

God's Blessing and Salvation

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everybody. For those who don't know me or are just back from holidays like Andrew, my name's Martin Pakula.

I'm a member of the 6pm congregation, and we're doing a series of four talks on the book of Joel. This is the third one. If you'd like to open your Bibles to the first reading that we had, which is on page 911, that will help you follow along, page 911.

And there's an outline that's amongst the pieces of paper that you were given, which can help you to follow along. Before I pray, I'll just say that for those who might be wondering what I do, inverted commas, I'm now working with AFES, Australian Fellowship of Evangelical Students.

It's a bit of a mouthful, but it basically means that I work sharing the gospel with students at university. So I work particularly with international students at Deakin University at Burwood.

And some of you might be aware there's about half a dozen people doing that sort of thing here at Holy Trinity. So I'm one of several. Anyway, let me pray and let's get into God's word together.

[1 : 19] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for your word that we've heard read this morning. As we consider this passage in Joel, we pray that you would work in our hearts and minds by your spirit to impress it upon us, that you would give us joy in your salvation and thankfulness for your many blessings upon us.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I can't remember usually the last time I was hungry, like really hungry, not just a bit.

So I don't know about you whether you can remember the last time you were hungry. We are so blessed in Australia that basically we have enough food and plenty more than enough all the time. I can remember, however, back in year nine at high school, my third year at high school, I used to be in the Army Cadet Corps and we went away for two camps in a row, or I did, for a week each. So for two weeks, I was eating fairly boring, dry Army rations. And at the end of the two weeks, which seemed like a very long time at the time, at the end of two weeks, we had a barbecue and I had a nice juicy steak.

[2 : 34] And I reckon that that is probably still the best meal that I have ever eaten. Just sort of seems to work that way. I think if I had it for lunch today, it probably wouldn't mean much, but I was so hungry back then, it just tasted so good.

I'd imagine droughts are a bit like that, that we so often have in Australia, that after months or even years of no rain, that when the rain finally comes and good sort of pouring down rain, the farmers must be so overjoyed at getting that rain.

And of course, the Christian farmers must be thanking and praising God. Well, the passage in Joel that we're looking at today is a little bit like that. The people in Joel's time, as we've heard the last couple of weeks, were suffering from a terrible locust plague, which a bit like a drought or a bushfire would have devastated the land.

It's possible that they may have even suffered a series of locust plagues for years, because verse 25 in our passage speaks about the years that the locusts have eaten.

And some people think that may be quite literal, that it's been happening for years. Either way, they must have been longing for relief, like getting rain after a drought. Over the last couple of weeks, as we've looked at the book of Joel, we've seen that God's people had broken his covenant, and as a result, were suffering the punishment or judgment of God that came in the form of a natural disaster, this terrible locust plague.

[4 : 08] And Joel had called on God's people to feel the impact of what was happening, to mourn over their loss in God's judgment that was happening to them, and then to turn to God in prayer, to turn to God in real wholehearted repentance.

And it seems they did. God's people turned back to him. And God responded, which is what we'll see in today's passage. And it's like rain after a drought, that God responded by pouring out his blessings upon them.

Today's passage, you can see it in the NIV, it's in two sections. Verses 18 to 27 is where God responds to his people's repentance by removing his judgment off the locust plague.

And then in verses 28 to 32, Joel looks ahead to the day of the Lord that he's been speaking about, where God would save them in the future from his final judgment on that day.

So let's look at that first section, and we'll pick it up from verse 17, which was the last verse of the passage from last week. In verse 17, we were told last week that the priests, the religious leaders of God's people, were to cry out to God in prayer saying, spare your people, Lord.

[5 : 25] 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? And I mentioned last week that this is largely about God's own honor and reputation, his glory.

For God's reputation was bound up with his own land and his people. And the land had been devastated by the locust plague, his people were suffering. So the nations round about might be thinking, well, maybe their God is weak and ineffectual.

