

THURSDAY 02 June 2022 "Day of the LORD" (Joel 2,3)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

I'm sure we've all had the experience of standing in a crowd confused by what is happening all around us, right? *Was that a frightening experience for you?* I have a large scar near my right ankle which reminds me of the terrifying day I was almost trampled to death in a crowd. Crowds don't do well with confusion or frustration or even unbridled excitement. Quickly a crowd can turn into a mob, an angry, uncontrollable mob bent on destruction.

Yesterday I left you standing in the middle of a confused crowd in the overcrowded city of Jerusalem, about 2000 years ago, at the Pentecost Festival. Peter, the bold, courageous disciple of Jesus, had stood up in the middle of this crowd quieting them and trying to explain *the unexplainable phenomenon of the Holy Spirit of God coming to Jerusalem in a powerful wind, tongues of fire landing on the heads of Jesus followers, and many of them speaking in languages they didn't know* but languages recognized by pilgrims who had come from the far corners of the Roman Empire for this Pentecost Festival.

Peter had begun by explaining these followers of Jesus were NOT drunk, as some imagined, but rather they and the crowd were experiencing a phenomenon... *God Himself, the God of Israel, was fulfilling a prophecy HE had spoken 800 years before through a little-known prophet Joel.* I say 'little known' because today we don't know much about him, but for Peter and those people, evidently, they highly respected the three chapters Joel had written. Unlike people in our day, even very religious people, perhaps even devout people among us, in the first century Jewish children grew up memorizing vast portions of their sacred Torah and prophetic books. Thus even though it might take you and me a while to find the little book of Joel in your Bible, for Peter, as he watched the wind, the tongues of fire, the ability to speak in languages not previously known, and the amazement of the crowds, *Peter knew he was seeing prophecy fulfilled and he didn't miss this strategic moment, so he leaped to his feet and began quoting Joel's 800 year old prophecy: "In the last days', God says, 'I will pour out MY Spirit on all people..."* (Acts 2:17)

If you look with me at the little book of Joel, you'll see a primary theme through the three chapters...**a warning!** A challenge to recognize that a very serious locust invasion, which had ravaged the land, was a symbol, *a picture, of the devastating judgment power of God and the certainty that God will judge all mankind and He will deal with wickedness as wickedness and evil deserves!* Joel challenged the adults to understand, and to be sure and teach their children and grandchildren, how to recognize the judgment hand of God, *and also how to avoid God's judgment by repenting of their wickedness, returning to the holy relationship God invited them to, and living God honoring lives!*

Locusts, as you may know, are a remarkable winged insect which fly in swarms that can be so thick with billions of locusts that a 'swarm cloud' of locusts can block out the sunshine! The sound of a billion buzzing wings of locusts can be terrifying. Locusts have ravenous appetites, needing to eat up to their body weight in vegetation every day! A swarm of locusts can strip a field or grove of fruit trees or a grape vineyard everything green ... leaves, stalks, vines, buds, everything in a matter of hours. East Africa is one place where huge swarms of locusts have been ravaging vast areas of Kenya, Somalia, Ethiopia and other countries in the past few years. Google it and see for yourself.

In the days of Joel, evidently a huge locust invasion had recently come through and God was warning the people that He could do even more by sending invading armies of soldiers as judgment. And if you know Israel's history, in 722bc the Assyrian army swarmed over Israel and conquered the northern kingdom as they had rejected God in favor of idolatry. In 586bc the Babylonians did the same to the southern Judah kingdom and destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple. *In the first century, Peter was calling the crowd in Jerusalem to remember their history and look closely at their lifestyles and their hearts. Were they living in rebellion against God?* Would He soon send either insect locusts or another invading army if they refused to repent and turn to God? In fact, history tells us the Roman army did invade and it destroyed Jerusalem only about 40 years after Peter was speaking these words in Acts 2!!

In Joel 2:28 God led the prophet Joel to speak and write the words Peter was quoting in Jerusalem that day, as recorded in Acts 2:17-21. Joel was describing a day which is still future to us even in 2022. Joel, and several other Old Testament prophets, refer to it as **"the dreadful day of the LORD."** (Joel 2:31) *It will be a time of unparalleled judgment from God on the wickedness which has by then engulfed the entire world for generations.* As God judged the entire world with the great flood in Genesis 7,8 so the judgement of **"the dreadful day of the LORD"** will bring the horrific judgment of God to every corner of our world. Unlike the flood in Genesis, not every person will die in the judgments of **"the dreadful day of the LORD"**, but the worldwide devastation, destruction, death and calamity will be unlike anything ever seen and *most all those who survive will wish they had died in the horrific judgments as described in Revelation 6,8,9.*

But friends, while we may shudder at the thought of such worldwide calamity in judgment, we must remember God is Holy, Loving, Just, Merciful and *God does NOT find joy in the death of people, especially wicked people.* Through the prophet Ezekiel God said: **"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take NO pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they would turn from their ways and live. TURN! Turn from your evil ways! ..."** (Ezekiel 33:11)

Peter wanted the confused crowd in Jerusalem to understand that while Joel's 3-chapter prophecy had some very clear, frightening, dire warnings of judgement,

*God in His mercy and love for the human race He has created, would do amazing things to invite and draw humanity TO Himself, urging them to reject the self-destructive, evil darkness that so easily consumes individuals, marriages, families, neighborhoods, entire cities and even nations. May I ask... what evidence do you see of the encroaching, spreading, destructive moral and spiritual darkness in your city, your society? Joel's message from God was that God promised: **"I will pour out MY Spirit on all people... and everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved...!"** (Joel 2:28-32) *Oh my friends, do you regularly thank God for His mercy, and the deliverance from judgement which Jesus provided through His death and resurrection?**

Peter knew the crowd before him was thinking through the words they well knew were in Joel's terrifying prophecy, so he raised his voice again: **"Men of Israel, listen to me: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through Him, as you yourselves know..."** (Acts 2:22) A hush fell on the crowd, they remembered. Either they had seen some of Jesus' miracles with their own eyes, or they had heard the stories repeated by those who had experienced one or more of Jesus' amazing miracles. While they may not be able to explain the miracles, they couldn't deny them, and here Peter was boldly proclaiming it was the power of God unleashed in Jesus for the purpose of identifying Jesus as God's sent Redeemer for the human race, and their Jewish Messiah! That was stunning news for this crowd! Is it for you? As you consider Joel's dire warning of God's soon coming judgment are you confident you are safe in Jesus?

Let's pause right here and contemplate the moral and spiritual condition of our world and God's JUSTICE judgment which may not be far in the future now! What do you expect God's judgment will bring to our world? Let's also consider God's MERCY and the price God paid by sending Jesus, God the Son, to BE our sin sacrifice, and make it possible for us to receive forgiveness from God for all our wickedness! And more than that, to be adopted by God as His son or daughter, and have His Holy Spirit come to live IN us. How do you thank God for that, my friends? And here's a song that might help you consider this. It's the Gospel, the greatest news of all time!!

Today's Scripture is Joel 2, 3.