

God's Message to Us in Joel

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Introduction

Last time, which was three weeks ago, we came to the minor prophets in our sermon series through all the books in the Bible.

- I explained to you that the minor prophets are made up of twelve shorter books, and were viewed as a unit at least as early as 300 BC.
- Last time, we looked at Hosea, the first of the twelve, and today we are going to look at Joel which comes next in order.

I mentioned to you that the first six of the twelve were thought to have been written when the Assyrian Empire was dominant, the next three when Assyria declined, and the last three after the Babylonian Exile.

- Not everyone agrees about the time of Joel though—there are some who think it was written after the exile.
 - It is difficult to say for sure because Joel does not tell us when he wrote and he and his father are otherwise unknown in history.
 - The only historical event that he ties his prophecy to is a locust plague, and nobody knows when this occurred.
- The best guess is that he wrote during the time of Joash, perhaps around 830 BC.
 - This would explain why he does not address the king, (who was only a child), but only the priests.
 - If this date is correct, it would make Joel the earliest of the writing prophets (except for Moses of course), even before Isaiah.
- But the nature of the prophecy is such that the date does not need to be known.
 - The occasion of the prophecy is a devastating locust plague that ought to have humbled God's people and led them to repentance.
 - Joel uses this locust plague, as he might have used any national catastrophe, to speak about *the day of the Lord*.
 - Joel's prophecy introduces us to this term, *the day of the Lord*.
 - This is a term that is used to refer to the day when God fully reveals His glory to everyone.

Let's take a look at what the Holy Spirit teaches us as God's people in Joel's prophecy.

I. First, Joel teaches us how to respond to national calamity.

A. Joel draws us in by describing this locust plague.

- He gives us a report much like the reports we recently heard about Hurricane Florence or Hurricane Michael.
- 1. First he describes the devastation that has been caused by the locusts in Joel 1:2-4:
 - **Joel 1:2-4: Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has *anything like this* happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? ³ Tell your children about it, *let your children tell their children, and their children another generation.* ⁴ What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.**

- The horrible picture is that of one kind of locust after another coming in so that one thing after another is destroyed.
 - As with a hurricane, first you have the winds, then you have the storm surge, and then you have flooding from all the rain.
 - What the wind does not get, the water gets till all is in ruins.
2. As with news reports in our day, Joel tells how different sorts of people are affected.
 - a. First, he takes us to the heavy drinkers who cannot get their drinks anymore.
 - He calls them to wail because the wine has been cut off from their mouth by this mighty nation of locusts with teeth like lions.
 - b. Next, he takes us to the priests. They are affected because there are no offerings brought to the temple for sacrifices by which they had their living.
 - The grain, wine, and oil that were brought as offerings have failed so that the priests mourn.
 - c. Then the farmers are seen, who are affected because their crops are ruined.
 - As this was an agrarian society, this affected the entire economy so that Joel says that joy has withered away from all the people along with the crops.
 3. What we are talking about here is a catastrophe on a national scale.
 - Certainly, things could have been a lot worse, but this was a disaster that everyone felt.
 - To various degrees, we experience catastrophes... this was not one from which there could be no recovery, but it was one that shook them all.
- B. Joel tells us to respond to such catastrophes by fasting and repentance.
1. He calls the priests to lead the way in calling for repentance, just as ministers should do today when calamity comes.
 - Look at Joel 1:13-14 where he says: **Gird yourselves and lament, you priests; wail, you who minister before the altar; come, lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. ¹⁴ Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders *and* all the inhabitants of the land *into* the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.**
 2. When national calamities occur, we need to humble ourselves and turn to the Lord.
 - It doesn't matter if it is a nation that acknowledges God or not; they ought to acknowledge Him at such times.
 - Catastrophes are always a way for Him to get our attention when we have been ignoring Him.
 - He is drawing attention to Himself as a God who judges sinners.
 - He is reminding us that He is a God who judges so that we will turn to Him for His grace and mercy.
 - The worst thing we can do when trouble falls is to ignore Him—or to become embittered against Him.
 - Instead we need to see that He has sent the calamity to alert us that we need to turn to Him for mercy.

TRANS> Joel makes it clear that great catastrophes are but harbingers of *the day of the Lord*.

- A harbinger is something that leads to something greater—much greater—that is coming.
 - It is an alert, a foretaste, of greater things to come.
- The harbinger itself (be it a locust plague or a hurricane) may seem quite overwhelming at the time, but is quite small and mild compared to *the day of the LORD*.
 - But what is *the day of the LORD*?

