

The Valley of Decision

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Preacher: Rev. George Macaskill

[0 : 00] Now, I like to read in the book of Joel. Joel is a very short book. There's only three or four pages at the most.

And it comes after Hosea, which comes after Daniel, after Ezekiel. It's only a few pages. You can easily miss it. It's immediately after Hosea and before Amos.

Now, I want to perhaps concentrate on a verse in chapter 3. I want to read verses from all the chapters.

So we'll begin by reading from chapter 1, verse 1. And we'll read four verses and then we'll move on.

That's the book of Joel, chapter 1, verse 1 to 4. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel.

[1 : 06] Hear this, you elders. Give ear all inhabitants of the land. Has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers?

Tell your children of it. And let your children tell their children and their children to another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten. And what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

And we'll move to verse 13. We'll read verses 13 and 14. Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests. Wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God.

[2 : 15] Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God. Consecrate a fast.

Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God.

And cry out to them. Now we'll move to chapter 2. And read verses 12 to 16.

Joel 2 at verse 12. Yet, even now, declares the Lord. Return to me with all your heart.

With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God.

[3 : 16] For he is gracious and merciful. Slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And he relents over disaster.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him. A grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion. Consecrate the Lord your God. Consecrate the Lord your God. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the people.

Consecrate the congregation. Assemble the elders. Gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room.

And the bride, her chamber. And we move on to verse 25. Chapter 25 to 27.

[4 : 21] John 2 at 27. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locusts has eaten. The hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter.

My great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied. And praise the name of the Lord your God.

Who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel. And that I am the Lord your God. And there is none else.

And my people shall never again be put to shame. And now we'll move to the third chapter.

[5 : 29] The last chapter in Joel. Chapter 3. And we'll read verses 14 to 16. Joel 3 at 14. The Lord roars from Zion.

And utters his voice from Jerusalem. And the heavens and the earth quake. As the Lord is a refuge to his people.

A stronghold to the people of God. May God bless these readings in his own words.

Let's just bow our face again in prayer. Our gracious Father in heaven.

Before we turn and study your word together. We ask for your Holy Spirit in large measure. We ask for your Holy Spirit in your heart.

[6 : 56] We pray, Heavenly Father. May that you will speak to us. In a way that will affect our behavior. We ask, Lord, that every syllable of your truth.

Would have an effect upon us. We ask, Lord, that we might be different people. We ask, Lord, that we might be better people.

And if there are any here who are unseen. Who are not in Christ. We pray that we be new creatures in Christ.

Gracious Father. Bless our meeting around your word. He has a mercy. Answer us in peace.

As we pray only and all. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, as I indicated earlier, I want to concentrate on Joel, chapter 3, verse 14.

[8 : 17] Joel, chapter 3, verse 14. Multitudes. Multitudes. Multitudes. Multitudes. In the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near.

In the valley of decision. Our whole lives involve making decisions.

And choosing certain paths to work in. We all have a freedom of choice.

We're free to choose whatever we want. We have the ability to choose what we want. We have the ability to choose what we want. What we do not have is the ability to change what we want.

That's the key. That's the key. What do you want? Why do we want it? What does our character, our nature, make us want?

[9 : 27] Thank you. Why do we want it? Why do we want to choose the decisions we choose?

You've probably heard it said, you are what you eat or maybe you are what you read.

And it's getting to the point that we are conditioned by our environment. We are being conditioned all the time to think in a certain way and to choose certain things.

I used to tell young people I used to give a little test and say now when you say you're good at spelling what is M-A-C-K-A-Y They got the answer correct.

What is M-A-C-R-A-E Oh, correct. What is M-A-C-D-O-M-A-L-D Not at all.

When I say what is M-A-C-H-I-N-E or some say how you and others say I say wait a minute M-A-C-H-I-N-E is machine.

[10 : 58] They'll know but you see what happens I conditioned them to think in a certain way so that they say a certain thing.

That is happening in our lives all the time. we're being conditioned we're being conditioned by what we read we're being conditioned by what we what we hear and we're definitely being conditioned by what we watch TV shows films all these things are conditioned all the time our peers our friends we're being conditioned by what we do we're being conditioned by what we see our work makes our environment makes us go down certain paths and make certain choices.

Now here in verse 14 of chapter 3 we have a lot of pictures in the valley of this surely one of the most solemn and serious pictures in the whole Bible.

What is vital to grasp is this these multitudes in that valley of decision are not about to make a decision.

