

Repent Before the Day of the Lord

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Date: 13 January 2013

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. Well, good morning, everyone. It's good to be back here again. For those who don't know me, my name's Martin Pakula. My family and I go to the 6 o'clock church normally.

And for those who might not be aware, I'll just mention as well, I'm working for AFES, working with international students at Deakin University. We're doing a four-week series on the Book of Joel. This is the second of the four talks. If you'd like to turn in your Bibles to Joel chapter 2, you'll find that on page 910 in the Pew Bibles. And if you like to use outlines and they help, it's a fairly brief outline, but there's an outline as part of the papers that you were given on the way in that hopefully will help.

And finally, just before I pray, one of the other hats that I have is being on the Council in Melbourne for Christian Witness to Israel, which is, as far as I'm aware, the only reformed evangelical mission to Jewish people.

And I've brought their quarterly newsletter, which is just on the table outside, if you'd like to grab a copy. I think there's only a few left, though, because most of them got taken at 8 o'clock this morning.

[1 : 21] But anyway, there's a few there. But let me pray and let's look at God's Word together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word that we've heard read this morning.

And as we look at this passage from Joel this morning, please work by your Holy Spirit in our hearts and minds that you would impress your Word on us, that we might take it to heart and believe it, that we might see the fulfilment in Jesus and grow in our faith in him.

Please help us to keep turning to you through Christ our Lord. Amen. Well, I don't know if you know the modern song, it's the end of the world as we know it, but many people thought that was going to come true just a couple of weeks ago on December the 21st.

And you've probably noticed that they weren't right. So according to their interpretation of the Mayan calendar, which apparently is not the interpretation of most people who know what they were talking about, the world was meant to end then.

It's often the stuff of laughter, though, for us modern 21st century sophisticated Westerners, because we don't believe in such things as the end of the world.

[2 : 35] I mean, it's good for blockbuster movies and that sort of thing, but by and large, we tend to scoff at the idea that our peaceful and wealthy lives might suddenly come to an end.

The Apostle Peter, in his second letter, talks about people in his time 2,000 years ago who also scoffed at the idea that the world might suddenly come to an end.

They said the world just goes on day by day as it always has. Of course, it will continue on. If you're a Christian, you don't agree with them. And we don't agree with our sophisticated modern Western fellows, because we know that the world will indeed come to an end one day, that Jesus will return, and the world as we know it will come to an end.

The Bible speaks of this as Judgment Day, and we looked at it last week. We'll look at it again today. I don't want to end up being pigeonholed as the Judgment guy, by the way. I was saying that to Andrew Reid before.

And the next two sermons on Joel, I can say, will not be on Judgment so much, more on salvation. But this is the Bible. We're working our way through it, and it's looking at Judgment Day again.

[3 : 44] And it's important for us to look at it. One day, the Bible says, you and I and everyone who has ever lived will be raised from the dead to stand before God to answer for every wrong word we have spoken, every wrong deed we have done.

And that is a terrifying thought, or it certainly should be. And it should help us to change the way we live. We saw last week that in Joel's time, there was an unprecedented natural disaster in the form of a locust plague, actually something quite terrible.

But we also saw last week in verse 15 of chapter 1, that this judgment of God in the form of a locust plague was foreshadowing the much greater judgment to come of the day of the Lord, the final judgment day.

And chapter 2 continues then to speak about this locust plague, but more focusing on the idea of the final judgment day, that it's foreshadowing the day of judgment.

The passage we're looking at this morning in Joel chapter 2 is very much like a parallel of what we looked at last week. It's in two halves. And like last week's two halves, the first half looks at the locust plague and the second half looks at our need to turn to God.

[4 : 59] So let's look at this passage together. If you've got your Bible open there, verse 1. Joel says, So Joel's still speaking here about the locust plague, but focuses there on the day of the Lord, the judgment day that they foreshadow.

But he speaks about an invasion of Jerusalem and the promised land. The locust is like an invading army. And so he gives the command to blow the trumpet and sound the alarm.

