

## **Introduction**

Abraham had quite a life. Think about God's call for him to leave home and go to a land unknown to him that God would give him. He went and lived in that land as a foreigner although it was promised him by the Lord. He traveled around and experienced ups and downs. Twice he got into trouble with locals because out of fear he lied about his relationship to his wife. He tried to answer God's promise of an heir through his own ingenuity and wound up fathering a child who would prove to be trouble for his legitimate descendants. Quite late in his years, God in his mercy miraculously provided the heir as the fruit of Sarah's womb. There was great rejoicing. However, the Lord tested him by instructing him to take his son Isaac and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham, in a staggering display of faith, did as he was instructed, believing he would return with a resurrected son. If you know the account, you know that at the last possible moment the Lord stayed the hand of Abraham and provided a substitute.

When we look to the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter of Hebrews, we find a list of men and women of great faith and we are told how their faith stands out. Abraham is included on the list but not because of his willingness to sacrifice Isaac. The thing that the chapter notes about Abraham is this: he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. He was looking beyond this world to heaven. It matters what you look forward to. What you look forward to in the future will greatly impact how you live and what kind of faith you possess in the present. The fact is that followers of Jesus Christ are like Abraham. We have been called to a land to which we have never been. We will wander this earth all our days, and only at our death will we ever get there. We look for the same city as Abraham. But glimpses of that city keep us going and fill us with a determination to trust and hope and obey in the most difficult of life's circumstances. We get such a glimpse in the concluding verses of the prophecy of God through his instrument Joel.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

In the first 8 verses of Joel 3, the prophet declares the intention of the Lord to restore his people and judge their enemies and his. Verses 9-21 depict a call to execute what he prophesied in the earlier section. In this way we are given a deeper understanding of God's judgment on the one hand and his restoration on the other. What happens in judgment happens in the valley and what happens in terms of restoration occurs in the mountains. Last time we looked at the four aspects of final judgment that the Lord is bringing upon the nations. This morning we turn our attention to restoration in the mountains.

## **Part II. Restoration in the Mountains.**

I told you last week how I am introducing my grandson Titus to tigers by showing him YouTube videos of tigers roaring. I was a little hesitant to do so at first because I was concerned that the sound might scare him. But you know, Titus never flinched. In fact he thrilled to hear that roar. We can crank up the volume and the sound is impressive. But Titus has just always seemed comfortable with it. Perhaps sitting in Grandad's lap surrounded by my arms and us enjoying the experience together has something to do with it.

It is true; a sound that can bring utter terror to one person can actually be a comfort to another. It is that way with the roar of the Lord. On the occasion of judgment, when the Lord roars, the heavens and the earth quake. But not so the people of the Lord. See the contrast in verse 16. "The

heavens and the earth quake, but the Lord is a refuge for his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel." And as such he secures them in his blessing as surely as he judges the nations. When the Lord judges the nations, he will secure his own people in an overflow of his mercy and kindness. The Lord highlights a number of the precious aspects of blessing for his people in their restoration.

### **I. Ineffable Knowledge.**

There is an ineffable knowledge that characterizes the blessing of God's people who are brought home to be with him on his holy mountain. The Lord himself assures us: "So you will know that I am the Lord your God who dwells in Zion."

In the context of Joel's prophecy, much is being made of the hostility of foreign peoples toward the people of the Lord. The Lord is judging the nations in behalf of his people. But when he judges the nations and roars with his voice and is a refuge to his people, those people will be comforted; they will experience the inexpressible assurance and riches in a way they have not known before that Yahweh, the Lord, is THEIR God. They own him and he owns them. The one true God whose voice speaks creation into existence, who now roars over the destruction of his enemies and shakes the heavens and the earth he has made, by that same roar says to his people, "You are mine and I am yours! Be assured! Know as you never before how true it is. Delight and rest in this knowledge, the joy and satisfaction of which is inexpressible, that I am the Lord, the Sovereign over all, who is a deliverer and a defender is your God."

This language recalls what the Lord said to Moses when the hostility against the Israelites came to a peak and Pharaoh had demanded increased responsibility but the same output. The Lord said to Moses, "I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God."

This knowledge is not the mere understanding of a fact or knowing a fact to be true. This is knowing a reality in a deeply experiential way. It is ineffable in that it is too deep for words, too sacred for adequate expression. It will draw worship and gratitude and love to flow from our hearts through our lips. The Lord may allow us to undergo troubles and afflictions and hardships and even persecution for a while, but he will deliver us. And for all those times when we will have cried out to the Lord wondering why, we will then know the peace of being under his rule and having him in our midst in Zion.

Knowing God is THE fundamentally satisfying and assuring reality for the child of God. In anticipation of knowing him more fully, we should press forward to know God better and better now. How? By walking closely with him every day in every circumstance. Do not leave God when you get up from your devotions. Study him. Study what his word tells about who he is. What are his attributes? What do they tell you about who he is. Seek. Seek him. Seek him and he will be found of you to know him better every single day.

