

1207
2aH 338

A sermon preached by the late Mr. J.E.Hazelton on September 8th 1907

"But the Lord will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel." Joel 3:16

The name Joel means "Jehovah is my God", and all the designations which the prophets of the Old Testament bore were significant of their experience and of the messages that they were authorised and inspired to deliver; blessed are they, who, like Joel, in a time of public distress and calamity can say concerning Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, "This God is my God forever and ever, He will be our Guide even unto death." Joel is declared to be the son of Pethuel (vision of God) and doubtless was the godly son of a godly father. Though we are not told in the Word of God anything of his history, it is evident that his prophècy referred mainly to Judah, and was delivered in Jerusalem, probably about 800 years before the first advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, with its predictions of judgment, exhortations to repent, and affirmations of blessing. The prophecy is short, and little is said about other nations and God's judgments upon them, but, like all the Old Testament prophets he speaks of events of his own day, and others which extend to a much later period, some even now awaiting fulfilment; for instance that outstanding passage which Peter quoted on the day of Pentecost and which predicts the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all flesh, and is closely connected with events leading up to Christ's second advent, and scattered throughout there are beautiful and soul-stirring messages to God's own people, as the promise "They that wait upon Me shall not be ashamed," and that other which the Apostle Paul quotes in the 10th of Romans, "They that call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." In every age the Lord's people have proved the faithfulness of God to His promises and invitations as set forth here.

This leads us to what our Lord says by Joel in our text. Look for a moment to the margin, because the following remarks will be largely founded upon that reading, which is "A place of repair or a harbour," and the verse may be rendered equally well thus:- "The Lord will be to His people and to the children of Israel a harbour of refuge, and place of repair." That is the line which we will, by God's help, take this morning - God is a harbour of refuge and a place of repair for His storm-tossed people.

Joel was not far from the Mediterranean Sea, and he refers by name in his prophecy to Tyre and Sidon, the two greatest seaports of that day. As he visited those mighty ports, he must have noticed the great breakwaters, the harbours of refuge for the vessels which filled the Mediterranean; the dry docks of Tyre and Sidon in which vessels out of repair were placed that they might be made good again. The Mediterranean Sea being exposed to terrific and sudden storms and the whole of the coast of Palestine very rocky and rugged and broken, harbours of refuge and places of repair all along the coast would be intensely prized by mariners. In those days all vessels were propelled either by oars or sails, hence they were very much at the mercy of wind and water, and when a sudden storm sprang up, how grateful the mariners would be to run under the lee of a breakwater and find a harbour of refuge where the broken mast might be bound up, and the broken rudder made good - a place of repair, a place for injured or disabled vessels of the utmost value! Joel, by the Holy Ghost, says here that as a harbour is a place of repair for the vessels which go up and down the Mediterranean Sea, so the Lord, our faithful covenant-keeping God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is to

His people. Blessed is he who knows in this storm-tossed world a faithful God as a harbour of refuge, and place of repair, a God who is the strength of the children of Israel, and the hope of His people!

Let us speak of our text under two divisions; first of all His people's need, and secondly, the Divine provision which the Lord has made for the meeting of this need.

A harbour of refuge and place of repair: Is not that the cry of the natural man today? Look at life today. It becomes more and more pressing. Consider the wheels of daily business! They revolve with greater rapidity and grinding noise than ever. Look at our great places of business, crushing out the small man; at commercial life, at the general run of things throughout the whole world, and behold the awful selfishness that prevails on the right hand and on the left, every man struggling to keep himself above water. How many poor fellows there are looking about for situations; they are too old at forty, and again and again they retire with crushed spirits from this door and from that. We all of us know the sad and unavailing pursuit of many older men for work. 'No, we need younger men' is the reply they receive and so life becomes sadder and sadder, and the competition greater and greater. But, say some, the length of life is increased, and there are improved methods of sanitation and much less disease than there was. All that may be granted but the enjoyment of life has diminished, and so men are seen in our city on the right hand and on the left, fagged and dejected, complaining of sleepless nights and anxious days, crying 'Oh, for rest! I feel thoroughly out of repair with the rush and commotion of daily life.' You have only to look at the crowds hurrying in any large town, and see how few faces are lit up with smiles, and where there are smiles, how few are looking really happy! Rest is necessary, but we see in our day and generation that 'men are lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God,' and in our seaside resorts people fly from one excitement and one enjoyment to another and then come back to daily work. What a solemn thing it is in these days of increasing grind and excitement for men who are thoroughly out of repair to be without God - no God, no Christ, and no Sabbath! The week-ends must be taken Oh, the Sabbath! The weekend must be taken advantage of; the motor car and bicycle must be used! No Sabbath no Christ, no God!

