

8/2/15

Joel 2:11-13

## The God Who Cares

*The Lord utters his voice  
before his army,  
for his camp is exceedingly great;  
he who executes his word is powerful.  
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;  
who can endure it?*

**12** *“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”*  
*Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
and he relents over disaster.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Can there be any question in any sane person's mind, whether or not Planned Parenthood has participated in and supported what is commensurate into a horror film come-to-life?

This is not the forum for me to recount all the atrocities perpetuated in the name of making a dollar at Planned Parenthood. We stand against that as an atrocity. But as I've considered these things, I've thought about the people who work for Planned Parenthood and the people who support it and I wonder what they believe about God.

Assuming they are not all atheists --and many claim to be Christian and maybe even go to church-- it makes you wonder: what kind of God do you believe in that says that's okay? What's on these videos is ok? What God do you believe in? It's not the God of the Bible. Don't you wonder what do they believe that they could actually think that is okay?

And that's when it hit me.

There are people sitting at Hickory Grove who hate Planned Parenthood but who are prideful and lustful people who drink too much and cuss too much. Men cheat on their wives and wives are doing the same. Guys are addicted to pornography and girls are doing the same or worse. And yet most would say we believe in God, that we believe in the God of the Bible, the God of the Bible, the Old Testament *and* the New Testament. There are many ways to describe this God of the Bible but in the middle of this little book of judgment called Joel, we find that:

**The God on the Bible is a God Who Cares**

Let me show you how He cares.

### **He Cares Enough to Pursue**

You have to sort of dig for this in Joel. This little book is the story of God using a horde of insects called locusts to punish his people for some sin. And listen to the description in v. 3 & 4 (Read) then you get to v. 11 and you find out this seemingly natural disaster is at the hand of God that is sovereign over his creation and he is using his creation to get the attention of the crown jewel of his creation – Mankind. He pursues sinners not with determined hatred but a providential purpose. In the text there is this inevitability, this inescapability about God. Isn't that what the Psalmist meant in Psalm 139:1-11 when he said:

*O LORD, you have searched me and known me!*  
*<sup>2</sup> You know when I sit down and when I rise up;*  
*you discern my thoughts from afar.*  
*<sup>3</sup> You search out my path and my lying down*  
*and are acquainted with all my ways.*  
*<sup>4</sup> Even before a word is on my tongue,*  
*behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.*  
*<sup>5</sup> You hem me in, behind and before,*  
*and lay your hand upon me.*  
*<sup>6</sup> Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;*  
*it is high; I cannot attain it.*

*<sup>7</sup> Where shall I go from your Spirit?*  
*Or where shall I flee from your presence?*  
*<sup>8</sup> If I ascend to heaven, you are there!*  
*If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!*  
*<sup>9</sup> If I take the wings of the morning*  
*and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*  
*<sup>10</sup> even there your hand shall lead me,*  
*and your right hand shall hold me.*  
*<sup>11</sup> If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,*  
*and the light about me be night,"*

Here's a question: could it be that all of these "random" events of your life are not random at all but are the hard providences of a God, a Loving God, who is pursuing you and making it so that, as Saint Augustine said, your heart is not content until it's content in Christ? The God of the Bible is the God who cares. He cares enough to pursue. Also

### **He Cares Enough to Judge Sin**

That's what this is about: God's people being judged for some unnamed sin. It gives us a chance to fill in the blank. Whatever the sin is, it calls for judgment. It's what the Old

Testament law points to. It tells us we are sinners and it's that awareness that moves us to seek a remedy.

Look, you don't call the doctor if you don't know you're sick. God's judgement is the underside of his love and the Cross of Christ is the ultimate display of God Judging and punishing sin while loving and reconciling sinners. It's why the Cross of Jesus is the centerpiece of our faith. At the cross, wrath of God is satisfied and the love of God is multiplied and sinners are reconciled. The worst phrase that can ever be uttered about sinners is in Romans 1. Three times Paul said "God gave them over".

The God of the Bible is the God Who Cares.

He Cares Enough to Pursue

He Cares Enough to Judge Sin

### **He Cares Enough to Give a Second Chance**

To understand this point you've got to read v. 11 and the first part of v. 12 together

*The Lord utters his voice  
before his army,  
for his camp is exceedingly great;  
he who executes his word is powerful.  
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;  
who can endure it?*

**12** "Yet even now,"

See that little phrase in v. 12, "Yet even now"? That's the Lord saying your sin is such that it calls for judgment, a judgment you fully deserve. But if you turn from it (your sin), I'll give you another chance at life.

The three words "Yet even now" in the Old Testament are equivalent to the two words "But God" in the New Testament. The little phrase is found in one of the most life-changing paragraphs in the New Testament in Ephesians 2:15: "And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. **But God**, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—"

"Yet Even Now" is God saying to you "You are not too far gone. Hope is not lost. Your life is not over. Your future is not ruined. Addiction does not define you. Heartbreak won't ruin you. And by God's grace, your sin doesn't have to imprison you." The God of the Bible is the God who cares enough to give a second chance. The Bible is a story of broken people being pursued, loved and restored by a grace-filled God. He cares enough to give a second chance.

## He Cares Enough Not to Play Games

Let me show you what I mean by that. When you read v. 12 and the first part of v. 13 you can get a feel for what genuine Biblical repentance looks like.

*“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”  
Return to the Lord your God,  
for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;*

What does a life that honors God look like? Instead of *playing* Christian, how do I *live* like one? I think you have a really good description of it right here.

### **A Yielded Life**

In v. 12 it reads "Return to me with all of your heart." This is speaking to the man or woman who is tired of riding a fence with one foot in the world and one foot in God. This is to the man who sees what is at stake and will say to God, "Do whatever it takes to make me fully yours." This is for the life patterned after Jesus' prayer to His Father, "Not my will but your will be done." This is for a surrendered and committed life. There is no such thing as a non-practicing Christian.

### **A Learning Life**

Isn't that what a disciple is? One who is learning and growing and following. In v. 12, the prophet writes, "Return to me with all your heart – with fasting and weeping and mourning." Those three things – fasting, weeping and mourning – are Old Testament rituals performed when someone dies. Fasting, weeping, mourning comprise a funeral practice. It's a growing understanding of the depth of your alienation and sin outside Christ, that we are dead in sin.

We don't need "rules for better living" or "tips to handle anger" or "advice on dealing with criticism" or "techniques for saving money." We are dead in sin and we need to be made alive together with Christ. We need what Jesus called being "born again," and it starts with repentance, a radical change, a renouncing of your sin and a full surrender to God. Aren't you ready for that? Here's your God in v. 13.

- Gracious
- Merciful
- Slow to Anger
- Abounding in steadfast love

All found in Christ.

He cares enough to send Christ to die in the place of sinners.

*(Pastor Prays)*