### **II. Inviolable Holiness.**

A second aspect of God's future blessing of his people is that they will dwell securely in a place where holiness abounds and is not violated. In verse 17b, the Lord says, "And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers shall never come through it."

The city, as those in Joel's day saw, was overrun. It was abounding not with holiness but ungodliness. The people had turned from God, and the worship of the Lord had suffered. And their suffering in part came at the hands of strangers who invaded and sold them away from their land and divided it up for themselves. The tumult in the land was a result of the unholiness of God's people. It will not be so in the days of the final restoration. Jerusalem will be holy. And unholiness and strangers to God will not be there. Revelation 21 reaffirms this prophecy of the new Jerusalem: "nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

The Garden of Eden seemed perfect and so much about it was. But the holiness that was there was not inviolable. The holiness that was there was violated when Adam and Eve disobeyed God. Their joy and life was brought to a crashing halt. But it will not be so in the future Jerusalem. There will never be sin. Never will enemies enter to disturb the peace of purity.

No hate. No envy. No pride. No lies. No idolatry. No cheating. No cold-hearted worship. No adultery. No theft. No murder. No jealousy. No discouragement. No anxiety. The only fear will be the reverence of holy God.

Since it will be like that, why do we not strive even more earnestly for holiness in our lives right now? Why do we not seek for pure-heartedness like we seek our next breath?

### **III. Exuberant Joy.**

Look now at verse 18. "In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water, and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Shittim."

Here is a depiction of agricultural abundance. All of these aspects of life had been affected by the plague of locusts. There was no sweet wine. The streams were dry. The herds were perplexed and therefore milk was scarce. Along with all the agricultural scarcity was an absence of joy. Rather people wailed, lamented with sackcloth, mourned, were ashamed, and their gladness was dried up. The people were called to fast in sorrow. But in the future Jerusalem, as the Lord had said in Joel 2:25, he would restore the years that the locust had eaten and the people would eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord their God.

Just as the devastation brought sorrow and grief, the restoration of abundance would bring exuberant joy. Where their joy had been dried up; now it would flow in abundance. And that joy is from the Lord. Typologically here we see Jesus. From him comes the fountain of life that flows from the house of God. You see, Jesus is the fulfillment of the temple. He is the true temple of meeting where human beings enter into fellowship and the worship of God. Here a fountain flows from that house to bring the life that restores the joy of God's people. It corresponds to John 7:38 where Jesus said, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."

Christ Jesus is the source of our very life. He gives through his people the enlivening gift of the Holy Spirit to cause us to walk in his ways and see his face. And out of that life in Christ, God's people will know joy inexpressible and full of glory.

#### **IV. Impregnable Security.**

The Lord directs our attention back to the enemies of God's people, Egypt and Edom. Now they pose no threat whatsoever because the Lord will have brought these people to nothing. They will be a desolation for the violence done to the people of Judah. They will have been avenged for the blood of his people. So the point is that the security into which God will bring his people is a security where there will be none to disturb. The security will be impregnable. No more threats . . . EVER! No more danger . . . EVER! No more harm . . . EVER!

#### **V. Eternal Life.**

Aspect #5 of God's restoration is eternal life. The Lord says in verse 20, "But Judah shall be inhabited forever and Jerusalem to all generations."

Whether Joel's original audience understood the prophecy as eternal life or the eternal existence of the nation, we see clearly that the people inhabiting God's eternal city will themselves live forever. Whoever believes in God's son has eternal life. And this is eternal life, that they know God.

The New Testament clears up any wondering about the eternal existence of God's people. They will put on immortality and be fitted in glory to live forever and forever.

#### **VI. Satisfied Justice.**

God is an avenger. He brings justice upon the wicked. He returns evil for evil. And he avenges the blood of his people. "The Lord dwells in Zion" points out that he has made his dwelling with his people. He is the Lord and he identified with his people. And he will satisfy justice in his dealings with those who have shed the blood of his people. I don't know about you, but if I am to be avenged by the one who spoke creation into existence, I haven't got a chance. But if the one who has made himself an enemy to me is to be avenged by the one who spoke creation into existence, I haven't got a fear.

#### **Conclusion**

People, followers of Christ Jesus are NOT home in this world! This is not our home. And the things that this world seeks to be happy and joyous are fleeting and empty. Like Abraham we have a promise of a glorious future of a city built on the foundation of Jesus Christ whose builder and architect is God. And what he is building is eternal.

We live in this world as strangers and aliens and sojourners. We must remember this. And we must keep hope alive by remembering what lies ahead. Last week I underlined the importance of keeping final judgment in view. Today I am also urging you to keep in view the promise of eternity in the presence and under the security of the Lord. Those who repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ, for us he is our refuge and defense. Bearing these truths in mind is what equips us for living in these days and not just getting through them but triumphing through them. So, Christ follower, keep your eyes fixed on Christ and the hope set before you that soon and forever you will be with him.

And if you have not yet come to Christ, I urge to do so today. Repent of your sin and trust in his finished work on the cross to atone and reconcile and redeem.