

Joel Lesson 23

Joel 2:26, Continued

Joel 2:26 – “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.

As we saw last week, verse 26 describes the great blessings that would follow the restoration in verse 25. And the first great blessing is that “you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied.”

And, as we also saw last week, I think we should view that blessing on two levels – the surface level of physical food and the deeper level of spiritual food. I think we saw Jesus in verse 23, and so we should not be surprised this week to see spiritual blessings in verse 26.

But some commentaries disagree. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about locusts. They tell us that the book of Joel is just a book about lost crops and a terrible drought. And so they tell us that Joel is just promising physical rain and physical crops to satisfy a physical hunger.

But I think those commentaries are completely wrong. Why? Because of what Peter tells us in Acts 2.

Right now we are looking at Joel 2:26, but we know with certainty that Joel 2:28 will be telling us about the eternal kingdom of Christ because that is what Peter tells us in Acts 2:16. And that fact alone tells us that Joel is **not** just focused on the physical, despite what many commentaries would have us believe. Joel is **not** just a textbook about locusts!

Let's look again at the blessings promised in verse 26. **"You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied."** Does that statement remind us of anything?

John 7:37-39 – On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, **"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.** Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" **Now this he said about the Spirit,** whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Here in Joel 2, we see the rain pouring down, and we see great blessings from God. And what will see at the end of Joel 2? We will see the Spirit of God being poured out, and we will see great blessings from God.

And how should the people respond to those great blessings from God? The answer is the same no

matter which great blessings from God are being received, and verse 26 gives us that answer.

**“You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the LORD your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.”**

The proper response from people who have been **blessed** by God is to **praise** God.

The Hebrew word “halal” translated “praise” in verse 26 means to speak with approval and admiration about God and to affirm his greatness and goodness with an attitude of delight and rejoicing.

One commentary makes the interesting point that when the Hebrew verb “halal” is used in the Old Testament, it is almost always used in the plural, as it is in “hallelujah,” which is the **plural** imperative of the verb halal – praise **you all** the Lord!

The frequent use of the plural form suggests that this praise is most often a congregational activity. Yes, we can and should praise God when we are alone, but the praise that we find most often in the Bible is the collective praise of God’s people when they are together praising and worshiping God.

There is an interesting link between the word “wondrously” in verse 26 and something we saw when we

studied the book of Zechariah. The same Hebrew word translated “wondrously” in verse 26 is found twice in Zechariah 8:6.

Zechariah 8:6 – Thus says the LORD of hosts: If it is **marvelous** in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be **marvelous** in my sight, declares the LORD of hosts?

Zechariah and Joel have something in common – some commentaries find nothing about Christ or his church in either book.

But, of course, we know that those commentaries are wrong. How do we know that? We know that because the New Testament quotes both Joel and Zechariah and confirms that they both contain prophecies about Jesus.

But can we prove that fact from the Old Testament alone? Did the people who first heard these prophecies know that the prophecies were about more than just their own current situation? Yes, I think they did. And I think Zechariah 8:6 proves that they did by using the same word that we find here in Joel 2:26.

If those prophecies in Zechariah were about only finishing the temple and repopulating the city of Jerusalem, then no one listening to those prophecies would have thought them farfetched. The tem-

ple was already under construction, and people were already moving back into the city.

But Zechariah 8:6 tells us that the people had a different reaction to those prophecies. They seem to have thought that the prophecies were so farfetched that not even God would be able to make them happen! And because of that attitude, the people receive a sharp rebuke in Zechariah 8:6.

God asks them if what seemed “marvelous” in human eyes would actually prove “marvelous” in his own sight? In other words, should an action be considered too difficult for God to accomplish simply because the action is too difficult for man to accomplish or even to imagine?

And here in verse 26 we find that same word: God has dealt **wondrously** with his people. Is that verse just talking about locusts? No, it is not – no more than Zechariah was just talking about a local construction project.

Both Joel and Zechariah were looking down the years to the day when Christ would come to save his people and establish his kingdom. That is what the word “wondrous” tells us.

Psal̄m 40:5 – You have multiplied, O LORD my God, your **wondrous** deeds and your thoughts toward us; none can compare with you! I

will proclaim and tell of them, yet they are more than can be told.

Joel is telling us about Christ. Joel is telling us about the church of Christ. "Praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you!"

Verse 26 continues: **"And my people shall never again be put to shame."**

Again, I think we are seeing a promise here that should be viewed on two levels.

First, the people hearing Joel would not be ashamed. Why not? Because it would be clear to all that God had not abandoned them.

