

A God of Great Things: Past, Present, & Future

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Bible Text: Psalm 126:3; Joel 2:20

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Now tonight being the last Lord's Day of an old year I have a special message to bring. It is a rather unusual message for me in that it is a sermon with three texts. I know that I usually refer to many, many texts in my sermons. I do that deliberately. I believe that we need to let God's Word speak for itself, but normally I don't preach a sermon with three texts.

But I want to do that tonight because I think that these words are particularly appropriate for this time. For, indeed, it is a time for us to look back into the past, a time to take stock of the present and also to look ahead with anticipation to the future in the will of God.

Our three texts, then, not surprisingly, deal with the past, the present and the future and each one of them has reference to the workings of God. The first text you will find in Psalm 126 verse three. "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad."¹ That is a text that hangs in our living room above the sofa and what a wonderful text it is.

The second text is found in Job chapter five verse nine. And speaking of the Lord it says, "Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number."²

And then the third text is one that is found in the portion that we read earlier, Joel chapter two verse 21. "Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things."³

So if you take each of those texts in turn you will see that they remind us of the great things that the Lord hath done, the great things that he does and the great things that he will get do. And that is what I want us to think about tonight for we serve a great God. God is great and God is one to whom we are to ascribe greatness.

These verses speak of the great things of God.

The first Scripture deals with the experience of the past. Let's look at it together. Keep our Bibles open there at Psalm 126 and verse three. I should say that these words are

¹ Psalm 126:3

² Job 5:9

³ Joel 2:21

spoken by people who had known the deliverance of God in the past. And they were looking back upon that deliverance with thankfulness and joy.

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”⁴ Here you have the testimony of the holy. “The LORD hath done great things for us.”⁵ For us. This is a word of personal experience in the context. You will find that it is the testimony of the people of God in Israel. They were delivered literally from bondage and from captivity.

Look at verse one. They refer to it. “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”⁶ The Lord turned their captivity. This refers to a return of captives, of slaves from their bondage.

Now there is some—I wouldn’t say controversy—but shall we say some conjecture, some guesswork as to which captivity it is referring to. It may well have been the captivity in Babylon or it might have been that other captivity in Assyria. But whatever the case, whatever the time that is in view here it was a great deliverance wrought for them by God.

“The LORD hath done great things for us.”⁷ What has he done? He has “turned again the captivity of Zion.”⁸ And this testimony, “The LORD hath done great things for us,”⁹ is a testimony that belongs to all of the holy in every age of history, not just the people of Israel here in the context, but to all of God’s people.

It reminds me very much of words that were spoken earlier in the Bible in 1 Samuel chapter 12 and verse 24. Samuel said to the people of God, “Only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth with all your heart: for consider how great things he hath done for you.”¹⁰ That is a good statement, isn’t it? Wouldn’t it be a good time tonight, the last Lord’s Day of an old year just to look back and think about the great things that the Lord has done for us? Not just this year, but in previous years in all the time that has past. “The LORD hath done great things for us.”¹¹

“Great things he hath taught us, great things he hath done and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son.” That is what the hymn says.

The Lord has done great things for us. You go to Mark chapter five and verse 19. You will see that this was a testimony of the demoniac, the man of Gadara who was healed, who was delivered from demon possession, Mark five verse 19. “Jesus suffered him not,” that is, didn’t allow him to travel with him at that point, “but saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath

⁴ Psalm 126:3

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Psalm 126:1

⁷ Psalm 126:3

⁸ Psalm 126:1

⁹ Psalm 126:3

¹⁰ 1 Samuel 12:24

¹¹ Psalm 126:3

had compassion on thee.”¹² In other words, “Go back home and start giving your testimony. Start giving your testimony. Start telling people what the Lord has done for you.”

“I am not demon possessed any longer. I am not among the tombs crying and cutting myself with stones and running about naked. But I am now in my right mind because Jesus has done great things for me.”

Those of us that are saved tonight can praise God for the experience of the past and we, too, can speak of our deliverance. “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”¹³ It was almost unreal to the people of God what the Lord had done for them. They could hardly take it in. They could hardly believe it. “When the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream.”¹⁴

Our spiritual captivity as God’s people has come to an end by Christ’s work for us and his work in us. Think of those words of John chapter eight and verse 34. We are talking here about the deliverance of God’s people, what the Lord hath delivered them from, John eight verse 34. “Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”¹⁵ The word “servant” there means bond slave. So he is talking here about the captivity of each and every person by nature. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin.”¹⁶ We are the slaves of sin. That is one thing.

