

Take Seriously His Justice, Mercy, and Command

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[0:00] If you would take your Bibles and go to the book of Joel, the book of Joel, if you're visiting with us, if you take that black Bible and the chair in front of you, start at the beginning and go to page 648, Joel, Joel chapter 2, remember we have Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, if you hit Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, you went too far.

Go back, find Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and then keep going forward. Joel chapter 2, we're just plowing our way through the book of Joel over these next few weeks.

We'll finish at the end of this month, so it's just four messages in the book of Joel. And you can see the theme of Joel is take God seriously, he judges and saves. Joel chapter 2, again, 648 in that black Bible, 648.

Joel chapter 2, I'm going to read for 17 verses and we can begin our study. Blow a trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm on my holy mountain.

And all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of Yahweh is coming, surely it is near. A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness as the dawn is spread over the mountains.

[1:36] So there's a great and mighty people. There has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them, and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses and like war horses, so they run.

With a noise as of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains like the crackling of a flame, a fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people range for battle.

Before them the people are in anguish, all faces turn white. They run like mighty men. They climb the wall like soldiers, and they each march in line, or that they deviate from their paths.

They do not crowd each other. They march everyone in this path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city. They run on the wall.

[2:41] They climb into the houses. They enter through the windows like a thief. Before them the earth quakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness.

And Yahweh utters his voice before his army. Surely his camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out his word.

Yes, indeed, the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome. Who can endure it? But the Lord says, yet even now, return to me with all your hearts, and with fasting, weeping, and mourning, and rent your hearts and not your garments.

Now return to Yahweh your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting of calamity. Verse 14. Who knows, perhaps he will turn and relent, and leave a blessing instead.

Leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a libation for Yahweh your God. Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the nursing infants, let the bridegroom come out of his room, and the bride out of her chamber.

[4:05] Let the priests, Yahweh's ministers, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, spare your people, Yahweh, and do not make your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? I remember distinctly when I was 17, I had a 1969 Dodge Dart, small little 278, I think the size of the engine, a small V8 engine, and oh, that was a hot car.

Oh, yeah, sure. That was manly. Then after that, I got a beater truck. Anyways, I was, in high school, I would clean, I was in part of the janitorial service, and two friends of mine that were brothers, Nate and Damien Blue, and we would clean together.

Well, Damien and I, we were cleaning doctor's offices, and Damien and I, we were cleaning this doctor's office, and I was supposed to follow Damien to another job. Well, he just took off down the road.

If I told you this story, just let me know. He just took off down the road. So I'm trying to catch up to him. The speed of him was 25. I'm going 45 down this.

[5:28] 5-0, sitting right there. Oh, sorry, millennials, that's the policeman. Okay. 5-0 sitting right there, nails me, pulls me over.

This is in Los Gatos. You know, probably wet myself. I was white as a ghost. I felt like I was going to throw up. License, registration, yes, sir.

And they gave it to him. He said, you know how fast you were going? I said, no, sir. He said, you were going 44. What's that, 19 over? I said, yes, sir. He said, slow down, son.

He gave me my license and registration back and let me go. No. Seriously. Speeding, I still will think of that.

When I'm going too fast, I go, I just kind of go, oh, I remember that time. Slow down. Just, I still remember that day. I remember that day that that police officer showed me mercy.

[6:31] I regret that. I'm sure there's things in your life that you've done that you've regretted and you weren't shown mercy. It's hard when things happen and we have regrets.

And we can't take them back. You know, the if only statements. If only I would have said this.

If only I would have said that. If only I didn't say that. If only I would have done this. If only I would not have done this.

I wish I would have taken things more seriously. You ever said that? I wish I would have listened. You ever said that before?

The pains of disappointment can be deep. Take mothers. You have warm memories, don't you?

[7:45] But you have huge regrets. Fathers have them too. As I mentioned earlier, even those who were mothers and they made the choice not to be.

Talk about regret. Talk about pain. If only I would have kept him. If only I would have kept her.

Right? All of us have those times. All of us have those moments of regret. So what is it that you regret today?

What is it where you've said to yourself, I wish I would have listened. I wish I would have taken things more seriously.

Here's an opportunity. Here's an opportunity for you to take God and his word seriously. That's the theme for Joel.

[8:56] Take God seriously. He judges and saves. And we're gonna look at three different aspects we wanna take seriously today. We take seriously God's justice.