In ancient times, when one nation was conquered by another nation, the assumption was that the god or gods of the first nation were just not as powerful as the god or gods of the conquering nation. And so, when the people of Israel were carried off into exile, the surrounding nations thought either that God had abandoned them or that God had been defeated. And that attitude from their enemies caused the people to be put to shame.

Psalms 25:2 – O my God, in you I trust; let me not be put to **shame**; let not my enemies exult over me.

Jeremiah 9:19 – For a sound of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How we are ruined! We

are utterly **shamed**, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings.'

But the promise here is that such shame would not happen. If the people repented, then the invasion would be stopped, and the shame would not occur.

But this promise is more than that. The promise here goes beyond telling them that this shame would not happen. The promise in verse 26 is that this shame would **never** happen again. "And my people shall **never again** be put to shame."

That part of the promise tells us that we are not just looking at Babylon or whatever current enemy was threatening the people. Instead, we are looking at **all** such enemies that would **ever** threaten the people of God. And, of course, that promise extends all the way to the church – the eternal kingdom of Christ that was coming and that would outlast and destroy all earthly kingdoms.

And how do we know that for sure? We know that for sure when we read the New Testament.

1 Peter 2:6 – For it stands in Scripture: "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him **will not be put to shame.**"

Romans 10:11 – For the Scripture says,
“Everyone who believes in him **will not be
put to shame.**”

This promise in Joel 2:26 goes far beyond the days of Joel. This great promise is a promise for the faithful people of God under the rule of Christ.

And the promise is not just that we will win the **next** battle – the promise is that we will win **every** battle. “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.”

And how will that happen? That’s the wrong question. Instead, we should be asking how could that not happen! Remember who is fighting for us!

Revelation 19:11-16 – Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe

and on his thigh he has a name written,
King of kings and Lord of lords.

That is why we know that “everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” How could it be otherwise?

And just how important is that great promise? It is so important that God repeats it in the very next verse!

Joel 2:27

Joel 2:27 – 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.

Who are God’s people? How do we know?

The answer to that question here is that the people would know because of what God had done for them.

God would save them, God would restore them, and God would do wondrous things for them. And, as a result, the people would know that God was in their midst. They would know that they are God’s people because of what God had done for them.

And today? How can we know that we are God’s people?

The answer is the same. God has saved us, God has restored us, and God has done wondrous things for us. And, as a result, we know that God is in our midst. We know that we are God's people because of what God has done for us.

Isn't that what John tells us? Doesn't John tell us that we know we are God's people because God has saved us and restored us and done wondrous things for us?

1 John 3:9-10 – No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, **because he has been born of God. By this it is evident who are the children of God,** and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.

1 John 3:23-24 – And this is his commandment, that we believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him. **And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.**

1 John 4:13-14 – **By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.** And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

And don't we know that God is in our midst? Haven't we been "built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22)? Isn't the church "the household of God" (1 Timothy 3:15)? And don't we know that we have been added to that church (Acts 2:47) after we have obeyed the gospel of Christ (Acts 2:38)?

Joel 2:27 is as much a promise for us (as *spiritual* Israel) as it was for the people of Joel's day (as *physical* Israel). "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."

And that knowledge runs both ways. We know that we are God's people, and God knows that we are his people.

2 Timothy 2:19 – But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: **"The Lord knows those who are his,"** and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

"The Lord knows those who are his." Where does that quote come from? The most likely source is the rebellion of Korah in Numbers 16.

Numbers 16:3–5 – They assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron and said to them, "You have gone too far! **For all in the congregation are holy, ev-**

every one of them, and the LORD is among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?" When Moses heard it, he fell on his face, and he said to Korah and all his company, "In the morning **the LORD will show who is his**, and who is holy, and will bring him near to him. The one whom he chooses he will bring near to him."

The spirit of Korah is still alive and well in the world today – "all in the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them." Korah may have believed that was true, but that was not true. Instead, what was true then and what is true today is that "the Lord knows those who are his."

Matthew 7:21 – **Not everyone** who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but** the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

2 Timothy 2:19 – But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "**The Lord knows those who are his**," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."

Let's pause and look at a particular word in that verse we just read from 2 Timothy – the word "seal." "But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this **seal**: The Lord knows those who are his."

We have look at some parallels between Joel and Zechariah – let's look at another one. Zechariah, like Joel, also tells us about the church.