We're probably meant to picture watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem who are standing there as sentries looking for danger to come. And Joel is saying to them, the invasion is coming, sound the alarm.

It'd be like today an air raid siren, that there's bombs or rockets coming. He's saying the invasion of locusts is coming, sound the alarm. Everyone in the land, he says, should tremble at the coming attack.

And the reason why, he says, is for or because the day of the Lord is coming. Because the day of the Lord, judgment day, is close at hand. We talked about terrible natural disasters last week, like this locust plague.

[6 : 18] It's very much like a bushfire in some respects. And it's a warning off worst judgment to come, the day of the Lord, the final judgment day. And we discussed natural disasters last week.

So if you missed that sermon last week and were away, hopefully it should be up on the website soon, if it's not already. And we discussed how horrific and terrible such natural disasters are.

And we've been reminded of that in the news in the last couple of weeks, particularly with the bushfires in Tasmania. But the Bible is saying we should realize there's something worse and more terrifying, which is, as the book of Hebrews would put it, is that it's a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God and that we will face God in judgment.

God is perfect in holiness and righteousness. He hates sin. He hates my sin and your sin. And we will have to answer to him for that.

And that is a terrifying thought. Joel speaks here of the day of judgment, the day of the Lord. He says in verse 2, that the day of the Lord is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

[7 : 32] It's an awful day. The locust plague is, I think, being pictured here, like the huge locust swarm is like a black cloud of darkness, like the day of the Lord.

He says, like dawn spreading across the mountains, a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times, nor ever will be in ages to come. So you might picture dawn slowly moving across the mountains or like a shadow of a cloud moving across the mountains.

Here he's picturing this locust plague moving across the mountains. And it's like a large and mighty army, he says, like an invading army covering the countryside.

And it's unprecedented. So again, we're reminded at the end of verse 2 that this locust plague was such as there never was before and never will be again. And so sound the alarm, Joel cries, because of this invasion of the locust plague, which is like the very day of judgment itself.

Verse 3 describes the devastation of this plague. He says, Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, behind them a desert waste.

[8 : 47] Nothing escapes them. Such a vivid picture, that verse. The destruction of a locust plague is meant to be something like the destruction of a terrible bushfire. And he's saying before it, it's like this beautiful, lush green land, like the Garden of Eden.

As the plague goes through, behind it it's like a desert waste. No one escapes. There's nothing left. The locusts themselves are described in verses 4 to 5.

They're again likened to an invading army. They have the appearance of horses. They gallop along like cavalry. Apparently locusts do actually, their head looks like the head of a horse apparently. And this is saying that they're like a charging cavalry of horses, an army that's invading. Verse 5 gives three similes using the word like.

It says, So again, there's this picture of this massive cloud of locusts.

[9 : 56] And here they're moving forward, advancing and eating all the vegetation as they go. And there's so many billions of them that the noise of their eating the vegetation, even though they're small, together it's like the sound of rumbling chariots from an invading army.

It's like the crackling of a fire devouring the bush. They're like a mighty army drawn up for battle. It's meant to be a terrifying picture, which they're actually experiencing.

Verse 6 describes their effect upon the people, that at the sight of them, nations are in anguish and every face turns pale. Verse 7 continues this description of them like an invading army, that they charge like warriors, they scale walls like soldiers.

They all march in line, not swerving from their course. They do not jostle each other. Each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defences without breaking ranks.

So there they are pictured, all relentlessly advancing forward in order, not moving out of place, just relentlessly coming on so that nothing can escape.

[11 : 03] Even with defences, they just smash through them as if they weren't there. And Joel is saying in verse 9, the next verse, that if you think you're okay in the city because there's no greenery or vegetation as such, think again.

They rush upon the city, they run along the wall, they climb into the houses. Like thieves, they enter through the windows. So this locust plague is described as like an army in terrifying onslaught, relentlessly advancing on so that nothing and no one escapes.

And verses 10 to 11 remind us again that the locust plague is a judgment of God, which foreshadows the great day of final judgment.

Verse 10 describes the plague like the end of the world. It says, before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine.