Now the Lord's people in the midst of all this are affected by it, and in addition there are many peculiar and special things which cause them to feel their need of a harbour of refuge and place of repair. In the 107th Psalm and the 23rd verse we have a description of one in this condition. The passage runs thus, "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters." Now that is what every man and woman in daily life, who knows the Lord, has to do day by day. What are the perils? There are pirates ready to rob them of their peace of mind, ready to rob them of their hope in God, and of their love to the Gospel and divine things; there are also rocks and shoals and quick sands in daily business, so that a man needs to be much in prayer for his conscience to be kept tender. Then again they have mutineers on board, pride and selfishness are in the heart, and, when the pirates come, the mutineers lift up their heads and cause trouble. So the Psalmist says the storm comes on; they mount up to the heavens on the top of the surges, and sink again into the depths. Day by day this is the case and they are cut off from all help from land; they stagger like a drunken man and are at their wit's end - that is, their thoughts, plans, feelings, wishes and purposes are all upset again and again in daily life - which does not mean absolute collapse, but confusion and wretchedness indeed, until at last we come to what the Psalmist calls 'our wit's end,' or as the marginal reading is, 'all their wisdom is swallowed up' that is, all hope in their own wisdom, plans and purposes is swallowed up. One dear old minister used to say, 'My God lives at Wit's End,' and some of us have found that that is where our God does live; there it is that God stretches forth His

arm and manifests his love and mercy to us. When wisdom is all swallowed up, then is the time when our God appears to those whose plans are all upset, who are doing business in deep waters, rising on the surges of trouble and then descending into the depths of dismay. What do they do? "Then they cry unto the Lord." What a glorious thing it is in the midst of all the hurry of daily life in the midst of all the perplexity, to know God to whom you can cry, to know Joel's God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. "Then they cry unto the Lord." - these spiritual sailors look alone for help to God, and the Lord speaks the word, the storm is calmed, the waves are stilled, and there is no ripple in the soul. The God who controls every atom of creation, without whose knowledge not a withered leaf in autumn falls to the ground can control every motion and passion of the soul, can speak the word and hush the storm to a calm. In the first verse of the 4th Psalm there is distress, in the middle there is "Be still," and in the last there is a description of the peace which passeth all understanding. Then are they glad because they be quiet, so He bringeth them unto their desired haven, the harbour of refuge and place of repair.

Let us speak next about the glorious provision which the Lord has made for men and women who are out of repair, for poor sinners who cry to Him for a refuge, a harbour of refuge and place of repair. What a lovely word that is in the 40th chapter of Isaiah! 'They that wait upon the Lord' - just what these poor mariners were doing when they had thrown all the cargo of their own wisdom overboard, for 'if God be for us who can be against us.' They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint, is the very verse that promises a place of repair. One says, 'Lord, I want my strength renewed.' They that wait upon the Lord shall come to the place of repair, that is, shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, that is better than mounting on the surges and going down to the depths.

So He bringeth them into their desired haven, to the haven where they would be. Where would you be in this world of strife and sorrow? where would you be in the midst of the family affairs which trouble you? NEAR TO JESUS in the haven of a covenant-keeping God.

Think of the havens into which the Lord promises to bring His people! The great breakwater that prevents those dashing waves from pouring into the harbour and causing it to be tempestuous like the sea outside is GOD'S INFINITE POWER AND WISDOM. built upon the solid foundation of His covenant love; and there is no God but a covenant God who can be the harbour of refuge and place of repair to His people, a God who has said He will be their God, and who has said "Thus far shalt thou come and no farther, and there shalt thy proud waves be stayed." Thus in relation to the Church of God, the persecuting and professing world have beaten against this breakwater but without effect; and how sweet it is to be brought into the harbour and to see the breakwater of everlasting love, power, purpose and wisdom: for it is all calm within the harbour, but all surge without. A covenant-keeping God says, "Say ye to the righteous it SHALL be well with him." In Malachi we read that the Lord said "My covenant was with him (with Levi representing Christ) of life and peace", and so the tempest draws the child of God to this harbour of rest and place of repair, as mariners cry and desire the haven. How can we make for the harbour? for many a natural good ship has come to grief in making for the harbour. I have loved thee with an everlasting love and therefore with lovingkindness have I DRAWN thee" - drawn by a word WITH POWER - "Come unto Me all ye that labour and are heavy laden and I will give you rest." Father, Son and Holy Ghost, my Harbour of refuge! Father, Son and Holy Ghost my place of repair! And so dear Toplady sings:-

*Almighty to rescue Thou art,
Thy grace is my Shield and my power,
Come succour, and gladden my heart,
Let this be the day of Thy Power.*

So let us pray that every battered ship in this place, everyone who is out of repair and crying to the Lord, may be sweetly gathered to the haven where they desire to be, and looking upon the calm waters of everlasting love, know Him as their Father and their Friend.