Zechariah 3:9 – For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, **I will engrave its inscription**, declares the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

As we said when we studied that verse in our previous classes on Zechariah, that stone is the church. It is the same stone that Daniel told us about in Daniel 2.

And what does Zechariah tell us that God has done with that stone? God has engraved something on it. "I will engrave its inscription, declares the LORD of hosts."

What has God engraved on the church?

Let me first ask a related question: What do we do when we have something important that we don't want to lose? Don't we write our name on it?

I think that is what we are seeing here with this engraved stone. I think God is writing his name on something that belongs to him and that is precious to him.

The New Testament tells us repeatedly that God has written his name on us.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 – And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his **seal** on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

Ephesians 1:13-14 – In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were **sealed** with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 4:30 – And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were **sealed** for the day of redemption.

Revelation 9:4 – They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the **seal** of God on their foreheads.

God has written his name on us. God has put his seal on us – we are his people. That seal is an indication of ownership. God sets his seal upon us to show that we belong to him. We are precious to him.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 – Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God?

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

God bought us, and God wrote his name on us.

So, who are God's people?

That is a question that runs all throughout the Bible. What is the identity of God's people? I think we are seeing that issue here in Joel 2:27, and I think we also see that issue in a parallel passage from Isaiah.

Isaiah 44:3-5 – For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; **I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring,** and my blessing on your descendants. They shall spring up among the grass like willows by flowing streams. **This one will say, 'I am the LORD's,' another will call on the name of Jacob, and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel."**

I will pour my Spirit upon your offspring ... and another will write on his hand, 'The LORD's.'

How can I know that I belong to God? How does God know that I belong to him? The answer to each is the same – the Holy Spirit.

1 John 4:13 – **By this we know** that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

Romans 8:16 – The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

And how does the Holy Spirit do that for us today? Is it through some sort of special miraculous modern-day revelation? No, it is not.

Let's think about Acts 2 again. At the beginning of that chapter, Peter began speaking to people who had crucified Christ. But at the end of that chapter, some of those people had been added to the church of Christ. They had been saved – and they knew they had been saved.

How did they know? They knew they were saved because they knew that they had done what Peter had told them to do. And who told Peter? Who told Peter what those people needed to do? The Holy Spirit.

Luke 12:11–12 – And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

The Holy Spirit taught Peter, and then Peter taught his listeners.

And today? Is the Holy Spirit still teaching us what to say today? Yes, he is – but he is doing

that today **only** through the unchanging written word of God – the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16 – All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for **teaching**, for **reproof**, for **correction**, and for **training** in righteousness, that the man of God may be **complete**, equipped for **every** good work.

So how did the people in Acts 2 know they were saved? How do we know today that we are saved? The answer to each question is the same – the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit through Peter told the people in Acts 2 what they had to do, and the Holy Spirit through the Bible tells us what we must do.

We can know with certainty we are saved because we can know with certainty that we have obeyed the gospel. The people in Acts 2 did not need a miracle to know that – and neither do we.

But what if I have not obeyed the gospel, but I think I am saved anyway? John answers that question.

1 John 2:3-5 – And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments. **Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar**, and the truth is not in him...

The reason why I can know that I am a child of God is because I can know whether or not I have done what the Bible tells me that I must do to become a child of God.

And what must I do? Let's listen as the Holy Spirit answers that question.

Acts 2:38 – And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

Have I done that, or have I not? Have I obeyed the gospel, or have I not? Am I a child of God, or am I not? I can **know** the answers to those questions.

And so where are we with verse 27?

The people are being told what would happen if they repented and obeyed God, and verse 27 is the culmination of that description:

“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.”

And the same is true today – that is also what happens when we repent and obey the gospel. God dwells in our midst, we know that we are his people, and God knows that we are his people. And we will

never be put to shame because we are victorious in Christ!

Well, that would certainly have been a happy ending for the people of God in Joel's day if they had repented and returned to God.

But what if they did not repent? What if they persisted in their rebellion? Then they would not receive these great blessings.

But would anybody receive them? Yes, they would.

God had long before promised Abraham that he would bless the entire world through Abraham's seed. And that great blessing was going to happen whether or not Joel's listeners repented and turned back to God. One way or another, God was going to send the Messiah to bless the entire world.

And that great blessing is what we see in the closing verses of Joel 2. Whatever happened with the people of Joel's day – whether they repented or did not repent – God turns next to what he was going to do afterward.

Joel 2:28

Joel 2:28 – “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters

shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

How many chapters are there in the book of Joel?
And what chapter are we in now?