That's why this is happening. Maybe there is no God of Israel, and that's why these terrible things are happening to them. And so verse 18, the first verse of our passage today, says, then the Lord was jealous or zealous for his land and took pity on his people.

So God was jealous or zealous for his reputation, which meant being zealous for his land and his people. And it meant that he had pity on his people.

He had compassion on them. We saw last week in verse 13, that that is the nature of our God, that he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love.

[6 : 43] Because God is gracious and compassionate, when his people turn back to him in repentance and faith, as they have here, God had mercy on them. Now I said last week, if we turn back to God, he always takes us back.

He always has pity, mercy on us. He forgives us all our sins. And that is what he did here. In Joel's time, God saved his people from this devastating locust plague.

Verse 19 speaks of God's response to their repentance. It says, the Lord replied, he responded to them, I'm sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully.

Never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations. So God responds to them. He replied to them. They had prayed in verse 17, that we just read before, that God would not make them an object of scorn, a byword among the nations.

And here God responds by saying, he will never again make them an object of scorn to the nations. He would remove their shame by removing the locust plague and then blessing the land with food and crops again.

[7 : 56] God says he will send them grain, new wine and olive oil. He'll send it in abundance, enough to satisfy them fully. So as Andrew said at the start of the service, salvation is not like just getting out of jail.

It's not like Monopoly, or I think of it more in terms of, I guess, movies where somebody gets out of jail and they're standing out the front of the jail in the movie with absolutely nothing and nowhere to go.

It's not like that. It reminds me of a passage in Deuteronomy chapter 15. I've mentioned that in your outline. So all the verses I refer to will be in your outline.

In Deuteronomy chapter 15, God speaks about how the Israelites were to let their slaves go free after six years. And every seventh year, when they let them go, it says they're not to let them go empty handed.

God has blessed them. So they are to bless their slaves when they let them go. They're to give them plenty of food and goods so that they don't go empty handed. So salvation is not like getting out of jail empty handed.

[9 : 03] Salvation would be, I suppose, more like having a debt cancelled and then winning the lottery or like getting out of jail. And in terms of Monopoly, going around the board a couple of times for free and getting you \$200.

Do not pass go or whatever you pass go this time. So God doesn't just cancel the debt. He doesn't just spare them from his judgment, although those things are incredible in themselves.

God then pours out his blessings on his people. In chapter one, we were told that because of the locust plague, they'd lost all their grain and wine and olive oil.

And now God is giving it back to them and enough to satisfy them fully. They will have abundant food again. Of course, God removes the locust plague.

Verse 20 speaks about that. God says, I will drive the northern horde far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land. Its eastern ranks will drown in the Dead Sea and its western ranks in the Mediterranean Sea.

[10:05] And its stench will go up. Its smell will rise. So God had sent his army, his horde of locusts, and he says, now he will remove them. He'll send them into a parched and barren land where there will be no food for them to eat and they will die.

He will drive them into the sea where they will drown. He'll remove the locust plague. And then when he's done that, he won't just leave his people there. He'll pour out his blessings on them. Verses 21 to 23 address the land and then the animals and then the people in terms of blessing. So verse 21, the land is addressed first. God says to the land, do not be afraid, land of Judah. Be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things.

Again, back in chapter one in verse 10, the land was personified there as being in mourning. The NIV used the word ground.

It's the same word, the land. The land was in mourning because it was stripped bare by the locust plague. And God now tells the land not to fear, but be glad and rejoice because the locust plague would be removed from it and it will be blessed again with food and crops.

[11:17] Also in chapter one, a couple of weeks ago, at the end of chapter one, verses 18 and 20, we were told that the animals were groaning as they were wandering about futilely searching for food that wasn't there because the locusts had eaten up all the food and the animals were starving.

But now God says to them in verse 22, do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green. The trees are bearing their fruit.

The fig tree and the vine yield their riches. The locust plague in chapter one had devastated the land. There was nothing left on the trees.

