

The book of Joel has taught us many things over the past several weeks. The first thing that it has taught us is that the Lord is the Lord of heaven and earth, that all things are in his hands, and that nothing happens in this world apart from him. The second thing that it has taught us is that God also sends disaster. God sends the storm, because he has all things in his hands, but he does it as a way of calling us to repentance, of calling us back to himself. And the book of Joel has also taught us that God does not send these things as a way of destroying us, as a way of crushing us, as if that was his goal. No, he also restores us again, because he lifts us up and gives back to us the things that we have lost, because God does not forget his people in the midst of all of their troubles.

And in our reading for tonight, from Joel chapter 3, Joel is teaching us this lesson again in a new way. Because we've talked about disasters in terms of natural disasters. We've talked about disasters in terms of biological disasters, like this virus that's going around. We've even talked about disasters in terms of financial disasters. But what we haven't talked about very much is what Joel is talking about in chapter 3, when the world itself is opposed to us, the disaster of suffering at the hands of the unbelieving world, the world which hates God and therefore hates the church.

Because Christians, think of how much we suffer at the hands of the world. Now, I'm not talking about just having interpersonal squabbles or a neighbor you just don't get along with. I'm talking about those times when we genuinely suffer for the sake of God. Like in some parts of the world, such as in the Middle East or in Africa, where they are literally persecuted for being Christians, literally put to death because of their faith. And thank God that has not happened to us. But we also struggle with very real problems from the world as well. Because when the world comes to us and tells us to be quiet and tries to silence the voice of the Gospel, it stops at nothing to do just that. All of these things are aimed towards us as a way of getting us to be quiet. And there's no other time, Christians, that I think we cry out to God more than when we suffer at the hands of the world, crying out for justice, crying out for God to do something about it, just as Abel's blood cried out for vengeance after he had been murdered by his brother Cain.

Now in all of these things, Christians, Joel reminds us over and over again the same things that he has been teaching us all along. The first thing is that, yes, God is the Lord of all things. He has all things in his hands. And that doesn't mean that he's just Lord of the church. That doesn't mean that he's just Lord of the church and then the natural world. God is the Lord also of the nations. God is God of all things, and all things must listen to him. He is the one who raises up kingdoms. He is the one who puts them down again. The Lord determines the boundaries of the nations, and he has the reins of history in his hand. Nothing happens apart from God. Even the world must listen to him.

But that also means, as Joel shows us again and again, that God sends these things too as a way of disciplining his people, as a way of calling us to repentance. Even the things we suffer as Christians are meant to call us back to God. Because God raises up those nations to discipline his people, just as he did with his people Israel. Because God raised up Assyria to carry away his people Israel into exile because of their sins. God raised up the Babylonians to carry away his people Judah into exile because of their sins. God raised up the Persians to bring them back to the promised land. And God raised up the Greeks and the Romans to rule over the world at just the right time so that the Gospel of Jesus Christ could go out. All of these things happen because the Lord has sent them as a way of disciplining his people and calling them to repentance.

But God does not do these things to destroy us, and God does not forget the things that we have suffered. God does not raise them up to do evil things, as if he himself were evil. And he remembers the things that they have done against his people: how they stole his people away to become slaves to

the Greeks, and how they conquered the land over and over again. God sees, dear Christians, and God will restore again, because God does not forget his people. God raised up the Babylonians to punish the Assyrians for the evils that they had done. God raised up the Persians to punish the Babylonians for the evils that they had done. God raised up the Greeks to punish the Persians for the evils that they had done against his people. And God raised up the Romans to to punish the Persians and the Greeks for the things that they had done against his people, because God does not forget us in the midst of our trials. God will give us justice on the last day.

So Christians, the things which you are suffering right now, even if they have come from the hand of God, God has not forgotten you. God remembers the things that you have undergone. God remembers the things that you have suffered, and he uses these things for your good, because he will raise you up again. He will restore you again, because he loves you, and because he wants to take care of you and to lead you to life and not to death.

That's why I think verse 16 in our reading for tonight is such a wonderful way of summing up everything that Joel has been talking about. And it says, "The Lord roars from Zion, and he utters his voice from Jerusalem," because he is like a mighty lion, the great King over all things, who has all things in his powerful almighty hands. "And the heavens and the earth quake." He causes all of these things to happen for the benefit of his people. "But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel." God has not forgotten the things that have happened to you. God remembers. God will restore. And God will take care of you, because God does not send the storm in order to crush you, but to save you.

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