We take seriously God's mercy. And we take seriously his command. Justice. Mercy. Command.

The command to repent. If you remember last week, we looked at the first chapter, Joel chapter one. And it was this locust plague, right?

A real historical thing that happened in Judah. I mean, it happened, still happens, even in the, there in Africa region and Middle East.

Devastating things that would happen when it took place in the ancient Near East. This locust plague. And Joel, here in chapter two, he's gonna use the locust plague as a framework to launch into warning Judah about the future day of the Lord.

[10:02] So he used this present event, the locust, to describe a later future historical event, which also described a far later or far future historical event.

Because what would come against Judah later on is described here. It really did happen with Assyria, specifically Babylon, and then with Rome.

But even greater time was gonna come in the future. So Yahweh had Joel used the plague as a platform to warn about the impending and imminent day of Yahweh that would come in the far future.

So that's why he's calling them, take God seriously. Because this locust plague, it was a precursor to a near future day and a greater future day.

And the prophets, the other prophets, they spoke about this coming disaster upon Judah by Babylon, by Rome. They called it the day of the Lord. And we have to understand, when the prophets, they prophesied, they would just prophesy about the thing that was there, kind of like a mountain range.

[11:26] You look at a mountain range and say, oh, there it is. Or here's Mingus Mountain. But you go, oh, there's three mountain ranges or there's four mountain ranges. You don't know that until you actually get there. So they just saw that. This is the day of the Lord.

They didn't understand there was actually something coming in the future and then the far future and the yet far, far future. Kind of like an initial and then greater fulfillment. Thus, the reason for the urgency of repentance towards God.

When true penitence and repentance before God happens, He may perhaps show mercy and restore us. We plead for His grace.

We plead for Him to show mercy. You may say, why you say, may, perhaps. You'll see why in a moment. So first point, number one.

We want to take God's justice seriously. Take seriously God's justice, verses one through 11. Why? He says here in verse one, for the day of the Lord is coming.

[12:33] It's near. In other words, it is imminent. Not in the sense it's coming tomorrow or a couple hours. It's in the sense that it is imminent, inevitable.

We just don't know when. Take for example, not to be morbid, your death. We are all dying in this room. From the four-year-old who's sitting in the chair on up.

We're dying. It's imminent. It's inevitable. It's going to happen. I mean, you're not guaranteed the next hour. You're not guaranteed the next ten minutes.

Some of you might be saying, I hope not because I don't have to listen to you preach. Hopefully you're not saying that. No, but you're not guaranteed tomorrow. So it's imminent. It's inevitable.

That's what he means.

The day of the Lord, the day of Yahweh, it's near. And plus, when it says the day, it doesn't necessarily mean a 24-hour time period. You know, Genesis chapter one, that's what that means.

[13:39] Yom, in the Hebrew there, in the Old Testament, Genesis chapter one, it means 24 hours, but not all the time. Here, it conveys a time period whereby God would bring about his justice on all.

So, Joel, he saw a vision of something in the future, kind of like the locust plague. And so he's going to take that, we're going to look at it in a moment, in detail, take this locust plague and really describe an army coming against Judah.

That's why he says, it's time to respond. Notice verse two through five. Verse two, how he describes these four words, darkness, gloom, clouds, thick darkness, misery, calamity, sorrow, the focus is God's judgment so it brings terror, wonder, fear, awe, reverence.

Oh, I love that sound. Notice he even describes as the dawn is spread over the mountains. So there's a great and mighty people as the dawn comes and it just overtakes the sky.

That's how he's describing this army. Just like locusts in their pervasiveness. Notice he says they consume everything.

[15:03] Verse three, a fire consumes before them, behind them a flame burns. I mean, it's like when you have a fire, it just takes everything out, doesn't it? That's what this army's like.

Notice he says there in the middle of verse three, the land is like the Garden of Eden before them and then once they go through the land, it looks like a desert. Nothing can escape these locusts. That's what would happen. Locusts would come and they would do everything in their path. That's what this army will do. Nothing can escape this army. So pervasive.

He says there in the end of verse two, there has never been anything like it nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. Verse four, their appearance is like horses so they're totally invincible.

The horses, horses were strategic in the ancient Near East. To have horses you were powerful.

They were war horses he says. And then verse five, with the noises of cheerfully leap on tops of the mountains.

