

Driftless Reflections with Pastor Dave

Word Study

October 24, 2020 | Joel 2:28-32; Colossians 1:15-20

THEME

All people are invited into God's Kingdom.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO KNOW?

We want to believe that it is possible that God is way ahead of us, working in and through all people in very surprising ways, and through people that might surprise us.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO?

We want to live and act in such a way that the world becomes a place with no barriers, no divisions, and no injustice. We want to live and act in such a way that the followers of Jesus become a people without judgment, hatred, or hypocrisy.

INTRODUCTION

The question is something like this: When we pray "thy Kingdom come," what are we praying for, and what should we expect? Are we even able to comprehend what we're saying, or have we placed God "in a box?" Put another way, when we read in Joel that God is going to pour out his spirit on all flesh, what does "all flesh" mean? If this time, right now, is characterized by prophesy, dreams and visions by the young and old, men and women, what does that look like?

PRAY

Father God, we admit that we have come to contain you as a God for just us, and we have boxed you in and limited you in many ways. We have a narrow view of your power and influence. We have made you in our image in order to keep you for ourselves. Forgive us. Surprise us with your expansive and mysterious love. Help us to imagine your greatness and wonder at your mercy for all people. Amen.

CONTEXT FOR JOEL

The book of Joel, written between 835 and 796 B.C., is a prophetic warning of God's impending judgment on sin with a plea to return to God. The people to whom Joel's writing is directed have become complacent in their prosperity and have begun to take God for granted. They have become mired in self-centeredness and idolatry. Joel warns them that this kind of lifestyle inevitably brings God's judgment. There are three broad themes in this short book: punishment, forgiveness, and the promise of the Holy Spirit.

REFLECTION How can prosperity make people complacent? What are some modern examples of how we become mired in self-centeredness and idolatry?

The book opens with a description of a terrible plague of locusts that covers the land and obliterates the crops. For a people dependent on the successful harvest of crops, locusts would be the worst possible catastrophe, and, in the minds of the original audience, the images Joel lays out would be horrifying. A locust plague would be as devastating as an invading army. Locusts gather in swarms too great to count and fly several feet above the ground, seeming to darken the sun as they pass by. When they land, they devour almost every piece of vegetation, covering everything in their path. A quick perusal through the first chapter of Joel is filled with riveting language of apathy in the face of destruction.

REFLECTION How can people become apathetic in the face of destruction? Where have we seen this image before?

(Read Joel 2:28-32.) Joel wants to be clear about God's judgment and grace, which always go hand in hand.

Joel 2:28-32 ESV "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. 29 Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit. 30 "And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. 32 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

REFLECTION Given God's power and mercy, why would we want to live outside of that, and go on our own?

This passage from Joel 2 is an oracle of promise pointing to a future redeemed and restored by God. The term "afterward" in verse 28 points to a time beyond the immediate restoration of blessing indicated in the preceding prophecy; a double promise of God's abundant grace. This will be a period marked by the promise of the Holy Spirit. God speaks into the immanence of plague with the promise of grace.

REFLECTION Look at the oracle of promise again and list the promises that point to grace. Have you ever experienced a time when judgment and grace went hand in hand?

CONTEXT FOR COLOSSIANS

The book of Colossians is likely the first of Paul's prison writings. The church to which he is writing in this book was most likely founded by Paul's ministry companion, Epaphras, but not visited by Paul. Other notable names in scripture connected to this congregation were Onesimus and Philemon.

The book of Colossians was written to a group of believers who were being confronted with false teaching that downplayed the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ, indicating that he was just one of many deities. Paul countered this directly, saying that Christ is

the sole King of the universe. (Read Colossians 1:15-20.)

Colossians 1:15-20 ESV He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

REFLECTION Is there any doubt about the supremacy of Christ in this text? What does it mean that he is the firstborn of all creation? What does it mean that “in him all things hold together”?

GOING DEEPER:

THE TRUTH ABOUT JESUS (Colossians 1:15-20)

Jesus is the perfect picture of God (verse 15). Jesus is the image of God. The word meaning “image” was used, in Paul’s time, for likenesses on coins, portraits, and statues. It showed a correspondence to the original; it was the nearest equivalent, in ancient Greek, to our modern photograph. Jesus is the perfect representation of God. Jesus is the eternal Creator (verses 16–17). Jesus holds the highest rank in creation because he is the Creator of all things. There is nothing in the created order that Jesus did not create (see also John 1:3). Because he is the Creator, Jesus has absolute supremacy over all creation, including any spirit beings worshiped by local heretics. Since only God can be the Creator, this means that Jesus, the perfect image of God, is more than just an image. He is divine. He is God.

Jesus is the universal Reconciler (verses 18–20). Jesus has supremacy over all things because all of God’s fullness resides in Jesus. He is the full embodiment of God’s attributes and saving grace. Through Jesus, God is able to reconcile to himself all things. Reconciliation is the removal of hostility and the restoring of friendly relations to those who have been at war. Paul also calls reconciliation making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. What God has done is to move toward us to restore harmony, patch things up, cease hostilities, bury the hatchet, smoke the peace pipe, and heal the breach. – From “The Holman New Testament Commentary, Volume 8: Galatians - Colossians,” by M. Anders, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999.

REFLECTION In what way or ways is Jesus the image of God? We usually think of God as the Creator of all things, and this says that Jesus created everything. Do these two ideas work together? Name some people and places that really need the reconciliation of Christ.

APPLICATION

NOW WHAT?

This week, choose to knock down one barrier that stands between you and someone else. Choose to be more inclusive, and to look for ways that God is working in surprising ways through people who may surprise you. Pray for that person each day during the week.

PRAY

Father God, you sent your Son to us as the firstborn of all creation. In him, everything everywhere was created, and he is the head of the body, the church. Your fullness is revealed in him. Through him everything in earth and heaven is reconciled, redeemed, and restored. We want to be known as those who follow him, who live as he told us to live, and love as he showed us to love. Amen.