

Joel: The Day of the Lord

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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If you can't preach after that, you need a new occupation.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the promise that this old world will one day quickly fade away, that one day everything that we have hoped for, everything that we have prayed for, everything that we've desired will actually come to fruition. Lord, you tell us in the book of Titus 2 to always be looking for your blessed appearing and, God, I pray today that if our eyes have strayed, if our eyes have found themselves looking on other things that, Lord, this day they would be strictly gazed upon you. O God, help us today as we celebrate, as we study for your soon coming return. May our hearts and our lives be prepared thus so. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

This morning I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of Joel. The book of Joel is the second book in a section toward the end of the Old Testament that we collectively call the minor prophets, not minor because the quality of their message but strictly because of the quantity, or shall I say, the lack thereof. The book of Joel only has three very simple chapters in it yet you can probably guess either A by the reading or B by the special what the subject matter is going to be. The subject matter of what we know as the book of Joel is that day when the Lord himself finally descends on the earth with the armies behind him and judgment before him.

Now of all the minor prophets, in fact of all the prophets that we are aware of in Scripture, Joel is probably the one we know the least about. We know the professions of many and the families of others, but Joel is one of those great mystery prophets. There is very little known about him yet at the same time there are about six or seven other books of the Bible that not only quote but refer to him. One thing we do know is this, that most likely he prophesied early in the days of the ninth century BC. You say, why is that critical? Because the northern kingdom had yet to go into captivity, the southern kingdom had yet to go into captivity, and yet he speaks a message through the Spirit of God that is very pointed, that it doesn't matter what is next on the horizon as far as human interaction is concerned, we need to be looking for the day when the Lord himself descends and returns.

So the book of Joel is almost completely about what you and I would refer to on the other side of the empty tomb as the second coming of Jesus Christ and so today as we look at the book of Joel primarily from chapter 2, we're not only going to see these great incredible prophecies of the second coming, we're going to see what is the Lord's plea, what is he admonishing us to do in light thereof, and finally, we're going to look at what's the present day environment in light of this biblical truth.

Joel 2, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 Blow ye 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 cometh, for it is nigh at hand; 2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations. 3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth: the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them. 4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run. 5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array. 6 Before their face the people shall be much pained: all faces shall gather blackness. 7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march every one on his ways, and they shall not break their ranks: 8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk every one in his path: and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded. 9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall, they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief. 10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: 11 And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?

That, my friends, that very last verse, that very last statement is truly the theme within the book of Joel regarding what you and I know as the second coming of Jesus Christ. There is this phrase used, "the day of the Lord," and it's not a simplistic phrase in that, oh, it's just this one 24 hour period, in fact, as you study the totality not just of the Old Testament but as you study the totality of the entire Scriptures, you discover that the day of the Lord is an extensive time period, so to speak. In fact, allow me to share with you the parameters, what we discover not only within the Old Testament but particularly within the New Testament and the writings of Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15, you know, this is that great resurrection chapter. It says that according to the Scriptures Jesus lived. According to the Scriptures, Jesus died. And according to the Scriptures, three days later he rose from the dead. That same chapter goes on later to say if Christ be not risen, our faith is in

vain. But he concludes that great resurrection chapter beginning in verse 51, he says, "I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall be raised with the Lord."

Now when you hear that word "mystery," you think was that something that they weren't aware of in days gone by? No, the Lord uses that phrase seven times in the New Testament to refer to something – hear me clearly – that was spoken of vaguely in the Old Testament but is now made very clear with the revelation of the New Testament. For example, in Ephesians 5 it says that the church is a mystery; that Jews and Gentiles would have that wall of partition broken down between them and they could worship together. Well, that was spoken of in the book of Genesis when the Lord called Abram and he said, "All nations will be blessed because of you." The book of Colossians 1 says it's a mystery that the Holy Spirit dwells inside of us, and yet it was the prophet Ezekiel who said, "I will give you a new heart, instead of a heart of stone it will be heart of the Spirit of God." So when you see these mysteries laid out, it's not that they weren't communicated, it's just when we get to the other side of the empty tomb we truly understand the details.