They were stripped bare. The fig trees, the vines, all their fruit was gone. But now God says he'll restore them all. The land will produce its fruit. They will have abundant food again.

The animals need not fear because they will have food to eat once more. And of course, the people will have food to eat again. Verse 23. Be glad people of Zion.

[12:22] Rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful. He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains as before.

So the rains will come after the drought, as it were. God will pour out his rain abundantly abundantly so that the ground will produce an abundant crop. Verse 24 says the threshing floors will be filled with grain.

The vats will overflow with new wine and oil. So what the locusts had removed, God would restore. And again, then they will have grain offerings and drink offerings that were removed.

As we saw the last two weeks, the worship of God in the temple will be restored. And so God says, verse 23 again, be glad and rejoice.

Tells his people to rejoice in what he will do. Because he won't just remove the locust plague. He'll pour out his blessings on his people. God is not mean.

[13:24] Salvation doesn't just mean being spared the locust plague, though that in itself would be fantastic. Salvation means being restored as God's sons and daughters, where God pours out his blessings on them again.

And after the years of the locust plague, this would be the best news ever. God says in verse 25, I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten, the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm, my great army that I sent among you.

You will have plenty to eat until you are full and you will praise the name of the Lord your God who has worked wonders for you. Never again will my people be shamed.

It's one of the famous phrases in the Bible. You may or may not have realized it's from Joel that God will restore the years that the locusts have eaten. Makes me think a bit of the end of the book of Job, where Job has had everything taken away from him.

But at the end of the book, God restores to him twice as much as everything he had lost. The locust plague here had eaten years worth of their crops, but God says he will restore it all.

[14 : 38] They will have plenty to eat until they are full. God will pour out his blessings upon them. And so he tells them to rejoice and be glad. They're to praise the name of the Lord their God, he says, to praise God in thanksgiving for all his many blessings.

Because he won't just remove the locust plague, he will pour out his blessings on them. They'll have overflowing harvests. They'll be filled to the brim. And so they can be rejoicing and glad and be thanking God for all his blessings.

And then verse 27, It's saying that when God removes his judgment off this locust plague, when he pours out his blessings on them, then they will know that God is present with them.

They will know that God is the one and only true God. Back in verse 17, the nations might have said, where is their God? And the answer is here, that God is with his people to save them and to bless them.

But there's more. In our second section of the passage, Joel looks ahead beyond the restoration from the locust plague to God's future salvation and blessing.

[16 : 03] Not only will God save them from his judgment off the locust plague, but as Joel has spoken again and again about the day of the Lord, Joel looks ahead now to the day of the Lord when God will save them from his judgment on that day, which is what verses 28 to 32 are about.

So we saw in the last couple of weeks that this terrible natural disaster of the locust plague was a judgment of God that looked ahead to an even greater judgment on the day of the Lord, which is the final judgment of God, when we will stand before him to answer to God for all of our deeds and our words.

But not only will God save them from the locust plague, he will save them from that final day of judgment. Verse 28 starts with the words, It's saying sometime in the future, after God has saved them from the locust plague and restored them from it, there will still come the day of the Lord, the final judgment day.

Verse 31 speaks about it explicitly, the great and dreadful day of the Lord. But it's saying God will save them from his judgment on that day. First, though, the passage speaks about what will happen before that day comes.

In verse 28, God says, I will pour out my spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions.

[17 : 29] Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in those days. You can almost miss it because of the divisions in our modern Bibles, but that connects up with verse 27 from the previous section.

In verse 27, it was saying that Israel will know that God is present with them when he removes the locust plague. Now in verse 28, it's saying in the future, God will be present with them in an even greater way by his Holy Spirit.

He will pour out his spirit on them. As he poured out the rains on the land to restore it from the locust plague, he will in the future pour out his Holy Spirit on the people.

Now in the Old Testament, you might know that it's only the leaders of God's people who have the Holy Spirit. It's the prophets and people like elders or judges or kings who are given God's Holy Spirit.