II. Joel shows us that the Day of the LORD is the day in which God reveals Himself in judgment...

- **judgment that results in either unprecedented misery or unprecedented blessing.**
- A. You see, our great problem is that we go about basically ignoring God when we ought to be always worshipping Him.
1. We actually go through life as if God is irrelevant...
 - God! The creator of the heaven and earth who made us in His image and who sustains us and gives us all that we have!
 - God! Who made us spiritual and moral creatures, creatures who are able to know Him and to respond to Him and to be His worshippers.
 2. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, brought us into this deplorable condition.
 - Adam in particular officially declared the independence of himself and of his posterity from God—
 - determining by the first act of disobedience, in eating of the tree that God forbade, that he and his posterity would live their own way.
 - It was absurd and it was wicked, but even when we have repented, we do not get how absurd and how wicked it really was.
 - We are still too caught up with this way of living.
 3. God would be perfectly just to condemn us all to the Lake of Fire forever without remedy.
 - That is truly what we all deserve and there could be no grounds for complaint if that is what He did to all of us without exception.
 - But He did not leave us all to perish in our sin our and misery.
 - He came to His Son, Jesus Christ, and He appointed Him to come as a second Adam—a new father to those He gave Him.
 - A father not like Adam, but one who would establish a house in which God is known and served and honoured as God.
 - A father who was so committed to this that He would do all that was required to redeem us—to bring us out of rebellion and to restore the honour of God by bearing our punishment for rejecting Him.
 - When Joel wrote, Jesus Christ the Son of God had not yet come, but He had been promised as the one who would come to Israel to bless them.
 - Even before He came, it is He who kept calling them back to God...
 - And He who promised forgiveness through the blood of the covenant.
 - And He promised that He would also bring this blessing to all the nations of the earth—to all those that He appointed to salvation.

B. *The day of the LORD* puts a complete end to ignoring God.

1. It is *the day of the LORD* because it is the day that reveals God.
 - It is the day appointed after which no one will ever be able to ignore God or treat Him as unimportant or irrelevant.
 - It is the day in which He will be glorified.
 - People will no longer be able to make up stuff about God or treat Him as if He is not worthy of all honour and glory.
 - The lies of the world will all be brought to an immediate halt forever.
 - The claims that God is not just or that He is not real, or that He is not loving and pure and holy, will all be fully exposed.
 - It will be God's Day—the Day of the LORD!
2. There will be two very different and opposite outcomes for human beings on the day of the LORD: blessing and cursing.
 - a. Joel describes the day of the LORD as a curse for all those who reject the LORD—both those in the church and those outside the church.
 - 1) The locust plague upon His people points to what will come on those among His people who reject Him.
 - Look at Joel 1:15-16: **Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. ¹⁶ Is not the food cut off before our eyes, Joy and gladness from the house of our God?**
 - See how the day is described for them in Joel 2:1-2:
 - **Joel 2:1-11: Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the LORD is coming, for it is at hand: ² a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.**
 - It goes on to describe the agents of destruction as a great army similar to the locusts... probably this refers to the angels on the Day of the LORD.
 - Joel 2 verse 2 (from the middle of v. 2): **A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. ³ A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns; the land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; surely nothing shall escape them. ⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; and like swift steeds, so they run. ⁵ With a noise like chariots over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. ⁶ Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color. ⁷ They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. ⁸ They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down. ⁹ They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. ¹⁰ The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. ¹¹ The LORD**

gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

- No one escapes them... the destruction is complete.
 - Indeed, the day of the LORD is great and very terrible for those who profess to know God but who do not know Him in truth.
- 2) And so also for the nations—those among the nations who never came to Christ will be judged.
 - a) On the day of the LORD, they will be rejected for rejecting God's people—for rejecting the church.
 - Joel 3:1-3 describes this: **For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land. ³ They have cast lots for My people, have given a boy as payment for a harlot, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.**
 - The Valley of Jehoshaphat—that is the place where God gave His people a great victory against their enemies even though they were vastly outnumbered by them.
 - b) See what will happen to all the nations on the day of the LORD in the Valley of Jehoshaphat:
 - They will be cut down as grain is cut down in the harvest, and trampled as grapes are trampled in the winepress:
 - Look at Joel 3:12-14: **Let the nations be wakened, and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. ¹³ Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down; for the winepress is full, the vats overflow—for their wickedness is great. ¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.**
 - What a great destruction this describes...
 - The language that universally speaks of a change (an overthrow) in government is used in verse 15: **The sun and moon will grow dark, and the stars will diminish their brightness.**
 - c) Once the Lord's glory has been revealed in that day, no one will ever again dare to mess with the church which is referred to as Jerusalem in verses 16 & 17:
 - ¹⁶ **The LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake; but the LORD will be a shelter for His people, and the strength of the children of Israel. ¹⁷ "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again."**