Next, does not God often make the Lord's Day a harbour of refuge and place of repair to His storm tossed people? Many may have come to God's house today saying "Oh, my faith is so weak, my love so languid, my heart so cold, and unbelief is rising up within, to cause me shame and confusion of face." They are out of repair and have come up crying to the Lord to put them in repair, to deepen His work in their heart, to increase their spiritual life and give to them a strong and living faith. There are many away from business, brought into the midst of the people of God and need a prayerful spirit, and thus many again and again on His Day have found in the ministry of the Word, the Father's love helpful and sweet, the Son's love precious, and the anointing of the Holy Spirit delightful, as David said "Thou anointest me with fresh oil," which is to be refitted, to be put in repair. Just as a ship is refitted and has cargo put on board, so in God's own House again and again there has been a time of refitting. The Pilgrim Fathers, how they loved the Lord's Day! They were months journeying across the Atlantic exposed to all sorts of privation, seeking for freedom to worship God, and it was on the Lord's Day they reached the Island of Plymouth Rock. The mainland was only half an hour's sail from this rock, but they would stay there and give God praise with the freezing sleet beating in their faces. There they knelt and worshipped their God! See what the Pilgrim Fathers did by Grace Divine, and what they were illustrations of. Let us never forsake the assembling of ourselves together as the manner of some is, but as the Lord's Day arrives let us seek the Lord's house.

Also, has not the Lord provided for us His own Word as a harbour of refuge and place of repair? Old John Knox said when dying, "Read me again in the 17th chapter of John, for there I first cast anchor when the Lord met with me years ago. Is It not a harbour of refuge and place of repair to man? for we can cast anchor in that chapter; it is to know and rejoice in the God of Heaven, in His dear Son's thinking of us, interceding for us with our names written upon His heart of love. Is not the 8th of Romans a place of repair, with the Psalms and other precious portions? 'Then are they glad because they be quiet (brought to rest upon the Word of God and the truths of the everlasting Gospel). Again, the Lord Jesus Christ in His glorious Person is the harbour of refuge and place of repair for his guilt-laden people, and his sheltering presence is a haven where all that is broken or displaced can be restored. His death has exhausted every penal sorrow. His righteousness constitutes a title to eternal glory and his ascension into the heavens is the earnest and the pledge that where He is there shall also His people one day be. 'Lord, save me I perish,' cries a poor sinner.

*Come ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore –*

that must be to be thoroughly out of repair, absolutely so

*Weak and wounded sick and sore,
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and power.*

Rest can only be obtained in Christ Jesus the Lord, so if there is one who says "I am a stranger in this busy world; I know no one in the sense of intimacy, love and friendship," remember many a solitary one has had to say 'Oh that I knew where there was a harbour of refuge.' Sometimes when we indulge most in thought of our own loneliness we indulge in thoughts that steal away our strength; He understands who has had the Heart of a stranger, and has pursued a solitary way, One who says 'I will not leave you orphans or comfortless, I will come unto you.' When minds are oppressed and filled with doubt concerning the future, or perplexed as to the path of duty in which one should walk (one way seeming equally right with the other, but the desire is to walk in (Gods way) then waiting on the Lord they shall know the power of the Word - He will lead the blind by a way that they know not. Oh, there is a solid reality in religion, a harbour of refuge indeed in a covenant-keeping God, who has provided for His people havens as places of repair. As the Lord himself is our place of repair as to the maladies of our souls and the unbelief and tremulousness from which we suffer, so He has made the grave to be the place of repair for the bodies of His people and, when He comes again, the body, so out of repair, shall be raised like unto the likeness of His own glorious Body; then with body, soul and spirit we shall take part in His holy worship with all the powers that God Himself has given unto us.

The Lord help us then in contemplating our Triune Covenant-keeping God so as to be able to say with the glorified above, "Holy,-Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." The Lord draw every battered, weary vessel in His love and mercy into His harbour of refuge and place of repair now: