

## **I will pour out my Spirit - Joel 2:28-32**

Series: Joel

Date: 17 November 2024, 26th Sunday after Trinity

Location: St George's Battery Point

Texts: Joel 2:28-32, Acts 2:1-39

I am terrible at the art of gift giving. It's fine for giving presents to kids, but when it comes to adults, I'm woeful. Some people are brilliant at it. They pay attention to what other people like. They notice little spaces that could be filled. It's like they have a little file on all their family and friends ready to access when they are out shopping and they spot something that would be just perfect. I am not like that. I usually have to ask Claire for what she wants and even then I forget. Once when we were dating I bought her a skirt at a market that was just perfect. She wore it till it fell apart. Since then, it's been downhill.

There's nothing like being given a gift that is exactly what you need, even though you didn't know it. We've been preaching through the prophet Joel and today we come to one of the greatest prophecies in the Old Testament. It's the promise of two extraordinary gifts from God to us: the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of salvation. On the day of Pentecost, when God poured out the Holy Spirit on Jesus' first disciples, the apostle Peter saw that this moment was when God's word spoken by the prophet Joel hundreds of years before had now come to pass. God still offers these gifts to all who call upon his name today - the gift of the Spirit and the gift of salvation. This morning we'll have a look at Joel's prophecy in 3 parts: I will pour out my Spirit (28-29), I will show wonders (30-31) and Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (32).

### **I will pour out my Spirit 28-29**

Have a read with me verse 28.

**28** 'And afterwards,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

**29** Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

The great theme of the prophet Joel has been the Day of the Lord. The day of the Lord was one where God came to bring judgement upon his enemies and to rescue his people. In chapter 1

The first tricky question for us in these verses is the time signature, “and afterwards”. Joel saw in a locust plague the day of the Lord, where God had come to judge his own people for their sin. In chapter 2 he warned his people of a future day of the Lord when God again would come to judge. He urged them to repent, and in response to their repentance God did not come in judgement, but instead brought restoration after the disaster of chapter 1. But there still is a sense that the day of the Lord promised in chapter 2 lay in the future. In verses 28-32, God promises that “afterwards” he will pour out his Spirit. It’s interesting that when Peter quotes this text in Acts he translates “and afterwards” to “in the last days”. It is as though he sees the day of the Lord in the coming of the Lord Jesus, and his death, resurrection and ascension. The day of the Lord is not so much a “day” as an event. And what follows in these verses will also be part of that event.

If you’ve been here for this series you’ll know that Joel makes many references to other books in the Bible. The promise of the gift of the Spirit is one of these. Back in Numbers 11 Moses complained to God about the burden of leading the people of Israel. God told Moses to bring 70 of Israel’s elders to the tent of meeting, and there God said, “I will take some of the power of the Spirit that is on you and put it on them.” Moses did this and when the Spirit came upon the elders they prophesied. But there’s a twist in the story. For some reason 2 of the 70, Eldad and Medad, didn’t make it to the tent of meeting but remained in the camp. Maybe they had a cold, I don’t know. Anyway, when the Spirit came upon the elders at the tent of meeting, he also came upon Eldad and Medad and they also prophesied. Joshua, Moses’ aid, told Moses to make them stop. But Moses said, no. “I wish that all the Lord’s people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!”

Now, through the prophet Joel, God declares that one day he will grant Moses’ wish. And then, 10 days after Jesus ascended into heaven, on the day of Pentecost, all Jesus’ disciples were gathered together in Jerusalem.

Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3** They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. **4** All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

When the apostle Peter got up to address the crowd he said, “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel.” What Joel had promised had now come to pass. Peter finishes his sermon by saying that the crucified and risen Jesus has now been exalted to the right hand of God. “He has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Acts 2.33

There's several things to notice here. First, the Spirit is poured out on *all* people. In the Old Testament, God gave his Spirit to particular individuals, for a particular time, for a particular purpose. We've seen how Moses was given the Spirit, and how the elders of Israel were given a portion of the Spirit to help Moses judge and lead the people. In the book of Samuel, when Saul was anointed king he was given the Spirit and prophesied.<sup>2</sup> But later the Spirit was taken away and given to David as the anointed king. Elijah and Elisha were empowered by the Spirit as prophets. Ezekiel writes of how he was filled with the Spirit so as to speak God's word. Here Joel says the Spirit will be given to all people, not just kings, and priests and prophets and judges.

And Joel further spells this out:

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,  
 your old men will dream dreams,  
 your young men will see visions.

**29** Even on my servants, both men and women,  
 I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Young and old, men and women. Even servants. In fact the word in verse 29 could be translated as slaves. This is what the apostle Paul writes about in Galatians 3.28:

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female,  
 for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

That is to say, the Spirit is given to all, regardless of class, of gender, of ethnicity. Not to say these distinctions don't exist, they do. Rather they are relativised. They are no longer a defining identity that divides and excludes. Indeed in the Church, the body of Christ, the Spirit breaks down the barriers these distinctions create.

Second, a word on prophecy. Here in Joel, as with Moses and the elders and with king Saul, when the Spirit comes upon people they prophesy. The accounts of Saul prophesying suggest that this was not a coherent telling of the future, but rather some form of ecstatic speech. In fact, comically, God used prophecy from the Spirit to prevent Saul's minions from capturing David. When Saul himself came to seize David, he was seized by the Spirit, and he stripped off naked and prophesied. When we come to Acts, the disciples aren't seized with an ecstatic frenzy when the Spirit comes, but instead they speak in other languages. Later in Acts Paul meets some believers in Ephesus who had not yet been baptised in the name of Jesus and who had not received the Spirit. When he baptises them in the name of Jesus and lays hands on them, they receive the Spirit and prophesy and speak in tongues.<sup>3</sup> At this stage it's not

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Samuel 10.6,10, 19.20-24

<sup>3</sup> Acts 19.1-7

clear whether tongues are other human languages or the angelic languages that Paul mentions in 1 Corinthians.<sup>4</sup> All of this is to say that the New Testament authors are flexible with what “your sons and daughters will prophesy” looks like. Or, to put it another way, they don’t expect that every Christian will prophesy or speak in tongues. These are gifts of the Holy Spirit, and the point for Peter in Acts is that the Holy Spirit has been given to *all* believers.

