

The Message of Joel

by G. Campbell Morgan

The book of Joel illustrates the principles of God's government and the revelation of God's plan in the ages, emphasizing the importance of recognizing our place, proclaiming the fullness of the Spirit, and urging men to call on the name of the Lord.

Scripture: Joel 2:12

Topics: "Grace and Judgment", "Divine Government"

Description

G. Campbell Morgan emphasizes the profound messages found in the book of Joel, illustrating the principles of Divine government and grace through the prophet's visions of locust plagues, imminent judgment, and the future outpouring of the Spirit. He highlights that the 'Day of the Lord' is both a present reality and a future promise, urging repentance and recognition of God's active governance in all circumstances. Morgan calls for believers to proclaim the fullness of the Spirit and to encourage others to call on the name of the Lord for salvation, reminding them of God's grace amidst judgment.

Transcript

A. THE PERMANENT VALUES

I. The Illustration of Principles

i. The Principles. Government. Grace.

a. Government.

1. The Lord enthroned.
2. Presiding in Patience.
3. Pressing all Forces into His Service.
4. Finally asserting Himself.

b. Grace.

1. The Inspiration of Government.

2. The Restraint on Judgment.

3. The Issue of Government.

ii. The Illustrations.

a. Of Government.

1. The Locust Plague. The Act of God.

2. The imminent Judgment. 2:11.

3. The final Movements. The Day of the Lord.

b. Of Grace.

1. The Call to Repentance presupposes it.

2. The Declaration announces it. 2:12.

3. The Patience and the Purpose declare it.

II. The Revelation of a Plan

i. The Immediate.

a. Judgment.

b. The Promise of Deliverance.

ii. "Afterwards." The poured out Spirit.

iii. The Day of the Lord.

a. Restoration of Judah and Jerusalem.

b. The Finding of Israel.

c. The Judgment of the Nations.

d. Restoration of Israel.

e. Supremacy of Judah.

B. THE LIVING MESSAGE

I. The Principles

The Day of the Lord always present and always coming.

This is the Day of the Lord.

It is also to come!

Through all we are to rejoice in and proclaim Grace.

Ever insisting on the Conditions.

II. The Plan

We must recognize our Place.

Proclaim the Fullness of the Spirit.

Urge Men to call on the Name of the Lord.

Taking it for granted that we are familiar with the contents of the book of Joel, in order to the discovery of its permanent values we need to remind ourselves of the threefold vision of the prophet.

In the first place we have his vision of the things that were nearest to him, the circumstances in the midst of which he and the men to whom he spoke were living. An actual plague of locusts had swept over the land, and the first part of his message was delivered in view of the desolation resulting from that plague.

The second vision was that of judgment of a more serious character threatening the people, that, namely, of the coming of an army which he described, using the locust plague for purposes of illustration.

The third vision was that of things beyond his own day and generation.

Joel looked around and saw the results of the locust plague. He looked ahead and saw the new judgment coming upon his people. Then climbing to a yet higher height he saw the things of the far distances. In each case he recognized the activity of Jehovah, and spoke of "the day of the Lord." The locust plague was "the day of the Lord." The swift judgment coming upon his people would be "the day of the Lord." The far distant vision was also that of "the day of the Lord."

The whole prophecy is the result of a vision in perspective of the highway of Jehovah through the centuries; while the burden of the book is expressed in the phrase, "the day of the Lord." Whether the prophet looked at the things in the midst of which he lived, or whether he looked at the judgment which was imminent, or whether he looked to the final activities, he saw "the day of the Lord." To him that day had always come, and was always coming. It was the burden of his prophesying.

The permanent values of the book are first, its illustration of the principles of the Divine government; and secondly, its revelation of the plan of God in the ages.

Its illustration of the principles of Divine government. I use these words quite carefully. I do not say its declaration of the principles, because those are to be found in the prophecy of Isaiah, in which, after the vision of the established throne, its active principles of government and grace are declared. In this book of Joel those principles are illustrated.

First as to the activity of the throne in government. From first to last we are made conscious of the enthroned Jehovah. Whatever were the signs of the times, whatever the defection of the people, whatever the perils threatening them, the one main impression made upon the mind is that of Jehovah enthroned, presiding in patience over all the processes through which His people pass ; pressing into His service all forces, the forces of nature, the locusts; human forces, the coming army ; and finally asserting Himself in absolute and unqualified victory. Every day to this man was "the day of the Lord." The final "day of the

Lord" is postponed, but it is absolutely certain. That will be the day of His established victory. The long-sightedness of this prophet is evident when we remember that the things he described at the close have not yet taken place. He saw the near things, the sin of his people, and the locust plague; the imminent things, the coming of judgment, and the restoration following it; the far things, the day of the Spirit in which we are living, and the things beyond.