But then there is another reference which reminds us of this bondage and this slavery in 2 Peter chapter two and verse 19. “While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants...”¹⁷ Again, it means bond slaves, the bond slaves, the captives “of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.”¹⁸ There is a captivity that you and I are in by nature. Sin has men and women in bondage. Sinners are the captives of Satan. But the gospel, we know, sets men free. The gospel sets men free. The gospel cuts the chains and the Lord turns their captivity.

Think of the words of Luke four verse 18. The Lord Jesus told what the purpose of his ministry was. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives.”¹⁹ Deliverance to the captives. That is the gospel message. You know, the Scripture teaches us, 2 Timothy two verse 26, that men are held captive by the devil at his will. “And that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.”²⁰ Men are in bondage by nature to their sins and to Satan. But the gospel, when it is applied, sets men free and the believer, every believer tonight is

¹² Mark 5:19

¹³ Psalm 126:1

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ John 8:34

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 2 Peter 2:19

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Luke 4:18

²⁰ 2 Timothy 2:26

one who has been set free. And we can say tonight, “The LORD hath done great things for us,”²¹ not only in conversion, but since conversion. The Lord has done great things for us. He has delivered us, but he has continued to deliver us. He delivers us, as the hymn writer puts it, “From a thousand falls.”

We think of the words of Job concerning this, Job five and verse 19, “He shall deliver thee in six troubles: yea, in seven there shall no evil touch thee.”²²

How the Lord has delivered us in many, many instances. We can think of various ways that the Lord has delivered us perhaps even this past year. The Lord has delivered us physically perhaps. The Lord has delivered us from harm and from danger. The Lord has kept us from our own folly and stupidity.

Psalms 91 puts it like this, verse three. “Surely he shall deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence.”²³ And I believe if you apply that spiritually it is certainly the case that the Lord has delivered us from the evil one on many, many occasions.

Paul, when he was writing close to his own time of death he thanked God that he had delivered him from the mouth of the Lion.

And the Lord has done great things for us. It is true of all of God’s people throughout history and it is true of us even this past year. The Lord has done great things for us. This is the testimony of the holy. They can not only speak of their deliverance, though, this testimony is one of delight as well as of deliverance.

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”²⁴ Are you glad tonight? You should be if you are a child of God. There is a little chorus that some of you might have heard sung in certain places. “He hath made me glad,” right? He hath made me glad. And he has. “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad,”²⁵ not sad, glad. We ought to be glad. The Lord has put gladness in our hearts. The psalmist talked about that away back in the early psalms. He said, “[The Lord] hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.”²⁶ You read that in Psalm four verse seven. “Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.”²⁷ In other words, when the ungodly were rejoicing in material things and in their riches he said, “God has put a greater gladness in my heart, the joy of the Lord which is our strength.”

You know the work of God for us will produce delight in us. We rejoice in the Lord and the great things that he has done for us. I really think, then, that a miserable Christian is a

²¹ Psalm 126:3

²² Job 5:19

²³ Psalm 91:3

²⁴ Psalm 126:3

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Psalm 4:7

²⁷ Ibid.

contradiction in terms. A miserable Christian. Why should we be downcast? Why should we be downcast? “Hope thou in God,” the psalmist said, “for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.”²⁸

This testimony of the holy then, this testimony of the experience of the past is also accompanied—you will see in the context—by the testimony of the heathen. Oh, it is one thing for the holy, for the people of God to say, “The Lord hath done great things for us,”²⁹ but then, again, if you look at Psalm 126 verse two it says very clearly, “Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: then said they among the heathen, The LORD hath done great things for them.”³⁰ And, you see, the words of God’s people. “The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad,”³¹ is a response, actually, to the words of the heathen. We are agreeing with the heathen. That’s right. The Lord has done great things for us. But the first people to say it are the heathen.

Now why on earth would the heathen say that the Lord has done great things for the Lord’s people? Well, I have to say to you that that acknowledgement of the Lord’s goodness to his people spoken by the heathen was caused by the joyful testimony of God’s people. That was the cause of it.