The multitudes in this valley are awaiting a decision awaiting a decision from God a final decision from God it's akin to awaiting an exam result awaiting a biopsy report positive or negative and you see the multitudes there in the valley they've made their decisions they've made their decisions now it's God's turn now God will make his decision all their lives the multitudes in this valley have made their decisions according according to what they want according to what they liked according to their pleasure

[13 : 54] God is now going to make his decision in the valley of decision but not according to his pleasure according to his justice he told us what his pleasure was I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked he desires all men to be saved did we not read it there in chapter 2 when they were waiting even now God says even now return to me with all your heart and I will receive you that was his pleasure but now his decision is according to his justice now we're going to return to the valley of decision

God willing before we finish but before let us understand what has led up to the multitudes in the valley of decision this Joel book of Joel this message of Joel's we call it a prophecy of Joel's but technically speaking it's not a prophecy what's your definition of prophecy it's a very difficult thing to define actually I'm sure that you and I certainly used to have a prophecy as a prediction of what's going to happen in the future get in touch with what is happening around you now can you not see what's happening around you that's what

Joel is at pains to point out you see Judah was very very prosperous at this time very prosperous but within ours within ours the locust plague effectively stripped away their whole economy does that ring bells does that ring bells with us the economy the economy have you heard the politicians speak about that recently what's going to happen the economy at least we got a few weeks a few months warning they got ours a few hours their whole economy of

Judah was ruined for at least a year and their situation was that from a very affluent outlook they were suddenly facing austerity that would make COVID-19 look like good times that was the seriousness of their situation within ours but there's two things in Joel's message that absolutely shook the people of Judah to their roots the first thing was this who was behind the plague who sent this how did all this happen to prosperous Judah so quickly how did it happen where did it come from

Joel's answer it came from the Lord your God the God that was so so kind to you the God that took you out of Egypt when you were oppressed that's who sent this plague it was the God who divided the Red Sea for them so that they could march on dry land through the Red Sea and watch the Egyptians chasing them drown that's the person behind this plague that's the person who sent it to you God sends pandemics God sends tsunamis hurricanes floods

[20 : 06] God sends plagues God sends COVID 19 God sends political unrest movements that all of a sudden rise and change society and outlook God is behind them all that was the first thing that shook to the roots the people of Judah through Joel's message but there was also a second thing that shook them they could not understand such austerity suddenly coming into their lives but Joel said to them secondly see this plague there's nothing compared to what's to come the plague the locust plague is only the precursor of far worse to come the day of the

Lord verse 15 in chapter 1 spells it out alas for the day for the day of the Lord is near and as destruction from the almighty it comes we would know it today as the day of judgment it's called the day of judgment elsewhere in the bible the day of wrath the day of salvation the day of redemption the day of visitation the new testament calls it the day of the Lord the day of the Lord Jesus Christ the disruption of COVID 19 that we are going through now will be nothing like the upheaval of the day of judgment or the day of the Lord now get this right the day of the Lord will be a terrible terrible day for unbelievers but get this right it will be a wonderful wonderful wonderful day for the people of God are you a Christian are you looking forward to the day of the Lord if you are not a Christian start trembling start trembling because the day of the Lord has never ever been near us I don't know how long away it is I don't know how close it is but none of us have ever been near it and if you are unsaved start trembling now but if you are a Christian what a glorious wonderful day it will be now there is nothing you can do you can do there is nothing the church can do about avoiding the day of the

Lord not a thing we can do about it the only thing we can do about it is prepare for it the important thing about what we are going through now with COVID-19 is our response to it that's what's vital that's what's important the decisions we'll make since March the 23rd what decisions have you made since March 23 when we're officially under lockdown has the what we call the new normal has that made us more God aware has it made us more careful what we do has it made us more careful what we say has it made us more careful what we think what has changed since March 23 what has changed in our lives what has changed

Godward what decisions have we made to change things our response to these many judgments whatever you want to call them that's a vital thing our response now Joel's concern here or in his prophecy actually is not so much the unconverted heathen his concern was the unbelieving among God's people in Judah among the tribes of Israel especially especially the Judah tribe that was his concern how are they what about the unbelieving amongst them and we can apply that to unbelieving churchgoers now grasp it you surely must have picked it up as we read these various verses throughout his whole message his emphasis is on look you unbelieving even now it's not too late even now all can be forgiven and all can be forgiven in one moment if you just repent if you just

turn if you just trust

[26 : 15] Christ with your sins all can be forgiven God is still able to bless you God still wants your salvation even at this late hour I want to refer now to three verses in chapter two which we read verse 25 so I will restore the years he's saying to the believers I will restore to you the years that the locust has eaten isn't there some principle in maths and economics that one can never make up for what is truly lost or wasted isn't there some principle or some other formula or something if it's lost it can never be retrieved listen

God can God can restore the years that the locust is eaten the things that are impossible with men are possible with God Peter ian pray W sm■■ people to you restore to you the wasted years of your life.