The enormous swarm cloud of locusts would have darkened the sun and the moon and the stars. And literally one day, the sun and moon and stars will be darkened because on the final day of judgment, God will remove them as this creation comes to an end.

[12 : 18] There will be a day where the world ends. Joel is reminding us, I think, that this is personal as well, that we have personally offended the God of the universe.

I said last week that when it comes to things like natural disasters in the media, in the modern Western world, we depersonalize natural disasters. We cut God out of the picture.

They become just random chance events, divorced from anything to do with God. But it's not actually how most societies have thought about things through most of human history. In most societies and cultures, it's the gods that have caused these things.

And the Bible is clear, of course, that there's only one God and he is the one who has caused this locust plague and he is the one who will bring final judgment. Verse 11 makes it very clear that God is the one who is behind both and he has brought this plague.

The Lord thunders at the head of his army. His forces are beyond number and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the Lord is great.

[13 : 25] It is dreadful. Who can endure it? God himself, that says, is the one who is the general of the army, leading the army in its relentless onslaught.

The locusts are obeying his command. And God is the one who brings this natural disaster and God is the one who brings the final day of judgment.

The locust plague is meant to remind again of that day, the day of the Lord. Natural disasters are dreadful, horrific things, but the day of the Lord will be worse.

And the final question is asked, who can endure it? And the answer, of course, is no one. God's judgment is personal and you and I will stand before God in judgment and none of us can endure it. If you're a Christian here today, we are being reminded by God, I think, that we need to do what the Bible does here and we need to proclaim the judgment of God.

[14 : 33] No one will be able to stand before God at the judgment. I said last week that Jesus' death often means very little to modern Australians because they don't realise how much danger they are in.

It's not like, for example, that you or I would think about lifesavers every day, but if you were drowning in the surf and rescued by a lifesaver, nothing would be better. And nothing is better than the death of Jesus on the cross, that he has paid for our sins and brought us forgiveness, but you don't realise that until you realise how dire your situation was, how much danger we were in. For Jesus' death on the cross has paid the penalty for our sins. He has taken on himself the judgment that you and I deserve. If you trust in Jesus, you will in fact endure on the day of judgment because though we can't endure it, though we deserve God's judgment to be poured out on us, Jesus has taken it in our place.

He has taken that judgment so that we are forgiven our sins and when judgment comes, we'll be spared God's judgment. That is if you trust in Jesus, if you have turned to God.

And so in the second half of this passage, Joel again calls on us to turn to God in repentance. God himself says, even now, verse 12, even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

[16:05] That word return there is literally the same word as repent in the Hebrew. It's the word repent, return to God, same sort of thing. And if you'll bear with me, I want us to spend a bit of time now focusing on this verse, verse 12, to think about what repentance means.

For many people today have the wrong idea of repentance and think it means, of course, merely saying you're sorry. And repentance does mean being sorry. I mean, if you aren't sorry for lying, for example, then you won't repent.

You won't change from lying to tell the truth because if you're not sorry for lying, you won't really care about changing. So repentance does include being sorry, but it's much more than that.

It is actually changing. It actually means to stop going one way and to start going the other. It would be as an illustration that you've taken the wrong ramp on the expressway. You suddenly notice the cars all heading towards you.

You realize you've made a terrible mistake. You stop, do a U-turn and go the other way. That's what repentance is, that you stop lying. You tell the truth, although in this case, it's to do with relationship with God, that we stop living with me as my God, us as our God, and we start living with God as our God.

[17:20] That we realize what a terrible sin, in fact, it is to be living as if God is not there, as if God is not our God and to live with ourselves as our Lord.

To do that, of course, is natural. We're all born that way as human beings. All people, all Aussies do this, that we live our own way, how we want. We don't like anyone telling us what we should do, especially God.

And so we say, I'm the boss of my life. I decide how I live, which is the essence of sin. And repentance means that we stop that, that we realize how bad that is, what an affront that is to God. And we say to God, we're sorry that we've been living life without God, as if He is not our God, as if I am God of my life. And we repent by stopping doing that and saying, God is number one in my life and I'm going to live with Him as my God.

