

2. The imminent Day of the Lord

10/5/2006

Charles H. Spurgeon, the prince of preacher from the Great Britain of yesteryear tells the story of a woman who came seeming to be in great sorrow, saying what a great sinner she was, but Spurgeon immediately suspected her repentance wasn't sincere. He said, "Well, if you are a great sinner, of course, you have broken God's laws. Let's read the Ten Commandments and see which ones you have broken."

They started at the first: "You shall have no other gods before Me," and Spurgeon asked her if she ever broke that commandment. "Oh no," she said, "not that I know of." "'You shall not make any graven image' – did you ever break that one?" "Never, sir," she answered. Spurgeon went through all Ten Commandments and she could not find a single one that she had broken, and what he suspected was true. She didn't really consider herself a sinner, and she was making a show of repentance because she thought it was expected of her.

How often do we say to the Lord, "Please forgive me for my sins," but in reality, we are not quite sure that if there is any sin we really need to be forgiven? Because we have a tendency to zoom up on the other people's sins, but when it comes to our own sins, we don't see urgency, nor big issue.

Like us, the ancient Israel people of prophet Joel's time people didn't see their sins as they should. Our gracious God points out to them about their sins and even instructs them to repent, then He would relent His punishment to them. What a merciful God we serve!

A. TRIBULATION AHEAD

Joel 2:1-11 Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the Lord is coming, For it is at hand: 2 A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, great and strong, The like of whom has never been; Nor will there ever be any such after them, Even for many successive generations. 3 A fire devours before them, And behind them a flame burns; The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, And behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them. 4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like swift steeds, so they run. 5 With a noise like chariots Over mountaintops they leap, Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, Like a strong people set in battle array. 6 Before them the people writhe in pain; All faces are drained of color. 7 They run like mighty men, They climb the wall like men of war; Every one marches in formation, And they do not break ranks. 8 They do not push one another; Every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, They are not cut down. 9 They run to and fro in the city, They run on the wall; They climb into the houses, They enter at the windows like a thief. 10 The earth quakes before them, The heavens tremble; The sun and moon grow dark, And the stars diminish their brightness. 11 The Lord gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; Who can endure it?

This time it was real war. Joel commanded the watchmen to blow their trumpets and warn the people. The Jews used trumpets to call assemblies, announce special

events, mark religious festivals and warn the people that war had been declared. In this case, they blew the trumpet to announce war and to call a fast. Their weapons against the invading enemy would be repentance and prayer. The Lord would fight for them.

Twice in this passage, Joel tells us that this invasion is “The Day of the Lord”, meaning a very special period that God had planned and would direct. It was God who brought the locusts to the land and God would allow the Assyrians to invade the land. Just as the locusts had destroyed everything edible before them, so the army would use a “scorched earth policy” and devastate the towns and the land.

When we are right with God, we want the Day of the Lord. We long for Him to show His strength because we know that we abide in Him. When we are not right with God, we dread the Day of the Lord, because when God shows Himself strong, His strength may work against us. In Joel’s day Judah was not right with God, so the Day of the Lord would be nothing but darkness and gloominess to them.

Joel predicted an invasion that didn’t happen during Joel’ time because Judah responded to the invitation to repent and God held back this army. The 40-year godly reign of King Joash in Judah began right after the time of this Joel’s prophecy. During the reign of King Hezekiah, the invasion from Assyria took place in 701 B.C. according to Isa. 36-37. God allowed the Assyrians to ravage the land, but He miraculously delivered Jerusalem from being taken captive.

B. REND YOUR HEART, NOT YOUR GARMENTS

Joel 2:12-17 “Now, therefore,” says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the Lord your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm. 14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him-- A grain offering and a drink offering For the Lord your God? 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; 16 Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room. 17 Let the priests, who minister to the Lord, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, “Spare Your people, O Lord, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

The Israel nation didn’t know when this invasion would occur. So the important thing was for them to turn to the Lord now. But they must be sincere. It’s easy to participate in a religious ceremony, tearing garments like the ancient Jewish people did and crying, but quite something else to humbly confess our sins and bring to God a repentant heart.

Psalm 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart – these, O God, You will not despise.

Sincere repentance is to turn to God, and that means we walk away from our sinful desires. Sincere repentance is done with all our hearts, giving everything we can in surrender to God.

The one thing that encourages us to repent and return to the Lord is the character of God. Knowing that He is indeed gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great

kindness and the thought that God would relent from doing harm ought to motivate us to seek His face.

This description of the attributes of God in v13 goes back to Moses' meeting with the Lord on Mt. Sinai, when he interceded for the sin of nation of Israel in Ex. 34:6-7.

Why do people resist coming back to our gracious and compassionate God? I believe that these are their answers:

1) Some think it's too late to return.

It's never too late.

