## The Coming Rains

*Joel 2:21-24, KJV*

21 Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.

22 Be not afraid, ye beasts of the field: for the pastures of the wilderness do spring, for the tree beareth her fruit, the fig tree and the vine do yield their strength.

23 Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month.

24 And the floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

*Joel 2:21-24, NIV*

<sup>21</sup>“Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice.

Surely the LORD has done great things!

<sup>22</sup>Do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green.

The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.

<sup>23</sup>Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the LORD your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful.

He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.

<sup>24</sup>The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.”

The prophet Joel brought a message of hope to the people of Judah despite what had happened to the country. A locust plague had endangered the land, animals, and people, and all three would benefit from God's reversal of the situation. Thus Joel told all three that joy, not fear, would be their appropriate attitude when God fulfilled His promises to repentant Judah.

Despite their immediate past, God told the people, “Do not be afraid, land of Judah. . . . Surely the LORD has done great things!” (vs. 21). Israel's history contained countless examples of great things that God had done for them—and now, as they repented and pleaded for God's mercy, God would make His presence, provision, and greatness known among them once more. Even before God's material blessings had arrived, the

people should rejoice. Their focus was not to be on the blessings themselves, but on the God who provided them.

Nonetheless, in the verses that followed God described those material blessings in detail—even as He continued to remind Judah what their response should look like. God even addressed the beasts of the wilderness that were already benefiting from His provision: “Do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches” (vs. 22). This was a direct reversal of the circumstances detailed (especially) in Joel 1:7. Certainly God’s provision for His people would be no less than what He was already giving the beasts of the field.

Therefore, in verse 23, God again instructed the “people of Zion” to be glad and rejoice. He was providing not only the fruit of the tree and the vine but the “autumn and spring rains” that were causing those trees and vines to flourish once more. The reason for this was simply, “because he is faithful.” Even though Judah had been unfaithful to God—and would be again—God’s faithfulness would never end. As His people turned back to Him, He would be pleased to send “abundant showers” and all the people needed.

In addition, in verse 24, God pointed to the eventual results of the fruit and other crops returning: “The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.” The people of Judah were already beginning to see God’s abundant goodness, and soon they would be able to enjoy its results. Gladness and rejoicing were a small price to pay for such blessing.

**4.** *What did God tell the people of Judah in verse 21? On what did He base this statement?*

**5.** *What had God already begun to do, according to verse 22?*

**6.** *How did God repeatedly command the people of Judah to respond, based on what He had already done and what He promised to do?*



## God Will Repay and Renew

*Joel 2:25-27, KJV*

25 And I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

26 And ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, that hath dealt wondrously with you: and my people shall never be ashamed.

27 And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.

*Joel 2:25-27, NIV*

<sup>25</sup> "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm—my great army that I sent among you.

<sup>26</sup> You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the LORD your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.

<sup>27</sup> Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed."

In verse 25, God recalled the locusts of Joel 1:4 that had plagued Judah. Only this time, instead of telling the people to lament over what they had lost, here God promised that He would restore the fortunes of the people, which the locusts had taken away. The phrasing here also clarified that the devastation of the first two chapters was not just one very sudden and severe time but an extended period—"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten" (vs. 25).

There has been debate as how exactly to interpret the four names used for the locusts—as the significant differences in translation between the King James and NIV (and other Bible translations) make evident. However, there is no question that the curse God had allowed to fall on Judah was now in the process of being reversed.

God then made even more promises to Judah: "You will



have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you" (vs. 26). Again, God's blessing was tied to the command to praise Him. In verse 27, God also made clear that the purpose of blessing His people, and them rejoicing in Him, was so that "you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other." Thus, both Judah's misfortune and restoration had been given by God to draw the people back to Him.

Note also that verses 26 and 27 ended the same way: "never again will my people be shamed." As the people remained faithful to God and kept their minds and hearts focused on Him, not only would there be blessing but also a removal of the disgrace they had suffered. Ultimately this was an even greater blessing than the material blessings Judah would once again enjoy. God was not only restoring Judah's material stature but, more importantly, their dignity and identity as God's people. This section of Joel can remind us that God has great blessings in store for those who repent of their sins and turn to Him. From that perspective, it's astonishing how some people stubbornly refuse to turn to God. If only they would humble themselves before Him, He would gladly give them good things (spiritual, if not material). And the best blessing of all would be their new relationship with Him.



*A swarm of locusts on the move, perhaps like the one described by Joel (Joel 2:25).*

Photo: © CSIRO/Science image

**7. What did God declare in verse 25? What else was made clear about Judah's situation in this verse?**

**8. What blessings did God promise to Judah?**

**9. How do both verses 26 and 27 end? Why was this significant?**

## Beauty from the Ashes

My husband Ryan has a brother who is two years older than him. His name is Mark. Growing up, they were involved in all the usual activities: football, baseball, Cub Scouts, summer camp, etc. On the outside, it would appear that they were great brothers who got along and had a fun childhood. However, this was not the reality. With both parents working full-time, they earned the moniker “latch-key children” and spent a lot of their time alone and unsupervised. When they wrestled, it often got out of hand and fights could quickly escalate into doing real damage to one another. They both needed hospital visits on various occasions. Ryan grew up believing that his brother hated him and that’s why he bullied him so much.

When Mark went off to college, he joined a fraternity. This brotherhood opened his eyes to what it truly meant to be a brother: the camaraderie, the fellowship, the support, the sacrifice. One day, Mark sat down and wrote Ryan a multi-page long, handwritten letter—apologizing for his behavior as a kid and preteen and explaining his regret over missing out on their relationship all those years. Ryan was stunned to receive such a letter and immediately forgave his brother.

Today, these brothers are truly best friends. Mark was even Ryan’s best man at our wedding. With repentance, there can be true restoration, no matter how far gone a situation seems. It may not happen on the timeline we’d prefer—Ryan had to wait years for healing—but it happens according to the Lord’s schedule. His ways and timing are perfect, even when we don’t understand it ourselves. Only He has the power “to bestow on [people] a crown of beauty instead of ashes” (Isa. 61:3).

**10.** *What is a situation or relationship where you need to ask for forgiveness and repent?*

**11.** *When is a time in your life where you’ve experienced restoration?*

**12.** *What current situation needs God’s restoration? Have you surrendered it to Him? Why or why not?*

## Seeking Repentance, Receiving Restoration

As Christians, we can trust in God's promises to stand with us during difficult times and He won't leave us alone. Quite the opposite, He will walk with us and bring about beauty and restoration where hopelessness once was.

► *Do you have a relationship that needs to be restored? Start writing a letter to the other person here. Ask for forgiveness for anything you did to harm the relationship.*

### KEY VERSE

And ye shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the LORD your God, and none else: and my people shall never be ashamed.  
—Joel 2:27, KJV

"Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the LORD your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed."  
—Joel 2:27, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Week of January 30 through February 5

(See *The Quiet Hour* for devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Matthew 20:1, 6-16—The Last Will Be First.

**Tues.** Psalm 25:1-15—God, Teach and Guide Me.

**Wed.** Psalm 8—Majestic Is God's Name!

**Thurs.** 2 Samuel 7:1, 4-17—God Will Build a House.

**Fri.** 2 Samuel 7:18-29—Who Am I?

**Sat.** 1 Corinthians 1:18-24—God Confounds the Wise.

**Sun.** 1 Corinthians 1:25-31—God Chooses the Lowly.