That's repentance. And this repentance needs to be real and wholehearted. Joel says in verse 12, return to me with all your heart.

[18:27] And if it is wholehearted, you'll see an outward change in people. God says, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. There'll be a visible outward change in us if we have wholeheartedly repented.

We'll stop doing the wrong things we did. We'll start living God's way. We'll no longer live with me as my God, but with God as our God. And that will change how we speak. It'll change how we treat people, how we act.

It'll change what we do with our money. We won't spend all our money on ourselves anymore. We'll spend it on the work of the gospel and so on. We'll see that outward change when we turn to God and have Him as our God.

Now, I realise that when you tell some people that they need to repent, they put it off. In student work, I've talked to students at uni who are not yet Christian and urged them to turn to God and they say, well, I'll think about it after I do my exams.

Or of course, a lot of people say, well, when I'm on my deathbed, I'll think about it. Presuming they don't have dementia. Some people say, you know, when I've paid off the mortgage, when it's not so busy at work and on the excuses go.

[19 : 39] But verse 12 is saying, now is the time. Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart. So if we haven't yet turned to God, we mustn't put it off.

And the reason why is that we don't know when the end will come. We don't know how much time we have left personally. We don't know how much time this world has left.

So we might laugh at the idea that the world would end on December the 21st last year. But there may be no tomorrow. God may decide that today or tonight the world will end.

And because we don't know when that will happen, now is the time to turn to God. God. Now, I don't know everybody here. I don't know all of you. And I don't know whether all of you have turned to God.

So if there is anyone here who has not yet repented, put their trust in Jesus, turn to God, to have him as your God, please don't put it off.

[20 : 43] Please, before you go today, talk to somebody about how you can turn to God. Well, why would you repent? Why would you turn back to God?

Well, one of the reasons why we said last week is because God is the one who brings judgments and he's the one who removes it. God brings natural disasters. He removes natural disasters. God will bring the final day of judgment, but he can spare us from that judgment.

If natural disasters, for example, are caused, as the media says, by random chance events, there's nothing you can do about it. But if God has brought them, he can remove them.

And God will bring the final day of judgment, but he can spare us from it. And of course, he wants to, which is why he gave his only son, Jesus, to die in our place and take that judgment on himself.

In verse 13, the next verse in our passage, Joel speaks about the character of God as the reason to turn to him. He says, return, repent, return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

[21 : 56] And he relents from sending calamity. These are some of the greatest words in the Bible about the character, the nature of God. They come from the book of Exodus, which we're studying in our summer series at the moment.

And we haven't yet got to that passage, which we will, I think, in a week or two. But it's the passage where God reveals to Moses his nature and character, saying that he is merciful, gracious and compassionate, which is a fantastic thing because we're often not like that.

I don't think I am. If people hate me, do horrible things to me, I find it very hard to forgive them. But thank goodness, God is not like me or like you.

He is gracious and compassionate so that even after all the sins we have done, he forgives us. He doesn't hold our sins against us.

He wants to take us back. And when we return to him, he does take us back. He's slow to anger. He's abounding in love. The Hebrew word is *chesed*, which means God's steadfast love, his loyal love, his covenant love, that he keeps his promises.

[23 : 07] He loves his people so he relents from sending calamity, disaster, evil. God doesn't want people to suffer. He doesn't want people to perish.

He loves you and I so much that he gave his only son, Jesus, to die in our place, to take that punishment that you and I deserve on himself so that we could be forgiven.

Who knows? Joel says next. Verse 14. Who knows? God may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing, grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

Who knows? You can't actually presume on God. Even if you're someone who's seeking God at the moment, you can't presume that he should or will save you.

Although I can say if you put your trust in Jesus, it's a certainty that you will be spared from God's judgment, that he will save you. In Joel's time, he's saying they can't know that God will turn around this covenant curse of the locust plague and bring blessing on them.