[16:12] They consume everything in their path. Nothing stops their progress, not even a mountain range like fire. That's why he likens it to fire like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble.

Like a mighty people arranged for battle. They're swift, they're fast, a well disciplined army just like the army of locusts that would consume everything.

So this army would do as well. Verse six, before them the people are in anguish. They turn white. There's no hope. They're sick to the stomach. There's panic, fear, they're flushed. We're in big trouble now. Notice he says there in verse seven, they run like mighty men.

They climb the wall like soldiers. So they make it into the walls of the city. Most likely he's talking about the city of Jerusalem. They're swift, unstoppable. They're disciplined, they're organized, a single focus.

[17:14] Nothing stops their advance. They keep coming, they keep coming, they keep coming. Notice he says there in verse eight, they don't crowd each other. When they burst through the defenses, they don't break ranks.

So there's orderliness, there's cooperation. They're balanced like locusts, bursting through defenses like it was nothing. And notice there, verse nine, just kind of like the bullets, no pun intended, of an army.

Rush on the city, run on the wall, climb into the houses, run into the windows, run, enter through the windows like a thief. Boom, boom, boom, boom. They're like commandos, navy seals, coming in. They have an insatiable zeal to get inside and once again, the comparison of the locusts, it's striking, that's exactly what locusts do. They're like a guest uninvited. They just crawl through any little space crevice that they could get into.

That's what this army's like. Notice he says there in verse 10, before them the earth quakes, so when the locusts were coming, it was like something that was rattling, rattling, quaking.

[18:27] That's what people would hear. That's how this army would be. The smoke would rise up to the heavens so that the sun and the moon would go dark. Daylight represented safety, security.

The absence of it would be disaster. And the darkening of the heavens speaks of God's judgment. God will literally do this just before Jesus returns, Matthew chapter 24.

So he's describing this again. He's kind of looking back to the different things that are pulled out from Joel chapter 1 and then he's describing this army that's going to be coming in the future.

But notice the pivotal verse in verse 11. It strikes us. How did this all come to be? How did something like this happen? He says, Yahweh utters his voice before his army.

Surely his camp is very great for strong is he who carries out his word. How is this happening? Because it was actually Yahweh who brought this calamity.

[19:37] He was the one directing the army against him. It's his army. They're doing his bidding. That's why they should have such great fear.

That's why they should take seriously God's justice. The army was strong to carry out God's word of judgment.

What a day. What a time. A time. A time to take God seriously because it is a day that strikes terror and dread into our hearts.

And that's why he says the end of verse 11 oh yes indeed the day of Yahweh the day of the Lord is great and awesome very awesome. Who can endure it?

This is the climax of God's justice. Are we taking God's justice seriously? Oh it's fine.

[20:40] I mean you talk with people about the love of God absolutely. Just talking with a guy on Friday about God's love. He says God surely is God of love.

I say absolutely. But he's also God of justice. Is he not? His just judgment is irresistible. We cannot simply bypass it.

God's justice is real. He will right all wrongs so his justice can actually give us such great hope. You might say hope?

Are you demented? What's wrong with you? Are you crazy? What do you mean gives us hope?

Think about it. Think about the times when you've been severely wronged from your job by the government and a personal relationship and you think nobody cares.

You think nobody sees. Oh friend if you think that you're wrong God sees. God cares.

[21:59] God will judge. See this is the reality for those who come to God with arrogance pride and a high hand.

There's no flippancy here. We take seriously God and his word. If you're here and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ I implore you you should take God seriously.

You should take his justice seriously. It's not a little laughing matter. Take seriously God's justice and his command to repent.

We'll look at that later and what that means. But it's so good because he spends 11 verses Joel speaking about the justice of God.

Take that seriously but notice the next point which is take seriously his mercy. verses 13 and 14 dropping down to verse 13 says rain your heart and not your garments return why?

