

In the book of Deuteronomy, the people of Israel are just about to enter into the promised land. And as they're getting ready to go into the land, Moses is telling them all the things that God had told them before. And when he gets towards the end of his speech, he tells them about the blessings and the curses which God has promised will come upon his people. Blessings if they follow after him and do what he commands them to do, and curses if they do not. But the reason why that's important to bring up at this point is because in the Old Testament these kinds of blessings and curses are almost always pictured in very physical, earthly terms. The blessings promised to Israel that would come to them for their obedience, for their walking in the law, would be a good harvest, for example. Their cattle would grow and increase. Their families would become larger. All of these earthly, very physical kinds of things would come as a result of their following after the Lord their God. It's just the way that the Old Testament talks. It very often speaks in these very physical, earthly terms. And the same is true also of the curses that are promised to Israel for their disobedience, curses like a crop failure, curses like their cattle becoming less and less numerous, curses like their families becoming less and less numerous, curses like them being carried away into exile by a foreign people. All of these things would come upon them because of their sins. That's what Moses said would happen to them just before they went into the promised land.

Now, the book of Joel, which comes so much later than the book of Deuteronomy, has all of that in mind. Joel is writing with that speech from Moses that he gave to his people [in mind]. So when he comes to the curses that have fallen upon Israel, the curse of a grasshopper plague, all of these things, Joel says, came just as God said that they would. In fact, a grasshopper plague was one of the things God said would happen if they were not obedient to his law. Because of their sins, all of these things had come upon them.

And that is something we've been talking about for the past couple of weeks when we've been going through the book of Joel. God sends things into our lives, even sends disasters, as a way of calling us back to himself. Because that's really what the point of the curses was, to get them to turn away from their sins and to turn back towards God so that they might be saved. But then when Joel gets to this section that we just read this evening, he's talking about the blessings which will come upon Israel, and he uses these very earthly kinds of images. He's talking about the crops coming back and being restored. He's talking about the herds being brought back and increased. Everything is going to be given back to them that the Lord had taken away from them.

But I want you to understand what Joel is doing here. Because if we think only in very physical terms, we might misunderstand his whole point. The point of Joel in this passage is not to say that God is going to restore exactly what we've lost, as if we lost the crop and so we'll get a crop back. That's not his point. That's not how God works. What Joel is saying here to Israel is that all of the things that they had suffered, all of these things which had come upon them even from the Lord's hand, would not separate them from the love of God. God was going to raise them up again. He was going to restore to them all of the things that they had lost, but in a way far greater than they could even imagine. That's why you have the Old Testament using language of these abundant harvests, for example, that are almost supernatural. Like in Amos where the reaper is overtaking the planter because the crop is growing so fast. It's a way of the Old Testament showing God's love towards his people. And for us too, it shows us his love when we face equally uncertain circumstances.

Because God does not cast us off, Christians. God is going to take care of us no matter what. And that's exactly what he's talking about in verses twenty-six and twenty-seven of our reading. "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 again be put to shame. You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and

that I am the Lord your God, and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame." When God restores us, gives us back the things that he has taken away, he is showing to us that we are his, that he is the Lord our God, and we will not be put to shame in him, because God will never leave us or forsake us.

And Christians, I know that on all of our minds this evening are the uncertainties which we all face. We're dealing with a very uncertain, unstable future right now, because of things like the coronavirus. And even if it's not affecting us directly, it is affecting our world, and it is affecting everything that is going on around us. I mean, how many things have been canceled? How many things have been postponed? How many people have lost their jobs or lost money or even had poor health as a result of it? We face a very uncertain time, just like Israel faced a very uncertain time in the face of those grasshoppers that were destroying everything. And I will be perfectly blunt when I will say that all of this that is going on around us has been sent by the Lord. It is God's way of calling us back to himself. To turn away from the things of this world and to turn back towards him, because whatever we have suffered, whatever we are undergoing right now, all of it points us to him. And God will restore us again, because he is our Lord, and he will not cast us off.

So have you suffered or know of someone who suffered a loss of jobs? The Lord uses that as a way of calling us to himself, as a way of reminding us that he is the one who gives us all things. Because so often we can be caught up in the busyness of this life that we forget that it is God who gives us all things in the first place. But God will not leave you or forsake you, Christians. He's not going to leave you in the lurch and say, "Well, I guess you're on your own!" God will take care of you and provide for you even in these uncertain days to come.

And maybe you've lost money as a result of this. The stock markets seem to be crashing. The Lord is using that as a way of calling us back to himself too, to remind us that money is just money. You can't take it with you, right? It ultimately comes to nothing. Yes, it is something good. It is something that God has given us, and we need to carry out our lives. But God is a treasure far greater than anything this world can give us. God will go on even when all earthly treasures and all earthly money has passed into nothing. God will give you something far greater than what we have right now.

And maybe you're suffering ill health as a result of all this going on around us. That's also God's way of reminding us to turn towards him too, because sometimes it's only when we are on our back, on our sickbed, that we remember how much God is in control of all things. But God is not going to leave us there either, Christians. God will come and take care of us and provide for us something far greater than we can see even right now.

But perhaps most of all, if we were to even lose our lives as a result of all of this. Yes, it is difficult. Yes, it is painful. But God has promised for us something greater than anything this life can provide. Even if we must die, Christians, we are going to a life which knows no end. We are going to a comfort which knows no end. We are going to a joy which will go on forever. The things that we have lost will be given back to us, because God does not forsake his people.

So whatever we struggle with in this life, Christians, turn back towards God. Turn towards him and hold onto him, because that's why he does the things which he does. But also remember that he will not forsake you. He will not abandon you. He will take care of you no matter what. God is our fortress even in the midst of an uncertain future, because God is the one who has all things in his hands.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.