Yet even this prophecy does not give the final things; but only the beginning, the ushering in of that last dispensation of God when He will have won His victory and taken to Himself the reins of government, and demolished all other authority and power. The Kingdom of the Son which lies beyond the millennium is not in view in this prophecy.

As we read this book then, the first impression made upon the mind is that of the throne of God, and of God ever active in government.

The second fact illustrated is that at the heart of government is grace. Grace is the inspiration of government. It is seen acting as a restraint upon judgment, so that the locust plague was the occasion of the prophet's appeal to his people to repent; so that his declaration of the judgment which he affirmed to be imminent opened the way for him to make the appeal of God to the people to return to Him, and rend their hearts rather than their garments. When we come to the ultimate triumph it is not that of a conqueror who rejoices that he has broken and crushed, but that of a conqueror who rejoices that he gives peace, and honour, and deliverance, and beauty. Looking at the issue of government we understand its inspiration. That issue is beneficent, glorious, and beautiful, and by these things we are assured that its inspiration is the tender grace of the heart of God. Through all the processes of necessary judgment leading to the establishment of His Kingdom; the locust plague, the coming army, the final conflict, there is evident the restraint of grace, because grace inspires the process, and is the ultimate triumph towards which everything is moving.

Let us observe how these principles of government and grace are illustrated. Of the locust plague men would say, This is a sore misfortune. No one could foresee it, or prevent it. It has swept over the country, and so devastated everything, that no drunkard can obtain wine, that there are no offerings for the temple, that the people throughout the land are lacking bread. It is a terrible devastation, but no one could prevent it. Then the prophet delivered his message, that the plague had come by the will and act of God. The age was forgetting God, and Joel stood in the midst of the devastation and declared that the things of which men spoke as simple happenings in the course of nature, were as a matter of fact the immediate and direct acts of God in judgment. He insisted upon the fact of the Divine government as he declared that the day of devastation and the plague was "the day of the Lord." He called the old men and the drunkards, the possessors of the land, and all the people to observe the destruction, and to recognize that it resulted from the immediate action of God. This he declared also concerning the judgment which was about to come. In his graphic description of the destroying army he said, "The Lord uttereth His voice before His army," thus calling them to recognize the invading foe as acting under the government of God. When we come to the final movement no argument is needed. It is most certainly a prophecy of the going forth of God, turning the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, seeking and finding His scattered people, breaking the power of the nations that have oppressed them, restoring Israel, and raising Judah to the place of supremacy.

Thus whether Joel looked at the near, the imminent, or the distant, he insisted upon the presence and activity of God.

With equal clearness he illustrated the fact of the Divine grace. The call to repentance in the first place presupposes the grace of the Divine heart. The declaration of the second is perfectly clear, "Yet even now, saith the Lord, turn ye unto Me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God : for He is gracious and full of compassion, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy, and repenteth Him of the evil." That is to say, He will change His mind concerning judgment, when men rend their hearts and not their garments, and turn back to Him. He is slow to anger. He halts the march of His wrath in order that men may repent.

When we come to the final movement, the grace is as clearly manifest. "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke." That is the description of the great and terrible day of the Lord; but even then His grace will wait and act, " for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those that escape, as the Lord hath said, and among the remnant these whom the Lord doth call."

Thus throughout the prophecy, in the things that are near, in the things that are imminent and in the things of the final movement of God, the two facts plainly evident are those of the Divine government and the Divine grace. These constitute the first permanent value of the book.

Now as to the second ; we have in this book the revelation of a plan. Looking forward Joel saw beyond the circumstances in the midst of which he lived, and beyond those immediately following, another day of the Lord ; but ere its dawning a period undated and unmeasured, yet full of gracious and wonderful blessing.

"It shall come to pass afterwards, that I will pour out My Spirit." We are not able to say that we do not know where to place that period, because we have the New Testament in our hands, and therein the clearly spoken word of the apostle on the day of Pentecost, "This is that which hath been spoken by the prophet Joel." We know now what it was that Joel saw in dim outline, which he could not perfectly describe, yet which he did so accurately describe. He saw the glorious outpouring somewhere in the distance. He was unable definitely to place it; and referred to its distance by that indefinite word "afterwards." We know that it lay at least he centuries away from the day in which he uttered his prophecy.

The vision was most remarkable as that of a Hebrew prophet, because it foretold the outpouring of the Spirit upon all flesh, not merely upon Israel, not only upon the elect, but upon all flesh.

He saw, moreover, that this outpouring of the Spirit and its results were to be irrespective of caste; not merely upon the favoured, kings, princes, priests, and rulers, but also upon bondslaves.

Joel saw the strange and wonderful age in the distance. We are living in that age. There is no single statement in the Bible which enables us to say how long it will last, not a single note to enable us to measure it.