[23:04] Because Yahweh he is gracious and compassionate slow to anger abounding and steadfast love and relenting of calamity.

four out of the five characteristics described by Yahweh himself and you know where we looked at it just a few weeks ago Exodus chapter 34 remember that?

the climax the climax in the book of Exodus where God appears to Moses I'm going to show you my glory and my glory I'm going to show you is my goodness Yahweh Yahweh God the compassionate and gracious God slow to anger abounding in steadfast love forgiving thousands Joel quotes this he quotes Exodus chapter 34 he called the people to appeal to the covenant keeping gracious merciful loving God isn't that good?

look he says he shows undeserved unmerited favor he is gentle and tender he is long suffering and patient he has faithful covenant keeping love he relents from bringing calamity the New American Standard has evil better translation would be calamity a catastrophe you know God loves to display himself he loves to display his glory and God glorifies his character ultimately at the cross of Jesus where Jesus died on behalf of sinners that's why Jesus said in John chapter 17 the hour has come when the son of man was going to be crucified so he says father glorify the son glorify the son yes by him going to the cross what an infinite expression of his great mercy and grace his mercy flows out of the deep love he has for us in his son he is eager to forgive ready to bless desirous to give of himself yet notice verse 14 who knows perhaps he may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him a grain offering and libation for

Yahweh your God why does he say that perhaps is he doubting the love of God oh no friend he's not doubting he's just making sure we understand something understand what our repentance does not obligate God to give us mercy and grace you understand that right it doesn't control him he will be sovereign in his mercy and grace and instead of bringing a desert remember the army it was like Eden as he would blow through the land and become like a desert he he flips it around as a desert he may leave a blessing instead God comes through with his grace he leaves a blessing he may leave a blessing something tangible we're going to read about that next week and the week after that but he says here may perhaps God may relent but friends it's not guaranteed we cannot force God to be forgiving we truly deserve justice but God sovereignly decides to show his grace his unmerited favor that same guy I was talking to on Friday

[26:53] I told him that I said you realize God's not obligated to give you his love he kind of looked at me like wait what well God's a loving God I said yes he is but he's not obligated to give that to you he's not obligated to us we ask for pity realizing we cannot manipulate him with our repentance so you don't think oh I'm repenting so you better give this to me oh no friend you still can't do you can't do that he is God he is other he is not like you he's not like me we cannot manipulate him to give us something it don't work that way and yet still still he he calls us to take seriously his justice and he calls us to take seriously the love and the mercy that God has which leads us to the last point we must take seriously his command his command to repent the command to repent you see verse 12 to 13 and we'll hit verses 15 to 17 why verse 1 because notice the call blow a trumpet in Zion sound an alarm on the holy mountain let all the inhabitants of the land tremble the priests were to sound the alarm to warn the people that the danger was coming listen take seriously this command it's a way to give their attention and then notice how

Joel branches out from just Palestine let all the inhabitants of the earth regardless of any geographical region whether you're talking about the United States or Mali that we pray for this morning all must heed this warning of God's justice he will judge in an unprecedented manner heed him listen so as I said how should we respond what should we do we repent we fast we weep we take this seriously we plead God is coming in justice but there is hope repent notice verse 12 this is the Lord speaking Yahweh God says yet even now return to me with all your heart and with fasting weeping and mourning so we have to throw ourselves upon his mercy through repentance in spite

of all that has happened or would happen or will happen there is hope for grace notice how Yahweh God himself he initiates this pardon you see that he initiates mercy God warned him of his coming judgment but it's not too late to respond notice he says even now even now come to me it's possible for him to show you mercy friend it's not too late for you to respond to Jesus if you're here you're not a Christian it's not too late for you to come to Jesus and be saved don't wait what are you waiting for repent and put your trust in Jesus Christ who died for sinners notice he says return he says it twice he used the verb return return which means change our direction turn from evil renounce our sin turn to God with your heart your intellect your will your emotions our whole entire being Lord you have me you have all of me notice he says there verse 12 fasting weeping mourning these are outward signs of repentance yes it should be from the heart absolutely but this repentance should display true acts of change it should be expressed by outward transforming acts and yet notice what he says here in verse 13 and rend your heart and not your garments so wait he just said fasting weeping mourning but rend your heart so why is he doing that because he wants to get a point across he wants to understand that true repentance begins from the heart it cannot be just skin deep it had to be deeper than that it's not just you doing the ritual thank you

Aaron for saying that what a blessing that was he doesn't want to just do ritual I want to feel it man I want to know him right that's what it's supposed to be from yes yes yes the outward things we should do those he says tear apart your heart that's what we would do there render I won't do that I have my Captain America shirt underneath anyways don't judge me you have one on too they render garments right they tear them in half because that's it was it was a sign of just broken over our sin the fact that God commands them to repent that gives them such great hope and their own hearts as we look to his truth in our lives how we take seriously his word we genuinely recognize our sin