Having said that, prophecy and tongues are gifts of the Spirit. And he still does speak to people in dreams and visions. Growing up in PNG I often heard stories of people receiving messages from God in dreams. I also know many stories of people from a Muslim background to whom Jesus has appeared in a dream and this has been instrumental in their coming to faith in Christ.

There is another, more subtle context to Joel’s prophecy of the giving of the Spirit. Joel had spoken of locusts and famine as God’s judgement. The prophet Amos had said that there would be a famine of God’s word.<sup>5</sup> And the promise of Jeremiah was that there would be a day when God would put his law in the minds of his people and write it on their hearts.<sup>6</sup> Jesus says that the Spirit is the Spirit of truth and he will teach his people all things and remind us of everything he has said.<sup>7</sup> Now with the coming of the Spirit, prophecy breaks the drought of God’s word. Not all may prophesy, but all who believe in Christ are given the Spirit of truth, so that, as Jeremiah had said, we may all know the Lord, “from the least to the greatest” of us.

### **I will show wonders 30-31**

Joel continues in verse 30-31.

**30** I will show wonders in the heavens  
and on the earth,  
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

**31** The sun will be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood

before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

We’ve seen how verses 28-29 are fulfilled with the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. But what about these verses? Peter quotes them as well. How are they fulfilled? Now, I have to say I don’t have a great answer here, but let me make a brief comment. The first is to say that

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<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 13.1

<sup>5</sup> Amos 8.11-12

<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah 31.33

<sup>7</sup> John 14.26, cf. 16.12-13

we've seen some of these pictures already in Joel in association with the coming day of the Lord. The picture of fire has been used several times to describe the devastation caused by the locust plague.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, the day of the Lord throughout Joel is described as a day of darkness and gloom, a day when the sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine, when the earth shakes and the heavens tremble. This is in 2.2, and 2.10, and will be repeated in 3.15-16. Jesus himself picks up this imagery in Luke 21 and Mark 13, when he says,

**25** 'There will be signs in the sun, moon and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. **26** People will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

This is figurative language to evoke just how seismic the day of the Lord will be. In his commentary on Joel, John Calvin sees these verses as speaking metaphorically of the sorrow that will come upon people on the great and dreadful day of the Lord should they fail to turn to Christ for mercy.<sup>9</sup> That brings us to point 3.

### **Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved 32**

Read with me verse 32.

**32** And everyone who calls  
on the name of the LORD will be saved;  
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem  
there will be deliverance,  
as the LORD has said,  
even among the survivors  
whom the LORD calls.

If the Holy Spirit was the first great gift promised in this text, this is the second: Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

On the day of Pentecost when the assembled crowd hears of what God has done in raising Jesus from the dead, exalting him to his right hand and pouring out the Holy Spirit, they are cut to the heart and ask, "What shall we do?" Peter replies picking up these words from Joel:

'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. **39** The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'

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<sup>8</sup> Joel 1.19, 2.3

<sup>9</sup> John Calvin, *Commentary on Joel*, trans. John Owen, Banner of Truth, 1986: 100-104

There's three things to note here. God the Father has now made Jesus both Lord and Christ. As such whenever people are invited to call upon the name of the Lord in the New Testament, the Lord always refers to Jesus.<sup>10</sup> To call upon Jesus is to call upon the Lord. Or put another way, if you want to call upon the Lord, you must call upon Jesus. As Peter puts it in Acts 4.12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven to humankind by which we must be saved."

Second, notice the beautiful harmony between God's sovereign work and human agency. The verse begins, "everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved", and it ends with "even among [those] whom the Lord calls." Peter repeats this pattern in Acts 2 when he says, "The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call." When we call upon the Lord we find that God has already been at work gently calling us to himself.

Third, what does it mean to be saved? Another word for salvation is rescue. What are we rescued from when we call upon the name of the Lord? What is the context in Joel? The day of the Lord, which is a day of judgement upon the wickedness and idolatry of men and women. We'll look more at this next week in chapter 3. But here, calling upon the Lord goes with what we saw last week, rending your heart and returning to the Lord. To call upon the Lord is to recognise that you've fallen short of the life God calls you to. You've failed to love God and love your neighbour, in fact you've often done quite the opposite. It's to recognise that you stand under God's just judgement. To call upon the Lord is to turn back to him in repentance. God's wonderful promise is that if you do that, if you call on the name of Jesus, you will receive his full and free forgiveness. And not only this, but God will also give you the gift of the Holy Spirit, the fire of his own presence and power dwelling in you. And what is the work of the Holy Spirit? To assure you of God's love and to change you to be like Jesus so that you reflect God's glory and do the good he has planned for you to do.

This is what it means to be a Christian. Forgiveness and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These are the most extraordinary gifts of God. This promise is for you and for your children. For all who call upon the name of the Lord. For those of you who know this and have been walking with the Lord for many years, rejoice and give thanks. But for those of you who have not yet received these gifts. Hear God's call to you today. He offers you forgiveness and the Holy Spirit. He promises that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Will you call upon the name of Jesus today?

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<sup>10</sup> Acts 4.12, 9.14,21, 22.16, Romans 10.12, 1 Corinthians 1.2, 2 Timothy 2.22