You see their mouths were filled with laughter and their tongue with singing. And the Bible is very careful and the Holy Spirit says, “Then said they among the heathen...”³² When? When God’s people’s mouths were filled with laughter and their tongues with singing, when they were rejoicing in the Lord, when they were showing forth the gladness of a Christian testimony.

Is that your testimony today and is your witness having an impact on the heathen all around you so that people—where they may not appreciate what you stand for, they may not agree with what you stand for—they can at least point at you and say, “The Lord has done great things for them. There is no doubt about it. God has done something for those people”?

I want to tell you. You and I should never be content until ungodly people are forced to say that, until they give that testimony.

Now there is a contrast to note here, obviously, between verses two and three. The heathen said, “The LORD hath done great things for them.”³³ In verse three you have the words, “The LORD hath done great things for us.”³⁴

And that causes me to stop and ask the question: Where do you stand tonight? Are you one of the verse two or are you one of the verse three people? Are you on the outside, as

²⁸ Psalm 42:11

²⁹ Psalm 126:3

³⁰ Psalm 126:2

³¹ Psalm 126:3

³² Psalm 126:2

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Psalm 126:3

it were, looking in and saying, “The Lord has done great things for them, but he hasn’t done it for me, hasn’t done it for us”? You can’t include yourself in this great statement. Can you give a testimony to the experience of the Lord or can you merely speak about the experience of others and say, “The Lord has done great things for them, but as for me I don’t think the Lord has done great things for me. I am not sure or I am not saved”?

And you should never be content and never rest content until you can join the people of verse three. “The LORD hath done great things for us.”³⁵ Here are people who are glad in God. And can we not as individuals tonight, can we not as a church thank the Lord for that which we have experienced of his blessings in the past? The Lord has, the Lord has done great things for us.

Recently there I received a video recording from my successor in the work in Rutherglen in Scotland and it is a challenging video telling about the burden of the work there in Scotland. And in looking at that I found it very touching. It was very moving to me, but one of the things that it caused me to do was to think back on the 10 years that my family and I spent in that work. And sometimes when you think about certain works that you have been involved in you want to focus on the negatives, the things that discouraged, the things that were a trial.

But, you know, when you start to focus on the positive you start to think about some of the things that the Lord has done, what a blessing. I got to thinking about some folk who came to know the Lord through that little ministry there, some of them portrayed on that video, folks who when I first met them were ungodly. They were far from God, but through the preaching, just the simply preaching of the Bible God got a hold of their hearts and saved them. And I began to thank God for all those things that the Lord had done.

You know, it is easy to complain. It is easy to feel sorry for yourself and to mope. It is easy to focus on the negatives and even in this work here it would be so easy to focus on the negatives. But there’s a few folk here tonight who can remember six, seven years ago when this work didn’t even exist and how the Lord sustained the work and how the Lord has blessed the work. And we want to see the Lord do more.

We have got a pretty nice little group in here tonight compared to those early days. “The LORD hath done great things for us,”³⁶ and we should be glad. And, of course, we should look for greater things in the future and we will come to that.

The hymn says, “Count your blessings. Name them one by one and it will surprise you what the Lord hath done.” Just stop and think on a personal level about the blessings of God upon your life this past year. I guarantee you before the night is out you will have cause to praise the Lord.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

The experience of the past, but then look at the second text. It is Job five verse nine. And there you have a reference to eth exploits of the present. “The LORD hath done great things for us,”³⁷ but look at this. Verse eight says, “I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause.”³⁸ Verse nine, “Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.”³⁹ Here is a God who is working in the present. It is not all past. It is not all, you know, looking back and saying, “Wasn’t it wonderful what the Lord did then, but he is not working now anymore. He has left the field. He has deserted us. He is not doing anything anymore.”

Oh, that is not so. That is not so.

Oh, yes, the Lord has worked, but, friends, the Lord is working. The Lord is working. He is the God that doeth wonders as well as the God that hath done wonders.

Look again with me at the context here, Job chapter nine. Just go over a few pages and Job chapter nine and we read from verse 10. It says, “Which doeth...” Again, it is speaking of God. “Which doeth great things past finding out.”⁴⁰ Notice that. He still does them. Not “which hath done,” “which doeth.”

“Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number. Lo, he goeth by me, and I see him not: he passeth on also, but I perceive him not. Behold, he taketh away, who can hinder him? who will say unto him, What doest thou?”⁴¹

God is sovereign. God is on the throne and God does what he wants to do. I believe that with all my heart. God does what he wants to do and when he wants to do it.