- SPECIAL EXPLANATION: Do you understand *why* the nations are judged for rejecting Jerusalem?
 - This needs special clarification because a lot of people look at Israel without looking at what Israel is and why God said He would judge those that judged them.
 - Israel is the church—the assembly of God’s people in Jesus Christ.
 - In the Old Testament, the church was the nation to whom Christ, the Saviour of the world, was promised... Israel...
 - God preserved them as His people until Christ came, and then He added to those who believed in the nation of Israel those who believe from the nations.
 - To reject the church (be it Israel then or the church today) is to reject the people that Christ restores to God.
 - It is to reject God.
 - It is to say, “I am against the people that return to God, who come to God for mercy that they might be pardoned by Christ.”
 - It is to declare, “I don’t like for people to come to God.”
 - It is to say, “I want to go on in my independence from God.”
 - On the day of the LORD, God will reveal how wrong it was for you to be against Him—
 - The lie that God is unworthy of our complete devotion and that we are justified to ignore Him will be completely uncovered by the glory of His wrath and judgment from which none will escape on the Day of the LORD...
 - None except those who have repented...
- And that brings us to our next point...
- b. Joel describes the day of the LORD as a blessing for all who repent.
- 1) Christ is the leader and establisher of the repentant people—and they are called the church—the assembly of God.
 - Christ is the one who brings us into the church through the ages and the church is righteous before God by His work.
 - 2) And we just saw that in the day of the LORD those who oppose us and Christ our redeemer will be destroyed, but that the LORD will be a shelter to us (Joel 3:16).
 - We also saw in 3:17 that the church (**Jerusalem**) **shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her** [so as to hurt her] **again.**”
 - Joel describes a complete overthrow of the governing powers and their replacement with the reign of Christ and His kingdom of those He has redeemed.
 - 3) Not only will our enemies be destroyed, but there will be a complete restoration of paradise for us.
 - This is described in Joel 2:18-27: **Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, and pity His people. 19 The LORD will answer and say to His people, “Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will**

be satisfied by them; I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. ²⁰ But I will remove far from you the northern *army*, and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land, with his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea; His stench will come up, and his foul odor will rise, because he has done monstrous things.” ²¹ Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice, for the LORD has done marvelous things! ²² Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field; for the open pastures are springing up, and the tree bears its fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their strength. ²³ Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and He will cause the rain to come down for you—the former rain, and the latter rain in the first *month*. ²⁴ The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil.

- In verse 25, there are these beautiful words of full restoration: ²⁵ **So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you.**
- And all of this will be in a joyful relationship with God as our God: 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 be put to shame. ²⁷ Then you shall know that I *am* in the midst of Israel: I *am* the LORD your God and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame.”**
 - We will have a forever right relationship with the LORD.

TRANS> So you see that the day of the LORD will be very different for some than for others.

- God will be fully revealed, showing that He is all—showing everyone that He is LORD and that He is glorious and that He cannot safely be ignored.
 - Showing His great love and mercy to Christ and those that He redeems on the one hand; and showing His wrath and indignation upon all who never came to Christ on the other.
- But the book of Joel does not stop with telling us what the day of the LORD will be like.

III. Joel also tells us how to prepare for the day of the LORD.

- Obviously, this is *very* important.
 - Nothing could be as important as far as you are concerned.
- If you are prepared for the day of the LORD, you will be among those who rejoice in His glory forever and ever...
 - If you are not prepared for the day of the LORD, you will be among those who are condemned forever in shame before His glory.
- So what does Joel tell us to do to prepare?

A. He tells us to repent... he tells us repeatedly.

1. We saw in Joel 1:13-14 how Joel tells the priests to call for fasting and repentance because of the locust plague.
 - And I explained to you how catastrophes ought to awaken us to see that God is not pleased with our rejection of Him.
 - Joel says that we are to gather together in sackcloth and cry out to the LORD.