God is calling us this morning from his word he's he's speaking to you now and notice verse 15 he gets the attention of his readers and there's seven verbs that he uses boom boom boom boom boom he keeps going blow a trumpet in Zion consecrate a fast proclaim assembly gather the people sanctify the congregation assemble the elders gather the children you see that he's trying to get our attention summoning all people again not as a warning but to gather together to fast pray and lament to God and the call is to the priests and the leaders to gather the people to repent that's my responsibility to you they intercede for the people asking Yahweh to remember and to repent this is so serious so serious there the middle of verse 16 gather the children and the nursing infants so serious that the children and nursing infants should be present so serious look at the end of verse 16 let the bridegroom come out of his chamber his room and the bride out of her chamber so serious that the bride and the bridegroom are called to stop the consummation of the marriage and repent whoa they just got married this is what they're looking forward to you stop that consummation of the marriage and you come and repent that's how serious you need to take this this is urgent it's serious it's crucial vital pressing solemn heed he says and there in verse 17 that's why he's calling the priests to show the outward action of repenting and lamenting because remember they had nothing to offer

[34 : 41] Yahweh God as a sacrifice there was nothing left remember from chapter 1 let the priests weep between the porch and the altar and let them say spare your people Lord all they could do was entreat him with contrite hearts and beg for mercy pray pray that God would spare them we appeal on the basis of his tender feelings of God's tender feelings this is what every minister should be doing with God's people on Sunday morning this should be something that we do every time we gather and really you know what this is what we should be what we should do every Christian should be this to the world we should be this to the world speaking to them this gospel truth this is serious

God is speaking we appeal to him they appeal to him based upon the bond they had with him Yahweh their inheritance and for the sake of his name did not be dishonored or defamed his honor his reputation was at stake this is the end of verse 17 they say he says the priests were called to say do not make your inheritance a reproach a byword among the nations why should they say among the peoples where is their God so they appeal to God because they belong to him we appeal to God because he belongs to us and has helped displace his character his mercy towards his people will be for his own sake friends our sins are great indeed and yet so is God's compassion our repentance must be genuine with formal actions and with the true change of our wills we should turn away from disobedience to a firm loyalty devotion allegiance to the

Lord Jesus Christ it's striking that the father would give his only son on our behalf as the greatest display of his glory his merciful love how amazing and striking is his great love for us in Jesus Christ so we take seriously God's justice his mercy his command this is a call to our nation isn't it is this not a call to our nation these are words that people of this nation really every nation should heed the bent towards immorality impurity greed God's judgment will come on them these are words that we as a church should heed to shouldn't we

I mean has has our hearing become dull or complacent what about our attitudes are we ready to obey or is there insubordination do we want to submit ourselves to God and is shepherding us to his shepherds or do we push that away are we coming together as one as a church look when we as God's church do not take seriously his call and his command to repent we blaspheme his name we blaspheme his name in this community ah but yet when we do take God and his word seriously it's a glaring awesome testimony to this community where they say surely God is among them at Cottonwood Bible Church God is in that place when we take this seriously it's a call to our nation it's a call to us as a church and these are words we should heed individually should we not what about our anger what what courage for Aaron to say that to us this morning what about our bitterness is there a lack of love we have for others or are we broken over

God's love for us Lord Jesus we take seriously your justice your mercy and your command to repent we are a broken people I know Father we realize that you're not obligated to give us anything and let alone your mercy we repent as James says submit therefore to God resist the devil he will flee from you draw near to God he will draw near to you cleanse your hand your sinners and purify your hearts you double minded be miserable mourn weep let your laughter be turned into mourning your joy to gloom humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord and he will exalt you [40:24] Father we do that we know you are our just God and we know you're merciful and yet we cannot manipulate you to give us mercy but we will still repent from our heart we rend our heart we tear it apart and we admit may it start with us in this church we admit we've gone our own way we sought after other things other people not you we focus on our own agendas we have attitudes of insubordination and rebellion we lack compassion and grace for each other we're not speaking the gospel to others we've fallen short on prioritizing this body we're really prioritizing you oh God thank you that you do show us mercy in your son thank you that you draw close to us because of

Jesus so we will stand on this gospel truth and we will rend our hearts and take you seriously we off and give this so we will