2) Some think it's futile to return because they've done it before and they've failed.

God has the power to see right through His people, and He knows when we've been genuine and when we've gone through the motions.

3) Some think it's no use to come back because God is through with them.

As we just read in this chapter, God says, "No, I haven't finished with you yet."

C. HOPE AGAIN

Joel 2:18-27 Then the Lord will be zealous for His land, And pity His people. 19 The Lord will answer and say to His people, "Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, And you will be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. 20 "But I will remove far from you the northern army, And will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, With his face toward the eastern sea And his back toward the western sea; His stench will come up, And his foul odor will rise, Because he has done monstrous things." 21 Fear not, O land; Be glad and rejoice, For the Lord has done marvelous things! 22 Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; For the open pastures are springing up, And the tree bears its fruit; The fig tree and the vine yield their strength. 23 Be glad then, you children of Zion, And rejoice in the Lord your God; For He has given you the former rain faithfully, And He will cause the rain to come down for you-- The former rain, And the latter rain in the first month. 24 The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, And the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. 25 "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, The crawling locust, The consuming locust, And the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you. 26 You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, And praise the name of the Lord your God, Who has dealt wondrously with you; And My people shall never be put to shame. 27 Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel: I am the Lord your God And there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.

God promised to restore material prosperity to a repentant Judah, and to defeat the mighty army from Assyria. Because this mighty army had done monstrous things, God would turn the attention of His judgment away from His people and now against this mighty army.

God will do this, not because they deserve it, but that they and the heathen nations might know that He is the Lord.

Just as He blew the locusts into the depths of the Dead Sea which is the eastern sea and the Mediterranean Sea which is the western sea, so He would drive the invading army out of the land. In one night, God killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers according

to Isa. 37. That amount of corpses must have created quite a stench before they were buried.

Without the former rain which comes during March – April and the latter rain which comes during October – November, the land could not bear its crops. The Lord promised to give such bumper crops that the harvest would more than compensate for all that the people lost during the locust plague and the drought.

V25 shows what a merciful and ever-forgiving heart our God has. *“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten”* is a word of promise to all who return to the Lord with sincere and broken hearts. But this only comes after our true repentance. Many people want restoration and moving forward without true repentance. Our actions must accompany our repentance.

We cannot have back our time, but there is a strange, sweet and wonderful way in which God can give back to us the wasted blessings and the unripened fruits of years over which we mourned.

As never before, our lands today need healing. They are polluted by the shedding of innocent blood and the exploiting of both resources and people. We can claim God’s promise in 2 Chronicles 7:14 because we are “His people.”

2 Chronicles 7:14 if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

D. THE LATTER RAIN MOVEMENT

With v25 and others, such as Deuteronomy 11:14 and Hosea 6:3 were taken to give the name of the “Latter Rain Movement” starting in 1948 by William Branham.

Branham influenced a generation of Pentecostal preachers, including a young protege named Oral Roberts. Marked by strange and aberrant doctrine and practices, the movement eventually faded from prominence and Branham himself died in a traffic collision with a drunk driver in 1965. He died on Christmas Eve, and his faithful followers believed that he would rise from the dead, so they delayed his burial for several days.

But the influence of the Latter Rain movement lived on. The Latter Rain popularized many attitudes and doctrines popular in revival movements today:

- The “five-fold ministry” and “restoration of apostle and prophets”
- The “foundational truths” of Hebrews 6:1-2:

Hebrews 6:1-2 Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

- An emphasis on signs and wonders as marks of true revival
- A strong emphasis on unity
- Replacement theology, replacing Israel with the church
- Dominion theology, saying the church will conquer and rule the world
- An elitist attitude, promoting the idea of a group of “superchristians”

8 Many solid Bible scholars believe that many modern “revival” movements are really just a continuation of the Latter Rain movement. Movements such as “Joel’s Army,”

the Manifest Sons of God, the Dominion Movement, the Kansas City Prophets, the Toronto Blessing, the Pensacola Revival, and the Holy Laughter are connected in some way to the Latter Rain movement. For example, Paul Cain – later to re-emerge as head of the Kansas City Prophets in 1989 – traveled with William Branham and called him “the greatest prophet that ever lived.”

These people pump up immature Christians with their own false doctrines that would tickle their itching ears. But soon these winds of doctrines go away until another kinds come in. Many immature Christians go from one false doctrine to another, not growing, because they don't search the Scripture, but rather take what others feed them into whether they are in context or not.

Ephesians 4:14-15 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Sincere repentance is to turn to God, and that means we walk away from our sinful desires.

Sincere repentance is done with all our hearts, giving everything we can in surrender to God.

2) It is never too late to come to God.

3) We cannot have back our time, but there is a strange, sweet and wonderful way in which God can give back to us the wasted blessings and the unripened fruits of years over which we mourned.