

Chat with the Children: Best and Worst

- Have you had a good week?
 - what's been good?
 - what's been bad?
- Why are they good or bad?
- *We'll be thinking through what really are the **best** and **worst** things that can happen to us as we read and think about what Joel wrote in the Bible*

What's the worst thing that can happen?

- We chatted earlier about what are some of the good and bad things that can happen to us:
 - I guess we can all look back on good times and bad in our own personal histories... some really bad, some just a bit rubbish, some really good, and some just pretty decent...
- I wonder what the people of Joel's day would have said if you'd asked them what their best and worst was?

Losing God

- Presumably this plague of locusts?
 - its graphically enough portrayed - **vs.1-11** add to the picture begun in chapter 1
 - this time the locust plague is portrayed as a merciless invading army, bringing terror to those who face them, unstoppable and vastly destructive
- Surely this is the worst that can happen for a people faced with such destruction?
- **Actually, no!**
 - and here's the key point for this morning...
 - Joel and the people's concern is that the locust plague is the outward sign of something far more serious!
 - **a sign of the withdrawal of God's presence**
- Remember context: back from exile
 - great lesson of the exile was that God's people were to be loyal to him, to put him first...
 - for when they did not, before the exile, God's anger burned against them, he withdrew his presence, and they were turned out from their homeland, removed from the protection of the covenant promises...
 - they have learned that lesson, and fear losing his presence above all things
- Do you see how Joel sees the army of locusts?
 - God's judgement - **v.11**, his army, he is at their head...
- The great danger is that this plague of locusts is a sign that once again God has turned against them
- **R T Kendall quotes an unnamed Episcopalian minister, who in a radio broadcast provocatively commented:**
 - **"If the Holy Spirit were totally withdrawn from the Church today, 90% of the work would go on as if nothing had happened."**
 - pray God not true for us... but should cause us to pause and wonder whether our greatest fear is **really** the withdrawal of God's presence with us...

Return to God

- So, the call comes (**v.12**) to return to God...
 - to turn from sin, from anything that displeases God

- to deal with the attitudes of heart (v.13) that put self first
- fasting, weeping and mourning are all outward signs of inward repentance, of devotion to God, of sadness at our sin...
- And this turning to God is for the whole people
 - everyone has the same call upon them, old and young - even the bride and bridegroom on their wedding day! (v.16)
 - even the apparently holy people, the upright, the priests (v.17), are called to weep in repentance and call upon God to have mercy, undeserved forgiveness despite the sin of the people
 - for, as the Paul in the New Testament puts it, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23)
- And in the return to God is the possibility of restoration
 - (v.14) speaks of pity, and even blessing, a return to the possibility of offering him grain and drink offerings - compare 1:9, where they are "cut off"

Who is God?

- The confidence to turn again to God comes from an insight into who he is, and what he's like
- Who do you turn to in times of trouble?
 - someone who can help, who you trust, who you've seen have insight or compassion or offer support or whatever...
- So it is with God's people:
 - we turn to God again and again, realising that knowing him is the best of the best, because he is **gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity**
 - turn those words over... that's who God is

Conclusion

- **Is losing God your worst fear?**
- **Is returning to him when anything threatens that closeness your first priority?**
- **Do you realise what he is like - gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity...**