"I show you a great mystery, we shall not all sleep but we shall be raised together." The parallel passage in 1 Thessalonians 4, he says, "I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, but the day cometh that when the trump sounds those who are dead in Christ shall rise first and those who are alive in Christ shall fall after, and we shall meet him in the air." My friends, that event that we oftentimes because the word simply means just to be caught up, that event we often call the rapture, so to speak, what we heard about in song, what we see in Scripture when the Lord calls his children, his family home, that is the initiation, that is the beginning, that is that front side of this day of the Lord experience. The back side is what we just read. Notice it talks about this great army and that there is destruction and doom and gloom, but notice verse 11, it says this is the Lord's army. The garden of Eden is before them, destruction is behind them. When you read the book of Revelation 19 beginning in verse 11, it says that one day the heavens are going to open up, it says the Lord is going to descend and that what we know as the physical literal second coming of Jesus Christ, the battle of Armageddon, the final judgment, all those things, and yet what do we discover there? It says his armies are behind him as he comes. In other words, when we look at this concept known as the day of the Lord, when we look at these events that we commonly refer to as the second coming, here are the clear parameters: that day of the Lord is initiated with that calling home of the saints, that event known as the rapture, and it culminates with the physical return of Jesus Christ with all those who believed upon him following thereafter, and the day of the Lord is this phrase that describes all of the events both at the forefront, the end, and everything in between.

The book of Joel doesn't give us all of the details, that's why we have other prophets both major and minor and inclusive of the New Testament, but it does open up some interesting possibilities because as we heard in the song, there are signs that are happening everywhere and there are people who try to, and I think falsely so, lay claim to what specific date it may be and oftentimes we spend more time on the chronology of Christ than the Christ of the chronology, but nonetheless allow me to share with you

some of the possibilities and I hope this will help when we look at it from a timeframe perspective. What I'm about to share with you is a statement that does not originate with me, however, the man whom it originated with, one of my mentors, before he passed away told me I had absolute complete permission to hijack this statement on his behalf. Now many of you have heard this before. You email me, you call me, you text me and say, "Hey, can I get a copy of that?" And so forgive me if for some of you this is repetition but this is just too good when we talk about the possibilities. Listen to this: there is nothing that has to happen before Jesus comes back for us, there are a lot of things that have to happen before Jesus comes back with us, however, some of the things that have to happen before Jesus comes back with us may, in fact, happen before he comes back for us. Allow me to summarize that: he can come back at any moment. It is next on his calendar and none of you can predict when it will occur. So when we look at the possibilities and we talk about the signs that we see and the events that are happening, we need to understand that there is nothing that has to happen before he blows the trumpet and calls us home to be with him, there are a lot of things, in fact, for every prophecy in the Old Testament regarding the birth of Jesus, there are eight prophecies about the second coming of Jesus. The Bible is saturated with what we call second coming language. There may, in fact, be some of those things that do occur before he comes back for us, but I'll make you a promise they will all take place before he comes back with us.

Allow me to read this statement again and I'm going to do it in light of the parameters. There is nothing that has to happen before the rapture, there are a lot of things that have to happen before the return, however, some of the things that have to happen before the return may, in fact, happen before the rapture. So in other words what does that call us to do? It calls us to be prepared. It calls us to be ready, realizing that the trumpet can sound and the Lord can descend. At any moment, he will call his bride, his people, those who believe on him home. That's the prophecy that's not only in the book of Joel but all throughout Scripture.

The next thing we have to address is the Lord's plea to his people. Now beginning in verse 12, this is significant because they had not gone into captivity, they were not in Babylon, they were not being ruled by other people, and so the Lord calls them to repentance, he calls them to return to him, just as he calls us today. We're not in captivity, we're not in this event that many speculate that the church will and I believe does not have to go through known as the great relation that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24, this is a plea before he calls us. Listen to verse 12,

12 Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning: 13 And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. 14 Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God? 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sanctify a fast, call a solemn assembly:

So what is this plea? What is the Lord begging his people to do? Well, simply put there's a proclamation here. He says, "Yes, return. Yes, repent. Yes, blow the trumpet. Call a solemn assembly." Now that's a statement that's utilized numerous times in the book of Joel and it may be one that you've not come across very frequently in your Bible reading because it only happens 12 times in the Old Testament. Now a solemn assembly is very particular. It is different than when you get in your prayer closet and you confess as King David did, "Show me my sins, O God, and I will repent thereof." It is different than when we go to brothers and sisters who we've offended and we ask for their forgiveness for the sins that we have committed. A solemn assembly was a corporate gathering of the people of God to confess their corporate sins. Probably the most famous of these events is found in the book of Ezra where the people of God have come back and in Nehemiah they have gathered back from what we know as captivity, they've rebuilt the city, they've rebuilt the temple and they gather the entire body together and they begin to corporately confess their sins. Now here's what's critical about a solemn assembly: not everybody in that group was individually guilty of that which they confessed but was willing to recognize that those that were a part of them had gone places they shouldn't have gone, done things they shouldn't have done, and said things they should not have said. In other words, a solemn assembly was a collective group confessing the sins of the group even if you individually did not partake or participate.

