

“You Reap What You Sow”

October 6, 2024
New Hope-York Pines UC
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Prayer for Illumination

Your Word is our wisdom; it gives us insight, strength, and courage. Open our hearts and our minds on this day, that we might receive what you want to give. Speak, Lord! Your people listen! **Amen.**

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:21-27, Mark 4:8

- ²¹ Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice,
for the LORD has done great things!
- ²² Do not fear, you animals of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit;
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.
- ²³ O children of Zion, be glad,
and rejoice in the LORD your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.
- ²⁴ The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.
- ²⁵ I will repay you for the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army that I sent against you.
- 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.
- ²⁷ You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel
and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other.
And my people shall never again be put to shame.
- ⁸ Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.

<Reflection>

There is a Korean saying, "When one plants beans, beans grow. When one plants red beans, they grow red beans." We instantly understand it because we have a similar English saying: "As one sows, so shall we reap" or "you reap what you sow." That's right. As one sows, so shall we reap. That is so true, and it also shows the fairness that our society pursues. If someone offers their labour with a certain contract but hasn't received the wage, it is unfair. Or, if the person doesn't provide the contracted labour but asks for the wage, it is nonsense. If you want to reap, you must plant your seeds with effort. Without that trust, our society cannot sustain itself.

A funny thing I want to share: A few weeks ago, I watched a short video about the new generation's attitude in the workplace, and the video acted out calls that HR received from the workers of the company. The conversation went like this:

A: "Hello"

B: "Hello, I can't work today."

A: "Why?"

B: "Because today is my electronic device detox day."

Another phone call:

A: "Hello"

B: "Hello, I can't work today."

A: "Why?"

B: "Because I have to go to the gym for my yoga class."

What do you think? "Today is my electronic device detox day," and "I have to go a yoga class"? I still don't understand how this kind of conversation is

possible or at least plausible for the younger generation. If you don't "sow," you reap nothing. That is fairness.

Then, can this "fairness" that we all accept be applied to our relationship with God? Let's look into Prophet Joel's voice. We've read Joel Chapter 2, verse 21, saying,

"21 Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done great things!"

The verse expresses the genuine joy and gladness that God has graciously done marvellous works. It was all about happiness and exultation. However, the whole theme of Joel Chapter 2 is about Sin-Judgment-Repentance. Let me read verses 11 and 18 that we didn't read.

11 The Lord utters his voice
at the head of his army;
how vast is his host!
Numberless are those who obey his command.
Truly the day of the Lord is great,
terrible indeed—who can endure it?

God judges on the final day. When God weighs our sins, who can claim that "I am innocent"? Prophet Joel speaks up: "Who can endure it?" No one. No one can meet God's standards of total innocence. No one can endure it. If we apply the fairness that we all agree on in our lives, then no one can successfully pass judgment. Now, let me read verse 18. It says,

18 Then the Lord became jealous for his land

and had pity on his people.

Meaning the Lord was furious, but, at the same time, God had pity on God's people. That is the pivotal point of God's grace. Humans didn't meet God's standards and weren't entitled to receive God's grace; however, God came to have pity on God's people and graciously decided to give God's grace as a gift.

All are God's gifts, and no one is entitled to receive them. The gift was given to us not by our work or our efforts but solely by God's generosity. Our life, our life beyond earthly life, our family, the food, air, and water, that which cannot be found anywhere else in the universe. All are God's gifts. And you need it because you cannot create these gifts. God is giving you these gifts. And how do we react and respond? Suppose someone gives you a gift, then what do you do? You say "thank you," and you stretch out your hands to receive the gift and smile for the expression of gratitude. That is the minimum reaction towards a gift.

Prophet Joel also suggests the minimum reaction towards the divine gifts. In verse 12 to 13,

12 Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 rend your hearts and not your clothing.

Returning to God by rending your hearts: That is the minimum reaction towards God, for God graciously gives divine gifts. Returning to God. That's not easy for people who have stubborn hearts. The people think they know

everything, so they think repentance is not needed. They may even easily justify their mistakes and wrongdoings.

Can you recall when you poured your heart with sincere and genuine repentance? When we repent with pure hearts, we naturally become humble with deep silence. And that genuine repentance brings firm ground for God's blessings where we can find God's gifts.

The accentuation of repentance is an active theme throughout the Bible, from Moses in the Old Testament to the Apostles in the New Testament. Isaiah, Elijah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Habakkuk, Jonah, Micha, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zecharia, Malachi in the Old Testament. They consistently accentuate the importance of repentance. You can recall John the Baptist in the New Testament. He proclaims God's justice and love in the wilderness in Jesus' time.

Returning to God and rendering our hearts are the minimum response to God's gift. Joel elaborates on repentance and God's blessing by detailing God's blessing in two ways. One of the blessings is for the earth and wildlife on the earth. Joel poetically exclaims in verses 21 and 22;

21 Do not fear, O soil; be glad and rejoice,
for the Lord has done great things!

22 Do not fear, you animals of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit;
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.

From human repentance, non-humans will be receiving God's blessing of abundance. This implies a very important metaphor that we must proclaim. Due to our sincere repentance, God's non-human creation will be blessed with abundance. And that is so true today than in Jesus' time that human activity has impacted the healthy ecosystem since the Industrial Revolution.

The other side of the blessing is for the children of God, who repent their sins and shall live with abundance, fairness, and beyond fairness that God prepares. Joel's words in verse 23;

23 O children of Zion, be glad,
and rejoice in the Lord your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the later rain, as before.

Do you see the flow? God's blessing towards soil, animals, and plants, which are non-human, and lastly, "O children of Zion; the children of God." So God's blessing overflows not only humans but non-humans. And the blessing towards non-humans shall constitute God's integrated blessing.

Sisters, brothers, and friends! As the saying goes, "As one sows, so shall we reap." The principle of human society pursues fairness and justice. That is essential for all to live together on the earth. However, God's principle is beyond fairness. Although we sow only one tiny grain, we harvest 30 times, 60 times and 100 times. Why is that so? Because this is not just from human efforts but God's gift, God's blessing. All we have to do is repent, enjoy, and share the abundance with humans and non-humans, knowing that God has given to us by the heavenly grace.

Indeed, we are in the season of abundance. And I hope we enjoy God's abundance with others who are living on the other side of the globe, who are in a dire situations due to famine, war, and violence, and with non-humans who are growing around us and all over the world. That is what God wants while giving his gifts to us.

Let us pray silently, pondering God's gift to us.