Psalm 37 verse five says, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.”⁴² The Lord is going to do great things. The Lord is doing great things. And as we continue to trust the Lord and we continue to commit our way unto the Lord he will continue to do great things.

Look at Psalm 72 verse 18. “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things.”⁴³ “Who only doeth wondrous things.”⁴⁴

In Job 37 verse five it says, “God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend.”⁴⁵ Notice it again. It is in the present tense. “Great things doeth he.”⁴⁶ Job 37 verse five. The Lord is doing great things.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Job 5:8

³⁹ Job 5:9

⁴⁰ Job 9:10

⁴¹ Job 9:10-12

⁴² Psalm 37:5

⁴³ Psalm 72:18

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Job 37:5

So tonight we can not only look back at the past and say that God was able then to do great things, but he is able now to do great things, now, right now at the present.

And does this not bring us to the thought of the immutability of God, that he is unchanged, that he is unchanging, that he is unchangeable? That is how the Bible speaks of him. That is how the Word of God describes him.

Psalm 102 reading from verse 25 it says:

Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end.⁴⁷

God is immutable, unchangeable, always the same.

When I was studying in theology—and, of course, theology by its very definition is teaching about God. θεος (teh'-os) is the Greek word for God. It is God-ology. That is what theology is. It is learning about who God is. And I remember learning this great truth and it impacted me at the time that God doesn't dwell, really, in the past and in the future, but the eternal God dwells in the present. He is not just the I was and the I will be. He is the I am. That is how he introduced himself to Moses. "I am that I am."⁴⁸ And Jesus, of course, used that title in so many instances of himself. "I am."

"Before Abraham was, I am."⁴⁹

He dwells in the eternal now, in the eternal present. God never changes. And that should be a comfort to us and it is a comfort to us.

Malachi three verse six uses it as a comfort. Here is what it says, the very last book of the Old Testament chapter three verse six, "For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed."⁵⁰

I am glad God doesn't change. He doesn't change his eternal purpose.

And Hebrews 13:8 says, "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."⁵¹

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Psalm 102:25-27

⁴⁸ Exodus 3:14

⁴⁹ John 8:58

⁵⁰ Malachi 3:6

⁵¹ Hebrews 13:8

You know that God's power is undiminished by his past mighty works. I could put it like this. The batteries of omnipotence never need recharging.

You know, that which God does does not result in a leakage of power. God is ever the same and he is as strong to save today as he ever was. He is as mighty to send revival today as he ever has been. He still doeth great things.

Now, even though we may not see it outwardly sometimes, yet God is working even now. And we see that in the context of Job five. Very quickly let's look at it. Look at Job chapter five. Verse nine says, "[He] doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number."⁵²

Now read on. "Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields."⁵³

You know, I get slightly tired of this talk about mother nature, don't you? I get really fed up with that. Mother nature this and mother nature that. There is no such person as mother nature, no such thing, mother nature. The Bible says of God, "[He] giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields."⁵⁴

There is a brother that I know back in Northern Ireland who is somewhat limited mentally, but he loves the Lord and I remember hearing of him going at a certain time to a prayer meeting and in that prayer meeting he was praying to the Lord for rain. It hadn't, you know, unusually for Northern Ireland they hadn't had rain for a little while and he was praying for rain and a farmer in that meeting was heard to say, "Oh, no." He said, "There goes my crops. I was going to take them out of the fields." He says, "It will be washed out," he says, "because God hears Gerald's prayers."

And that's true. See, Gerald believed as we ought to believe that it is the Lord that sends the rain. Therefore we can pray even about the weather. Now the Lord might not always answer the way we want him to, but God is in control of these things. You see that it speaks here of his provision. He provides the rain, the snow and the dew. "Who giveth rain upon the earth, and sendeth waters upon the fields."⁵⁵ And it goes on to speak of other things. But if you just think about verse 10, the weathermen can talk about the weather all that they want, but they can't change it. They can't change it. But God can. He is in control of these things and these are things that we think little of at times and they are great works of God.

Let me read some more verses that prove this. Job 37 verses five and six.