Oh, do we, the church of Jesus Christ, need this today. We need to collectively say we have gone down the wrong path. You realize today and that's not just a message of doom and gloom because Joel spoke it thousands of years ago, but you are sitting on a campus that is collectively associated with the largest evangelistic evangelical denomination in America, and yet this week we proudly – please note the sarcasm – we proudly announced that our baptisms are the lowest in modern history. We need to corporately confess that we've been more interested in building programs than we have souls. We need to corporately confess we've been more interested in getting our way than showing people the way of Jesus Christ. Some of y'all remember 1953, we the "Southern Baptist" gathered and we had a slogan, "A million more in '54." Congratulations, we did less than 25% of that this year. We set a goal and we missed it greatly. We need a solemn assembly. We need to collectively say the church as a whole has majored on the minors and minored on the majors.

So what does the Lord say will happen if we do this solemn assembly, if we collectively admit who we are? Notice his provision. Look in verse 25,

25 ... I will restore to you the years that the locust hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar, and the palmerworm, my great army which I sent among you.

Now I understand that strictly speaking the book of Joel is regarding second coming, this eschatological end time event, I understand that, but he was speaking to a group of people who were associated with him who had not yet gone into captivity and that's you and I today, and he says, "I will restore to you the years that you lose." Can we just collectively

agree, at least within our generations, we have lost a lot. In fact, I'm currently reading a book, it's not a positive book but it's an accurate book that says that anywhere between 65-70% of the high school graduates that stood before you a couple of weeks ago in cap and gown, by the time they graduate college will really have no presence at all in a local body of believers. And yet he says, "I can restore to you the generations. I can restore to you the people. I can restore to you the time that you wasted." I've got news for you, the Lord can do more with your little than you could ever do with your lot, and oftentimes we look at it and say, "Oh, the time it would take." You know, it's amazing that the Lord can do in just a few days what we can't do in an entirety of lifetimes. Read the book of Genesis, God did more in six days than humanity has done in 6,000 years. He can restore. He can rebuild but it doesn't happen until we admit we're the ones who've gotten off track, we're the ones who don't know what we are doing, we are the ones who have strayed from his way, his will and his word.

So where do we find ourselves in the present day as you and I in a few moments walk out of this building, as you and I tomorrow morning hear the alarm clock go off and we go to the course of our life? I want you to look beginning at verse 28 of Joel 2, it says,

28 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: 29 And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. 30 And I will shew 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 great and the terrible day of the LORD come. 32 And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call.

Now I want you to think just chronologically here that the Lord gave this vision, he gave this message to a prophet 900 years before what we know as the empty tomb took place, and even though it is speaking of events that are yet to occur, what does he say will happen? There will be a pouring out. When you read verse 28, did it sound a whole lot like Pentecost to you? Did it sound like that event that as the disciples and the 120 in the Upper Room gathered together, that it says they began to speak in other tongues and people began to hear in their own language and 3,000 people got saved? Did it sound like that event to you? I hope it did because it is in Acts 2 that Peter quotes this passage out of the book of Joel. When they began to question, "Are these people drunk so early in the morning," he quotes Joel 2 and he says, "This is that." What's interesting is as you read verses 28 and 29, you and I can see that in Acts 2, you and I can see that in Acts 8, you and I can see that in Acts 10, you and I can see that in our very lives today, that when anybody from any background realizes that that they are the problem and Jesus is the answer, when they confess their sins and ask Jesus to save them, what happens? The Spirit of God comes within them, inside of them to dwell, to live and to empower them. Due to the Holy Spirit's descent not only in Acts 2 but hopefully in your life and in my

life, we have the ability, we have the authority, we have the power to live a life like no one's ever been able to live before. You see a lot of people in the Old Testament where the Spirit came upon them, but you don't see many instances where the Spirit dwelled within them, yet 1 Corinthians 6 says that our bodies are the temple of the living God, that the Spirit of God dwells within us, therefore we ought to live as such.