2. And then in chapter 2, Joel renews the call to repentance in view of the coming day of the LORD, of which the locust plague was but a harbinger.
 - Look at Joel 2:12-17.
 - 2:12-13 begins with the words: **“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. ¹³ So rend your heart, and not your garments;”**
 - When the day of the LORD fully comes, a mere form of repentance will not do!
 - It may give some temporary relief, but in the day of the LORD the secrets of every heart will be revealed,
 - a mere nod to the truth without an embrace of Christ and His ways will not help you at all.
 - You must come to Him to be restored to God by Him, not as one who comes to trifle with Him.
 - If the LORD is God, serve Him...
 3. Joel holds out great hope for you if you so come because our God does not hesitate to show mercy to all who truly come to His Son.
 - Joel 2:13 continues: **Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. ¹⁴ Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?**
 - In verse 15-17, He again instructs the leaders of the church to lead the way in calling the whole church to repentance: **Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶ gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes; let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, and the bride from her dressing room. ¹⁷ Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’ ”**
- B. Joel also tells us how Christ will give us His Holy Spirit so that we can serve Him until the day of the LORD.
1. Dream not that you can follow Christ in your own strength.
 - There is too much sin in you to do that—you will not even come to Him, much less continue with Him, unless He does a great work in you.
 - The Spirit is the one who endears us to God, to God’s ways, to the whole idea of coming to Christ that we might be forgiven and serve Him forever.
 2. Joel gives this great prophecy about how Christ will pour out His Spirit upon His people Israel after they are restored from the exile.
 - Joel 2:28-29 says: **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, your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.**
 - Peter tells us that this was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, just after Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at God’s right hand.

- It was then that He poured out His Spirit so that we could serve Him more fully under the New Covenant—that Israel, the root of the church, might be able bring the nations into His kingdom of repentance—His people who are restored to God... and that they might continue in His service.
 - Where would we be without the Holy Spirit?
 - We could neither have come to Him in the first place, nor could we continue to serve Him—but the Holy Spirit seals us so that we remain with the LORD forever.
- C. Joel tells us that when the Spirit is poured out on Israel, whoever calls upon the name of the LORD will be saved—and so prepared for the day of the LORD.
1. Look at 2:30-32 where the LORD says: **“And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. ³¹ The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD. ³² And it shall come to pass *that* whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved...**
 2. The government of the world has been changed.
 - The alterations of the sun and moon and stars point to the fact that now Christ is reigning at God’s right hand over all nations instead of Satan.
 - The dominion of Satan is broken, not just for Israel, but for all nations.
 - Now people are called to come to Christ the King for salvation from every nation on earth—and all who call upon Him will be saved!
 - That is the promise... not one person from whatever idolatrous rebellious nation who calls on the name of the LORD... no matter how idolatrous and rebellious you have been... will be saved.
 - That is how God reveals His glory—in receiving and fully restoring all who come to His Son—all who call upon Him in truth.
 - We have already looked at the complete restoration that is described by Joel in the day of the LORD.
 - The wicked are destroyed by His glory, but Christ and those who call on Him are blessed when His glory is displayed.
- D. Joel concludes his prophecy by declaring the acquittal of God’s people.
1. Acquittal is ours because the LORD, even the Lord Jesus Christ dwells with us and He is the propitiation for our sins.
 - He is the priest who gave Himself for us that we might be pardoned and accepted by God as blessed members of His household forever.
 - It is by His cross that atonement, from Joel’s perspective, was *to be* made, and from our perspective, *has been* made by Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.
 2. See how Joel describes it for us in the last two verses: Joel 3:20-21: **But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. ²¹ For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for the LORD dwells in Zion.**
 - The cross of Jesus is for the complete clearing of our sins, once and for all.
 - By it, we are completely pardoned for all our sins that have stained us before our holy God.

- This is the foundation of our complete acceptance with God.
- It is the cross of Christ that makes the day of the LORD to be of an entirely different character for the people He redeems.

Conclusion: To sum up Joel, we learn from Joel that when calamity comes, it is but a harbinger of *the day of the LORD*.

- Our calamities remind us that the day is coming when He will deal with us for rejecting Him our God—He will show us His full glory in His day.
 - It will not go well for you if you have not come to Christ.
 - But it will go very well for you if you have.
- Therefore, Joel advises all to prepare for it by true repentance, by receiving the Holy Spirit, by calling upon the name of the LORD, and by receiving complete forgiveness of sin from our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - This is a matter of the greatest importance.
 - Either you take this seriously and you prepare for the day of the LORD, or you ignore it and meet that day with nothing but your own resources, which will be of no avail in that day.
 - Ah, but what a glorious day it will be for all who are in Christ Jesus!
 - To be in His presence when the fullness of God's glory is revealed to all!