⁵² Job 5:9

⁵³ Job 5:10

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

God thundereth marvellously with his voice; great things doeth he, which we cannot comprehend. For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth; likewise to the small rain, and to the great rain of his strength.⁵⁶

So when I am tempted to complain that I am going to have to do a lot of shoveling I have to remember this. It was the Lord that said to the snow, “Be thou on the earth.”⁵⁷ That is what the Bible says. I believe the Bible God is in control of these matters.

Look, again, at Job 37 verse 10. “By the breath of God frost is given.”⁵⁸ That is why you had to scrape the windows of our truck this morning. Oh, yes.

Verse 11. “Also by watering he wearieth the thick cloud: he scattereth his bright cloud.”⁵⁹ And so on.

And verse 14 says, “Hearken unto this, O Job: stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.”⁶⁰

His provision and then his providence. God is at work in the earth and all that the Lord is doing today is great for all of these great things are for his own glory and for the good of his own people. Look at the context, again, of Job chapter five. You see from verse 11 it says:

To set up on high those that be low; that those which mourn may be exalted to safety. He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform their enterprise. He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.⁶¹

And it goes on to say in verse 15, “But he saveth the poor from the sword, from their mouth, and from the hand of the mighty.”⁶²

God is in control of all things. Everything that God does is with a purpose. It is for his own glory and it is for the good of his own people. So you look back on this past year and you can think of some negative things that happened in your life. At least on the face of it, humanly speaking, they were great negatives. But yet my Bible says in Romans 8:28, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”⁶³

So those things were not negative. Those things were positive.

⁵⁶ Job 37:5-6

⁵⁷ Job 37:6

⁵⁸ Job 37:10

⁵⁹ Job 37:11

⁶⁰ Job 37:14

⁶¹ Job 5:11-13

⁶² Job 5:15

⁶³ Romans 8:28

For the Scripture says, “I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me.”⁶⁴ Psalm 57 verse two.

There is the mystery of God’s providence. “[He] worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”⁶⁵

And even now, tonight, at this very moment, the things that are taking place are foreordained in the purpose of the Lord, the exploits of the present.

And we can rest in this confidence that Job had in the Lord. He is one “Which doeth great things and unsearchable.”⁶⁶ You can trust God. God knows what he is doing.

I don’t know about you, but a lot of times I get very frustrated by the things that I hear. I become very agitated by the things that I hear and the things that I see. And yet my Bible says in Psalm 37, “Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.”⁶⁷ The Lord has it all in control. God is on the throne.

And there is this third thought. We have looked at the past. We have looked at the present. Look at the text in Joel chapter two and verse 21. The Lord hath done great things. The Lord doeth great things and unsearchable, but Joel two verse 21 gives us this prospect. “Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”⁶⁸ He will do yet in the future great things.

Here is the expectation of the prospect. There is a prospect lying ahead. Future blessing is anticipated here. “The Lord will do great things.”⁶⁹

We don’t know what the future holds. None of us know if we will even be in church next Lord’s Day or if we will be on this earth next Lord’s Day. Only the Lord knows that. But the future for the believer, as one old preacher said, is as bright as the promises of God. The future for the believer is as bright as the promises of God.

Now in Joel chapter two this was God’s Word to his ancient people Israel. It held out the hope of blessing after times of great affliction and desolation and reproach. So as you look at the context in verse 20, the verse before this one at the end of the verse it says of the enemy, “Because he hath done great things.”⁷⁰ Do you see that? The enemy has done great things. The enemy has ravaged the land. But he says, “I want you to be encouraged.”

⁶⁴ Psalm 57:2

⁶⁵ Ephesians 1:11

⁶⁶ Job 5:9

⁶⁷ Psalm 37:1

⁶⁸ Joel 2:21

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Joel 2:20

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”⁷¹ Never mind what the enemy has done. They have done their great things in the land, but now the Lord is going to do great things in that same land. Times of prosperity and fruitfulness lay ahead.

Even down to verse 25 the Lord says, “I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten.”⁷² That is a wonderful text for the end of a year as well. It is a verse that many people have difficulty understanding. How can the Lord restore the years that locusts have eaten? And surely those years that are past and all that time that was wasted cannot be returned to us. That is true. But what the Lord is saying is this. “I can give you enough of a bumper harvest in one year to make up for all of those years of harvest that were lost.” That is what God is saying. That is what the Lord is teaching us there.

“I will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten,”⁷³ by giving you a great time of plenty. It will make up and more for everything that has been lost.