He's not only saying I will return you to the status quo you were in Adam. I'll not only restore you to the great blessings that you had in the past, but there's this idea of a reward and of prosperity.

In other words, when you get, you believers, those of you who are depending on Christ to take you to heaven, the moment you get into heaven, from that moment onwards, it's prosperity.

Nothing but growth in prosperity and blessing. I will prosper you. I'll bring you back to what you were in Adam, righteous and blessed in favor with God and man.

[29 : 37] But from that point onwards, you'll grow in blessing. Multiply in blessing. We're not static in heaven. We're not static in glory.

We grow in blessing. What a tremendous privilege you have as a Christian. What tremendous future you have.

The minute you'll get the glory, you'll hardly believe what you're experiencing, but it will grow and grow and grow from then onwards.

What a wonderful future we Christians have. But then there's a second thing in the word restore, not just rewarding and prospering, but security and safety.

Adam had paradise offered to him. Adam was in paradise. But as I'm sure all of you know, he blew it.

[30 : 41] And he not only blew it for himself and Eve, but he blew it for you and me. He blew it for the whole human race. All the blessings that he had, he could have lost.

And as I'm sure you all know, he did lose. He lost it all for you and me as well. But see when Christ saves you.

See when God restores to you the years that the locust has eaten. You're secure. And you cannot fall from the blessing.

It goes on and on. The security. People talk about security today. There's only one place where there's security. And that's in Christ.

That's in Jesus. I will restore. I will secure you in a permanent position of blessing.

[31 : 44] Why do you want anything else if you're not a Christian? Why not come to Christ?

Why not confess your whole life's history of sin and ask for the blessing that's in Christ? Ask him to restore to you the years that the locust has eaten.

That's the verse 25. But what about verse 26? Isn't that just about as good? Hmm? Chapter 2 verse 26. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God who's dealt wondrously with you.

And listen. And my people shall never again be put to shame. How's that?

Eh? My people shall never again be put to shame. Isn't that wonderful? You know, I found myself saying after twice, you know, I don't doubt I'll be in heaven, you know, but I'll be so embarrassed to be there.

[33 : 00] Not true. My people will never ever again be put to shame. And you know, that verse 26 is in response to chapter 1 verse 11 where they're told what?

What are they told to do in verse 11 of chapter 1? Be ashamed. You've behaved abominably. Be ashamed.

But repent. Confess it. Trust in me. And you'll never ever be ashamed again. Now listen.

You might feel ashamed. But you'll never ever be ashamed again if you come to Christ.

Whatever you feel, go by the word of God. Don't go by what you feel. come to me, Christ says, and you'll never be ashamed again.

[34 : 11] Isn't that a tremendous blessing? And you know this? He says it twice. He says it at the end of verse 28 as well. No, verse 27. Last two lines and my people shall never again be put to

shame.

in this world in this world we might feel ashamed of ourselves but we'll not be ashamed before God because he's cleansed us with the blood his son shed at the place called Calvary.

You're clean before God. How's that for encouragement? How's that for looking forward to the future if you're a Christian? but look at the blessing also in verse 27.

You shall know that I am in the midst of this and that I am the Lord your God. Or as it could be translated and is translated in several other versions then you shall know.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of you. Have you ever had to say I've certainly had to say umpteen times and not least in the work of the ministry I think God's forsaken us.

[35 : 35] I feel he's not with us but it's only feelings it's not reality. Then you shall know I am in your midst whatever you feel.

Whatever you feel I am in your midst. And again this is in response to verse 17 where it says chapter 2 verse 17 at the end there why should they say among the peoples where is their God. You know fine people say to you and not least COVID-19 probably hey where's your God where's your God now. He's in the midst of us. He's in the midst.

don't go by your feelings. Don't go by what people say. Go by what God has put in writing.

I am in your midst. And he also says that I am the Lord your God.

[36 : 57] Verse 27 then you'll know I am the Lord your God. You know I checked up one day last week apparently it's 73 times in the Bible that I am the Lord your God.

73 times. One and a half every week. I am the Lord your God. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.

Are you here this morning? How can I know God is my God and he's in my midst? How can I know? Is there anyone asking that? Here's the answer. Taste his mercy. You can know your Bible back to front but you don't know God until you taste his mercy.