So there is this pouring out of the Spirit of God but we would have to be honest with ourselves beginning in verse 30, we haven't seen this happen yet. We have yet to see this famous event where the earth and the blood and the pillars of smoke. We've yet to see the moon turn to blood and the sun go dark. In fact, if you want to read a very detailed exposé, just read the book of Revelation 6 through 19 and you can see a whole lot of verse 30 and 31 being played out in what we call those final last days, which leads to this very important conclusion: you and I today no matter where the Lord takes us this day or tomorrow or the days after, you and I are living in a time period that I like to refer to as the great parentheses. You know what a parentheses is, you're writing or you're reading a sentence in some type of literature and the story is being told, when you come to those parentheses this is vital information to the subject that does not change the subject but gives you insight and commentary on that which you are reading. In other words, when you read verses 28 through 32 of what we know as the book of Joel, it could have been a seamless occurrence. The Lord could have poured out his Spirit as he did at Pentecost and shortly thereafter verses 30 and 31 could have taken place. Why? Because there's nothing that has to take place before he comes back for us, a lot has to happen before he comes back with us.

And so you and I, if you want to insert yourself, your life is right between verse 29 and 30. The Spirit has come but those prophecies have specifically not been fulfilled. You and I are living in this time of what I call the great parentheses which means that what we've heard in song and what we've read in Scripture is absolutely true, there is nothing that has to happen before Jesus comes back for us, there are a lot of things that have to happen before he comes back with us, there may, in fact, be some of those things that have to happen before he comes back with us that may happen before he comes back for us. You say, "Pastor, what are you getting at?" If you're not saved, get saved. If you're not living right, live it, because you and I don't have the luxury of saying, "Well, until the sun goes dark, I don't have anything to worry about." You and I don't have the luxury of waking up, looking at the headlines and saying, "Well, this country didn't invade that country, I guess we're still okay." Why? Because he could come at any moment and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess, but the greatest of rewards are to those who do so now.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. You know, maybe you're one of those individuals today – and hear me very clearly, I'm not trying to single you out, if the Lord speaks to your heart at this moment, that's the Holy Spirit not Jeff. Maybe you're that person who is a guest or visitor, maybe that person you've been in church your whole life but all of a sudden the Lord got a hold of your heart this morning and said you've yet to make that decision, you've yet to have that salvation experience. Can I encourage you today to follow through. The Bible says in Romans 10 whoever calls on the name of the

Lord shall be saved, and a lot of times we question and say what does that really mean? Can I encourage you this morning just to have a conversation with the Lord, just we would call it technically a prayer, it's not a prayer that has to be spoken out loud, in fact, it's not one that has a certain set of rote statements that need to be memorized and repeated, to be honest with you it's a simple cry of your heart, and I don't know what your heart's cry this morning is but maybe it's something like this. "God, today I realize that I have lived my life for anything and everything but you. I realize, God, as we read in the book of Joel today, I'm the one who has sinned, I'm the one who needs to confess. God, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to be born on my behalf. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to pay the price for my sin on his cross. And God, I believe that when he rose from the dead, he actually made it possible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, in light of the message today, thank you. Thank you that I live in this time of the parentheses where I can cry out and be forgiven and saved and, God, that's what I'm doing today. I'm just asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me not based on my works, my deeds or my best endeavors, but based on the shed blood and the empty tomb of Jesus Christ. God, the best way I know how, I'm just asking you to forgive me and save me and I want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed, our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today. In just a moment we're going to stand and we're going to sing together and we'd love to celebrate with you. We'd love to celebrate that conversation you had with the Lord. Just step out, step forward. We're here to celebrate, not condemn. Or maybe you've already had that conversation and you've never followed in believer's baptism like we're going to witness in the next hour. We'd love to talk to you about that. Or maybe you're that individual, that couple or that family who says, "Do you know what? The Lord has impressed upon us, this is our family of faith, this is our church home." We would love to celebrate that as well.

Heavenly Father, as we gather at this time in our service, thank you that you have prepared our hearts to receive your word. God, I pray today that we would receive it with gladness, we would do as the parable that you told of the sower, one which grows fruitful in life and is not stolen by the enemy or dismissed by the things of this world. O God, may we respond to you and you alone today. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.

I'm going to ask you to stand with me as Jimmy leads us, whatever decision, I'm going to be right here at the front.