Do you ever think sometimes: I wish I had been saved earlier than I was? Did you ever think about that? I know people do think that. I wish I had come to the Lord earlier.

And we know that that is all in the providence and in the sovereignty of God and there is a sense in which it is true. Yes, we should have obeyed God’s command earlier. But here is the thing. You cannot turn back the clock. But what you can rejoice in is the fact that God can make you so fruitful now and in the future that he will make up for all that time that was lost. The Lord is able to do that.

There are some people of whom it is said they live fast because they live short. I think of some men of God who were like that. You know, I often have cause to wonder why the Lord would take a servant of his like Robert Murray McCheyne at 29 years of age. You would think, “Well, what wonderful things he could have accomplished for God on out into the future if the Lord had allowed him to live till 70 or 80 or 90.”

There was another great preacher in Scotland who preached in the Cathedral Church who died at the age 22. His name was Andrew Grey. I have a wonderful book by him on sanctification. Twenty-two and the Lord took him to heaven. But, you see, he lived short, but he lived fast and the Lord accomplished an awful lot through him in a short period of time. God is able to do that for us.

And notice here that this prospect was going to be based on something solid. It was based on the promise of God.

You see, this is the Word of God. “Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”⁷⁴

⁷¹ Joel 2:21

⁷² Joel 2:25

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Joel 2:21

If the preacher were to say that to you or the prophet were to say that to you it may or may not encourage you, but go to verse 19 and you will see that this is not the word of the preacher or of the prophet. This is the Word of the Lord himself.

“Yea, the LORD will answer and say unto his people.”⁷⁵ And here is what he says.

Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a reproach among the heathen: But I will remove far off from you the northern army...⁷⁶

And so on. “Fear not, O land,” verse 21, “be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”⁷⁷ This is the of the Lord. This is the promise of God. Therefore it is a promise to inspire confidence in God’s people. The Lord said he would do great things and he had power to perform what he promised to do.

And isn’t it the same for us tonight? Isn’t it the same for us? By faith we can lay hold upon the promises of God and therefore expect him to do great things in our own individual lives, in our families, in our nation and in our churches. We can expect the Lord to do that.

I ask you as I ask myself: Why may we not take this promise as applicable to our own work for the Lord here? Is there anything that says we can’t take this verse and plead it before God in prayer? Is there any reason why we can’t take this verse and plead it for the United States of America?

“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things.”⁷⁸

No matter about the things that the enemy has done. God is able to do greater things. He is able to turn back the machinations of the enemy. Oh, the enemies are out there, too. And they have done a lot of their deadly work and a lot of the evidence of their ravages are with us. But why may we not take this verse and plead it before God in prayer.

I believe that God encourages faith in this text because if you look at the context you will find that in the book of Joel there was plenty at that time to cause tremendous fear. There wasn’t much to be glad about. There wasn’t a lot to rejoice in. There was actually other devastation and dearth. And you can read about it in chapter one from verse nine to verse 12 in particular where it talks about the waste and how that even the priests, the Lord’s ministers were mourning. It was a time of terrible devastation.

⁷⁵ Joel 2:19

⁷⁶ Joel 2:19-20

⁷⁷ Joel 2:21

⁷⁸ Ibid.

And this that was spoken of this land, physically, is true of our land today spiritually. It is true of our land spiritually. But rejoice and be glad, they could, if they believed God's promise of blessing in days to come. He would do great things.

You know what the trouble with many of the Lord's people is? They don't believe in the ability of God to change things. They don't really believe it. They allow what they see to affect how they feel and they don't believe that God is able to change things. Or if they do believe he is able they somehow believe that he is not going to.

But this is a conditional promise. Look at the context from verse 16. God says, "Gather the people, sanctify the congregation,"⁷⁹ set them apart. "Assemble the elders, gather the children, and those that suck the breasts."⁸⁰ Yes, even the little ones in the house of God.

I have to say I am not a fan of children's church at all. That is just...I just feel that families should be in the house of God worshipping the Lord together. I like to see the little ones in the house of God. And little ones get saved under the preaching of the Word of God. They do.

You find whenever Moses was reading the law to the people they were all there with the little ones, the children.

When they stood for half a day when Ezra read from the law of the Lord you will see who all were there, the little ones, the children, the young people.