Beyond the age of the Spirit he saw other activities of the Divine government. Looking towards them he said, "I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord come." These are not the signs of the age of the Spirit. They will indicate its close, and initiate a new age which is that of the final day of the Lord. During the period of these signs "it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered" ; delivered, that is, from " the great and terrible day of the Lord." Thus we see the plan of the ages. Joel saw that the age in which he lived continued to a certain point, and its characteristics would be those of sin, of judgment, and of repentance.

Then he saw that day of the Lord moving on towards another day of the Lord, in which the characteristics of government and grace would be even more marked. Afterwards he saw something new, the Spirit poured upon all flesh, a quiet hush descending everywhere ; no longer the old manifestations, but a new order of prophesying, dreaming of dreams, seeing of visions, and breaking down of caste so that slaves also would be among the prophets. Then signs in the heavens and in the earth, and beyond these, "the great and terrible day of the Lord."

As to that great day the prophetic word was far more definite. His words concerning the age of the Spirit were to him full of mystery, but to us are clear. Beyond that age of the Spirit his vision was clearer, and he gave a definite description of what would happen. Judah and Jerusalem are to be delivered from captivity and from scattering among the nations. God will search among the nations for the lost and scattered Israel, and gather them together; He will judge the nations, and the basis of His judgment will be that of their attitude towards Israel. Israel will be restored to privilege and power and the supremacy of Judah will be established in the midst of the restored order.

None of these things have yet been fulfilled. As surely as they were written, they will be fulfilled. Place Joel as late as we may, allow the latest scholar to have his way, and declare that he spoke only four centuries before Christ; it is still enough if we admit that so long before the Pentecostal miracle this man saw it, to warrant us in saying that none has the right to deny that the things which our eyes have not seen will be seen. So surely as Joel wrote, God will act, and in his brief writing we have a remarkable unveiling of the plan of the ages.

The living message results from these permanent values. From them we learn that "the day of the Lord" is always present and always coming.

"Who would sit down and sigh for a lost age of gold

While the Lord of all ages is here ? "

There are those who deny that there ever will be a "day of the Lord "in which He will act in judgment. On the other hand there are those who are ever looking towards the future "day of the Lord," forgetting that this also is the "day of the Lord."

God is active at this hour. If that be denied, if it be true that God is doing nothing, then the outlook is indeed hopeless. This is "the day of the Lord," but it is not the final day. There is a sense in which this is man's day. It is an age of remarkable progress. Inventions are multiplied. Human culture has reached a level never before attained. Progress, inventions, culture are making man imagine that he is independent of God. There is a widespread tendency to the deification of human reason and human ability. It is peculiarly the age in which humanity is acting as though there were no God, or as though it were entirely independent of Him. The results are disastrous to all that is highest and best in human life. All our progress and inventions and culture leave us infinitely less than the highest, noblest and best possibilities of our being. But this is also "the day of the Lord" ; and the activities in the midst of which we find ourselves, if our eyes are but anointed to see, are activities bathed in the fire of His presence. Let no man think he escapes God because he denies Him. To go back to the prophecy of Isaiah, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with everlasting burnings 1" Isaiah saw the city and people of his age existing in fire. The everlasting burnings are not postponed. We live in the midst of them. I cannot tell how much Isaiah knew of what we call modern science. It is, however, perfectly evident that its teachings were apprehended by him in the spiritual realm. Modern science has revealed to us the

fact that there is a slowly burning fire everywhere in nature. We leave iron in the dews of the night, and in the morning declare it rusted. Scientists tell us rust is the evidence of the slowly burning fire. In the autumn we watch the leaves turning to gold and vermilion, and this also is the work of the same fire. Isaiah recognizing such a fire in the spiritual realm asked Who can dwell in it? and answered his own enquiry, "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly." Every thing else it destroys. London is wrapped in the fire of God's nearness. This is the day of God. The throne of judgment is erected now.

That, however, is not all; there is the final judgment throne. Every age will repeat the process until the last, in which He will finally deal with the sinning earth, in order that through the last fire baptism He may realize all the purpose upon which His heart is set. Yet thank God, there is committed to us also the ministry of reconciliation. Through all the movements there are evidences of His grace, and it is ours to rejoice in, and proclaim that grace, always insisting upon the only conditions upon which grace can operate, "Rend your heart and not your garments."

The final word of the living message is this. We are to remember where we are in the plan of the ages. We are in the midst of the age of the outpoured Spirit. The message we have to deliver to men is that of the possibility of the fullness of the life of the Spirit. Our business is to urge men to call on the name of the Lord, and thus to be saved from the judgment of His immediate day; from the judgment of His imminent day; from the judgment of His final day.

Let it be ours, who know anything of what it is to have received the Spirit, to hand over to that indwelling One all the keys of all the chambers of the being, that He may fill us, and use us as the instruments of both the government and the grace of God.

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