If you look at the Bible that you brought today, I suspect the answers are 3 and 2 – there are 3 chapters in Joel, and we are in chapter 2.

But if you look at the Bible that I brought today (and which is also shown on the Handout for Lesson 23), then the answers are 4 and 3 – there are 4 chapters in Joel, and we just started chapter 3. Why the difference?

Several of our handouts, including the one from last week, has shown excerpts of the Hebrew text of Joel in Leningrad Codex of AD 1008. As you will notice on those handouts, there is a lack of chapter and verse divisions in that Hebrew text – and that is the way things were from the day they were first written down up until around 1227, when the chapter divisions that we use today were added. The verse numbers that we use were added around 1555.

Over the years, two standardized chapter and verse divisions were created – one set for the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Septuagint (both of which are only the Old Testament, of course), and another

set for the Latin Vulgate (which contains both the Old and New Testaments).

And why is that difference important?

When you open a commentary on Joel or one of the other prophets listed on the Handout, that commentary may refer to both numbering systems. For example, a commentary on Joel 2:28 may refer to Joel 3:1 in parentheses. And some of the sources may use only the Hebrew system – for example, the program I use to locate verses in the Leningrad Codex uses only the Hebrew system. We will continue to use the numbering system in the ESV, but it can be very helpful at times to be aware of the other system.

And let me say one more thing about the *Jerusalem Bible* before we move on. That version of the Bible is of interest, not only to Bible readers, but also to readers of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*! Why? Because the person who translated the book of Jonah in the Jerusalem Bible was none other than J. R. R. Tolkien (my favorite author)!

Now that we have reached verse 28, we have reached a section of Joel that is by any measure one of the great texts of the Bible. And, yes, they are all great – but there is only one Old Testament passage so great that Peter quoted it at the very beginning of the first gospel sermon, which was

preached on the day that the eternal kingdom of Christ was established in Jerusalem!

But, as is so often the case, greatness is accompanied by controversy. These final five verses of Joel 2 are very controversial, both in and out of the church – and we will be faced with many hard questions, some of which we may be able to answer definitively, but others of which we will likely have to be content with a range of possible answers.

And how can I be so sure that is where we will end up? Because that is where many, many others before us have ended up!

One of the things I have done to prepare for these lessons is to read every article I could find in the *Firm Foundation* about the Holy Spirit. The earliest article I found was written in 1890!

And what did I discover after reading all of those articles? I discovered that there is very broad range of opinions in the church about the Holy Spirit – and it seems that has always been true, at least if we start in 1890.

And while some might find that difference of opinion discouraging, I do not. Instead, I am encouraged by how charitable and respectful most of

those articles were to those with different opinions about this very difficult subject.

I am also encouraged because our differences of opinion about the Holy Spirit prove that something we claim is true about us is in fact true – we do not have a human creed! There is no human authority telling us what to believe. Instead, we are relying only on God's word – and so we can and do have different opinions on questions not directly answered in God's word.

But I also discovered that there are some things about the Holy Spirit about which we in the church almost all agree. We may not all agree about what the Holy Spirit does **after** we are saved (the role of the Spirit in **sanctification**), but I think most of us agree about what the Holy Spirit does **before** we are saved (the role of the Spirit in **justification**). And that is also encouraging.

If we examine carefully what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit, I think we will find some things about which we can and must all agree. But I also think we will find some things about which we can have different opinions.

Let's start with a statement for which I suspect we all agree: There are some very hard questions about the Holy Spirit!

And if we were to study all of those questions, we would have quite a long road ahead of us! But that is not our task here. Instead, our task here is to study only those issues about the Holy Spirit that we need to consider in our quest to understand the closing verses of Joel 2.

But what approach should we take in our study of these difficult verses? We know that Acts 2 has some vital information for us about these verses – how should we use that vital information? Should we start with Acts 2?

I have thought a great deal about that question, and I have decided that the best approach is not to **start** with Acts 2 – but rather to **end** with Acts 2. We today cannot read Joel 2 without thinking about Acts 2, but that was not true for Joel's original listeners. They didn't have Acts 2! How did they understand Joel 2? Or, more to the point, how were they intended to understand Joel 2?

I think we should start with that question in our study of these closing verses of Joel 2, and then afterward we can circle back and determine what Acts 2 teaches us about those same verses.

So, here is my proposed plan. Let's first study of Joel 2:28–32 from the perspective of **Joel's** listeners in Joel 2. And then, after we have done that, let's flip over to Acts 2, and study those

same verses from Joel 2 from the perspective of **Peter's** listeners in Acts 2.