

Sermon 31st December 2017

Joel 2: 28-32

“And afterward, 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.

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

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, among the survivors whom the Lord calls.”

As we come to the end of another year I want to look this morning at something which is not often preached on today Because it is something that most people including many Christians do not want to think or hear about. That is the “Great and dreadful day of the Lord”

We so often live our lives as if God is some nebulous father figure that we can turn to when we are in trouble or if we are ill or when we need something really badly. God, of course, can and does answer those prayers but God is so much more than that.

God is our Creator, our Sustainer, our ever present help in time of need, but above and beyond that He desires that we live in intimate relationship with Him, in fellowship with one another as His people and perhaps most importantly that we take the Good News of Jesus to those who do not yet know Him.

Why does He want us to do this? Because we are told in 2 Peter 2:9

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

Great, you might say, really encouraging but rather than stop there we need to read the next verse as well:

“ BUT the day of the Lord (*the great and dreadful day of the Lord. Joel 2:31*) will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.”

Peter continues the chapter urging God’s followers to live Godly lives for He has promised eternal life and a new heaven and earth to those who call sincerely on His name. Note sincerely.

In John 3:16 we are told:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in Him SHALL NOT PERISH but have eternal life.”

Matthew Henry in his commentary on this passage of Joel says this:

“Those that sincerely call upon the Lord; *Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord* (whether Jew or Gentile) *shall be delivered* (Rom 10:13). This calling on God supposes knowledge of Him, faith in Him, desire towards Him, dependence on Him and a conscientious obedience to Him; for without that crying, *Lord, Lord!*, will not stand us in any stead.

So it's pretty clear, I think, that unless we have a real and living relationship with God through Jesus then it will be no good us shouting out, “Lord, Lord!” because as we're told in Matt 25: 31.

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with him, He will sit on His throne in heavenly glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on His right and the goats on His left.”

He then, as I'm sure you know, tells the sheep on the right to take their inheritance in the kingdom because they fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, gave hospitality to strangers, gave clothes to the needy, looked after the sick and visited those in prison.

The goats on the left did none of these and were condemned to eternal punishment whilst the righteous to eternal life.

There are several references to God's judgement day elsewhere in the Bible: Matt 10:14,15; Acts 17:31; Heb 10:26,27; and others which you can look up yourselves if you desire.

So why have I chosen today to speak on what many regard as a subject we should perhaps pass by on because it is difficult to believe that God would allow that to happen.

Firstly, and I do not say this lightly, because God told me too. It is not a subject I would have necessarily chosen to speak on but I believe God wants us to look at it as we approach a new year so that we can realise the importance of reaching those who don't yet know God as Saviour because there are real consequences on judgement day for those who have not accepted God as Saviour through Jesus.

Secondly because it is Scriptural and as Christians we should be looking at the whole canon of Scripture not just the parts which appeal to us, tempting as that may be. If this subject were confined to a few sentences in one chapter in one book perhaps it might be less important, although not necessarily. But God's judgement and the consequences of rejecting Him are found throughout the Old and New Testaments so I guess it's important to Him that we read it, hear it and make it known to those around us.

Thirdly, and this follows on really from the second point, it reveals some of God's character to us. We will never, this side of eternity, fully understand who God is, our brains cannot cope with the enormity of that, but we can see glimpses of who He is.

It might be very difficult for us to accept that a loving, merciful heavenly Father who is full of grace could allow individuals to end up in eternal separation from God but we need to look at the whole picture to see actually how much it pains God to see anyone end up in that position.

Firstly when God created us He made the decision to give us free will rather than making us robotic minions who would unquestioningly follow every command given. He knew that that would cause Him problems but He wanted people to follow Him voluntarily by their own choice so that He could have a real and loving relationship with Him rather than an enforced one. As we know problems did follow and with the fall of Adam and Eve it took the sacrifice of His one and only Son Jesus to restore our relationship with Him that cost Him a great deal.

Secondly God is patient and persistent, as we heard earlier in 2 Peter 2:9,

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

It is God’s desire that all of the people He created come to repentance by accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour; but He also knows that because He gave us free will not everyone will make that decision, but it is their decision to make, not influenced in any way by God, much as their decision may grieve Him.

We are told in Math 24:14;

“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.”

So God will not wait forever, and indeed we are promised that Jesus will return and take His people to be with him, but is that time approaching? I don’t know! There are those who tell us we are in the end times and that what is happening in the world today are confirmation of the prophecies in the Bible. Perhaps they are, or not, only God knows the hour and the time but our responsibility is as it has always been as given to us in Matt 28:18,

“Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

As we approach a new year I trust that by looking a little more closely at the consequences of not accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour it will spur us on in 2018 to take those opportunities that God gives us to speak individually to those who don’t yet know Jesus as Saviour and sow seeds for God to nurture in their lives, and as a church to reach out to those around us in whatever way God directs to bring them into a relationship with Him or at least to bring them into this place, God’s house in order that they may hear the Good News and make an informed choice for themselves.

Please pray for John, for Nik and myself as we seek God’s leading for NCF for 2018 and please pray for God to bring you revelation of His plans and purposes that you can bring to the Council meeting in February or direct to us earlier if you are lead to for its not about the three of us but

about the body of Christ which is NCF and that includes every single one of you for as we are told
in Joel:

**“Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will
see visions, even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.**

AMEN.