And I'm going to give you an example. Manasseh. Have you ever found anyone more wicked than Manasseh? The son of a godly father.

[38 : 10] And what's the first thing he does when he gets on the throne? Undo the godly reforms of his father. He turns to worship the sun, the moon, the stars.

He turns to dabble in the occult, the son of a godly father. He turned to worship the pagan god Molech and to appease him he actually burnt his own children in the fire.

That takes a lot. That takes a lot of evil. Burning your own child in the fire to please a pagan god.

God sent prophets to him. What did he do? He made Jerusalem, the streets of Jerusalem red with the blood of the saints. He martyred. But then another day came to him and he was in trouble.

2 Chronicles 33 verse 12. 2 Chronicles 33 verse 10. And when he, that is Manasseh, was in distress, he entreated the favour of the Lord his God and humbled himself greatly before him.

[39 : 39] How did God respond? Did God say, hey, try Molech now. You give me up. You give me up for the sun, the moon, the stars. Try them. Will they help you now when you're in trouble?

My friend, God's not into that kind of business. When he humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, the next verse says, he prayed to him and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom.

And here's my point. manasseh knew that the Lord he was God.

How's that for mercy? At the end of his days he's in trouble. None of his gods, none known in the occult can help him.

But he humbles himself and turns into the Bible. I believe in the verbal and plenary inspiration of scripture, which I hope you do, which actually means not only is the general truth too, but every word.

[41 : 00] Now here's a word. He humbled himself and treated favor of the Lord his God. If it was me that was right in that, I'd be rather inclined to say he turned to the God he once upon a time worshipped.

But the Holy Spirit says to the writer, to the writer, the author, put down the Lord his God. What a mercy, what a grace, what a privilege.

Well, I said we'd go back to the valley of decision. as we close, the multitudes have already made their decision, their choices and their decisions.

Now it's God's turn and as I said, he makes it according to his justice. There's only one real question that matters.

Have you turned to Christ? Have you humbled yourself before God have you repented of the past? That's the only question that matters.

[42 : 15] It's the only question that mattered to Manasseh. And the fact that God will make his decision according to his justice is a security for Christians.

God says, oh yes, you say, but I committed a lot of sins in my life. Yes, but God has put in writing the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sins.

if you have not humbled yourself and repented before God, you have every reason to tremble. And I plead with you, repent, humble yourself, confess your sins to God, and accept that Christ's death on the cross was a payment to God for your sins.

Believe it, and this day will be a wonderful day, and his justice will protect you. Just three things.

Do you know why? Because Christ paid for them. If you are a believer in Christ, your sins have been paid for. Forgiveness of sin is not God forgetting about your sin, or not counting it or writing it off.

[43 : 39] It's God saying, your sins have been paid for by the blood my son shed at the place called Calvary. There's a second reason.

God's ordained it. God has ordained from all eternity that anyone at all who depends on Christ for salvation is saved eternally.

And thirdly, look at he, he's put it in writing. He's promised you know, people argue about things they said and things they did.

And you often hear them say, have you got it in writing? Have you got it in writing? You're okay in the long court if you're covered by what's in writing. God has put it in writing.

Whoever believes on the son has everlasting life, whatever he feels like. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

[44 : 51] And I was going to say in my time's up, I'm sorry, it all begins, you know, what the new life, you non-Christians, if there's any here, I don't know you, it all begins with a cry.

Right back to chapter 1 verse 14, consecrate a fast, call a song, cry out to the Lord. A baby can do nothing but cry.

The sign of life that life has begun is a cry. It's certainly the way the Christian life begins.

A cry. A cry to God. My friend, cry as much as you like, but cry to God. Cry to God.

Confess your sin and ask for mercy and the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you permanently from all sin and God will make his decision.

[46 : 01] He put it in writing, whoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. The end of verse 32 in Joel chapter 2.

Well, may God, the Holy Spirit, make his word effectual to every one of us. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we ask that you might take the things of Christ and make them ours. We ask, oh gracious God, that you would bless our meeting around your word in this place today.

And we ask it all with the forgiveness of every sin. In Christ's name and for Christ's sake. Amen.

Now, we're not singing, but if we were, I'll just tell you what we would be singing.

Psalms 119 in the Psalter, verse 1, no, verse 57. Psalm 119, verse 57. And may it be true of all of us.

[47 : 18] Thou, my sure portion, art alone, which I did choose, O Lord, I have resolved and said that I would keep thy holy word.

With my whole heart I did entreat thy face and favour three. According to thy gracious word, be merciful to me.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and forevermore.

Amen.