I like to see that because it is biblical. But notice here that they were to gather the people, even the little ones. And they were to put off the celebrations of the wedding. "Let the bridegroom go forth of his chamber, and the bride out of her closet."⁸¹ There are some more important things even than a marriage.

Look at verse 17.

Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare thy people, O LORD, and give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God? Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people.⁸²

When? When people learn to pray. The expectation of blessing would be based upon the promise of God, but that promise must be pleaded before God. That is why in the Free Church we believe in having prayer meetings. You know, it is not just because we like to have extra meetings that we decide to have a prayer meeting. The prayer meeting is important. The place of prayer is important because God has given us his promises that

⁷⁹ Joel 2:16

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Joel 2:17-18

we might plead them before him, not just as individuals in our lives and our own homes, but as a congregation, that the volume of prayer might go up to God, that he might bless his work.

And it was the same here. The people were to be gathered. The priests, the ministers of the Lord, God's servants, they were to weep. They were to pray. And this future blessing would come because of the promise of God, but also because of their prayer to God based on that promise.

Look at chapter one of Joel verses 13 and 14.

Gird yourselves, and lament, ye priests: howl, ye ministers of the altar: come, lie all night in sackcloth, ye ministers of my God: for the meat offering and the drink offering is withholden from the house of your God. Sanctify ye a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD your God, and cry unto the LORD.⁸³

God is calling his people to pray. He is calling his people to seek him.

Do you know that the expectation of God's blessing is always the expectation of a praying people? It is the expectation of a praying people, not a prayerless people. It is not that God will do great things. It is that God will do great things in answer to prayer. This is ever the Lord's way. This is God's way.

Matthew Henry said, "When God intends great mercy for his people, he first of all sets them a praying for it." It is a good statement, isn't it? Maybe that is why we don't see anything happen hardly in the work of God at times, because we don't seek the Lord for it. We have no reason, I say, to expect blessing that we do not seek the Lord for. We don't have a right to expect it.

You say, "Well, where does the Bible say that?"

It says it in a lot of places, but particularly I am reminded of the words of Ezekiel 36 and verse 37. If you read Ezekiel 36 you will find that it is a catalog of the blessings of God that he is going to give to his people. But this is how he brings it all together at the end when he talks about what he will do and what he will do and what he will do and what he will do. He says, Ezekiel 36 verse 37, "Thus saith the Lord GOD."⁸⁴ Not thus saith the pastor. It is not thus saith the minister or thus saith the presbytery. It is,

Thus saith the Lord GOD; I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them; I will increase them with men like a flock. As the holy flock, as the flock of Jerusalem in her solemn feasts⁸⁵

⁸³ Joel 1:13-14

⁸⁴ Ezekiel 36:37

⁸⁵ Ezekiel 36:37-38

And that, by the way, is an increase of quality and not just quantity because the beasts that were used in the solemn feasts in Jerusalem were the best of the flock. They were the quality animals. They weren't the animals with broken legs and with scabs and with tears and so on in their flesh. No, no. These were the quality animals.

God says, "I will increase them with men like a flock,"⁸⁶ like this quality flock, this holy flock. "So shall the waste cities be filled with flocks of men: and they shall know that I am the LORD."⁸⁷

How is it going to happen? Why is it going to happen? When the Lord is inquired of by his people.

We have no reason to expect blessing that we do not seek the Lord for. But when we pray then we can look ahead with great confidence. We can pray for blessings that are promised in the Word of God. God has done great things. He is doing great things and he will get do great things for us in answer to prayer. So let us pray and let us labor with expectation that the Lord will yet do even greater things than we have seen heretofore.

I don't think that we have ever yet seen what can really do if he decided to do it. There is no limitation with God. The only limitation is with us. The limitation is with God's people.

In Israel there was the rebuke that the Lord gave to them that they limited the Holy One of Israel. They limited God. They put God in a box. They said, "This is how God will work and we will not allow him to work outside of these parameters."

But who is to say that God cannot do greater things than you and I have ever even dreamed of as far as the work of God is concerned, not just in the Free Church, but in the Lord's work in general.

"I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them."⁸⁸

May God yet do great things for us as he has done great things for us and we thank him. May he yet do greater things in the days that lie ahead in his will.

Let's all pray.

⁸⁶ Ezekiel 36:37

⁸⁷ Ezekiel 36:38

⁸⁸ Ezekiel 36:37