[24 : 17] But he might. He might remove his judgment. He might remove the curse of the locust plague. He might pour out his blessings on them again so that even though they've lost all the food and crops, even though it's a disaster that the worship of God has come to an end.

I said last week how the daily sacrifices at the temple had grain offerings and drink offerings and now they have nothing to offer to God in worship. It's the equivalent would be all the churches being closed that even though that has happened, God might remove that, pour out his blessings again, give them food and crops, restart the worship of God so that not only do they have enough food for themselves but enough to offer to God in thanksgiving.

God might give that blessing again. I'll skip over these last verses but let me read again verses 15 to 17.

Joel says, blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, consecrate the assembly, bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests who minister before the Lord weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, spare your people, Lord.

[25 : 33] Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Joel repeats his earlier words there that they're all to gather together at the temple and call out to God in prayer for mercy and that everyone's to come, old, the elders, the young, even the babies and that they're to drop everything and come because nothing's more important than turning back to God right now.

So he says, even if you're on your honeymoon and you've just got married, drop everything and come to the temple. And note at the end of verse 17, the reason is for God's sake, for his glory. God's reputation here is tied up with his people so that when other nations see this terrible suffering, the locust plague coming upon the people of Judah, they might wrongly conclude from that that the God of Judah is weak and ineffectual or maybe even that he's not there and say, where is their God?

And so for God's sake and his reputation, the religious leaders of God's people are to beg God to spare his people. Everyone is to drop everything, call out to God for mercy and to turn to him in repentance, in wholehearted repentance.

Well, this passage reminds us this morning that the day of judgment will come. You and I will one day stand before God to face him in judgment.

[27 : 10] And we don't know when that will be, so now is the time to turn to God in repentance and faith. And I want to say then again that if you have not yet put your trust in Jesus, if you have not yet turned to God, please do that today.

Is there any reason why you would not? For those of us who are Christian, who have turned to God, who do trust in Jesus, I want to say a couple of things briefly.

The first is that, of course, we need to keep turning to God in repentance. I'm sure there were many people amongst Judah in Joel's time who had turned to God, but they needed to keep turning to God and we need to keep turning to God.

I'm preaching as much to myself here, of course, as to you. We need to turn away from sin and to have God as our God in every area of our life. If there's an area where we're toying with sin, we need to repent of that.

If there's an area of our life where we're holding back from God and serving him, we need to repent of that. We need to keep trusting in Jesus and wholeheartedly repent that we live with God as our God.

[28 : 25] I know certainly for myself when I became a Christian, I think I had it very clear that my life was over, that it now belonged to God and I would live for him. But of course, over many years of being a Christian, I tend to keep clawing back my life bit by bit and more living for myself.

And I have to be reminded, as you do too, again and again, that my life totally belongs to God and I'm to keep turning to him and have him as my God, not me, and to live for him.

So we need to keep repenting. But secondly, we need to call on our friends and family who are not yet Christian to repent as well. And we need to say the hard things that Joel says, that much of the Bible says, to warn them of God's coming judgment.

I said last week that some people talk about how living a Christian life is better and I think that's true, but it won't have much impact these days on our fellow Australians.

We need to actually warn people of judgment and to call on them to turn to God. And God wants them to turn to him, which is why he gave his only son Jesus to die for them.

[29 : 39] So let me encourage us, we need to keep turning to God and we need to call on our friends and family to turn to God. For God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love.

And we know that because he gave his only son Jesus to die on the cross in your place and mine to take that judgment so we can be forgiven and have eternal life and be spared the final judgment when it comes.

Let's pray. We thank you so much, our heavenly father, that you gave your only son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins.

And we thank you for your sure and certain promise that when your judgment comes, that we who trust in Jesus will be spared your judgment. We pray for all here today that we would turn to you and keep turning to you and we pray for your help that we would not claw back our life and put ourselves in charge of our life, but that we would have you as the God of our life.

We pray for our friends and family who have not yet turned to you, that you would please work in them. Please help us to warn them of the coming judgment that they may turn to you to be saved.

[30 : 59] And we thank you again for your salvation in Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen. Amen.