But this is saying all sorts of different people will have God's Holy Spirit in the future. Moses himself in Numbers chapter 11, verse 29, the references on your outline, Moses said that he wished that all God's people would have the Holy Spirit, not just the 72 elders who received it at his time.

[18 : 48] And the prophet Jeremiah in chapter 31 of Jeremiah speaks about the new covenant that was coming when people would be forgiven their sins. And he says they would all know God from the least to the greatest.

And Joel is saying that will happen before the final judgment day comes. God will spare his people from the final judgment. But again, he'll pour out his blessings on them.

He'll pour out his spirit on people, but not just on the leaders of his people, but on all people, young and old, male and female, rich and poor. When it comes to receiving the Holy Spirit, there will be no distinction to be made in terms of gender or age or social class.

God would pour out his spirit on all his people. That would happen before the final day comes. But also verses 30 to 31 speaks about some signs of cosmic proportions that will happen before the final day comes.

Verse 30, God says, I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

[20 : 02] I take it these are things that will happen just before the day of the Lord. The words there at the end of verse 30, blood and fire and billows of smoke, phrases that come from the book of Exodus that we're studying in the summer series.

And it's meant to remind us of the Exodus plagues, like the plague of blood, but also of God descending on Mount Sinai, which was in fire and billows of smoke.

But when you come to the New Testament, you find that these words of Joel are taken up to refer to the end of the world as they are here. So Jesus speaks about his coming again in Mark chapter 13, for instance, where he uses this language to speak about his return in judgment.

And the book of Revelation in chapter 6 speaks about the end of the world using this language. And it's not a surprise because we saw last week that that huge swarm of locusts would have darkened the sun, moon and stars, which was actually a foreshadowing of the day of the Lord when the sun, moon and stars would literally be blotted out as they were removed from this creation.

So Joel is using this language to speak about the end of the world, the day of judgment. But the punchline comes in verse 32, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

[21 : 23] Everyone who repents, everyone who turns to God will be saved on that day. It's a great little passage of scripture, this in Joel, speaking of God's salvation and his abundant blessings.

God's people did turn back to him in the time of Joel. They repented and God saved them. He removed the locust plague and he didn't just save them from the locust plague, he poured out his blessings upon them.

He restored the years that the locusts had eaten. He poured out his rain upon the land to give them abundant food and crops again. He restored the worship of God that had stopped.

They had grain offerings and drink offerings to give in the temple again. They were fully satisfied.

Their shame was removed. Their shame was replaced with gladness and joy as God poured out his blessings on them.

And as for the day of the Lord that Joel has spoken about, it would still come. There would still be a final judgment day, but they'd be saved from it. Everyone who called on the name of the Lord would be saved.

[22 : 33] Everyone who repents, who turns to God, will be saved on that day. But not only, again, would God save them from his judgment, but he'd pour out his blessings on them.

Before that day came, he would pour out his spirit so that all God's people would know God and have him present with them by his Holy Spirit. Well, if you haven't yet picked up the main point of the passage today, I hope you have.

Let me spell it out. It's God's salvation and his abundant blessings. God saved his people from the locust plague and he would save them from his final judgment to come.

God poured out his blessings upon them after the locust plague in the form of abundant crops and food and rain and so on again. And he would pour out his Holy Spirit in time to come.

In our second reading this morning from Acts chapter 2, the Apostle Peter makes it quite clear that the fulfillment of this prophecy in Joel, as he looks ahead to the day of the Lord, the fulfillment is in Jesus.

[23 : 40] We know, of course, that Jesus' death on the cross, as I've said the last couple of weeks, that Jesus' death on the cross has paid the penalty for our sins. He has taken the judgment you and I deserve on himself so that when the judgment day comes, we'll be spared that judgment.

It's already fallen on Jesus who died in our place to take it for us. But as you read on in Acts chapter 2, beyond the passage we read, the Apostle Peter talks about Jesus being raised from the dead, ascending to God's right hand where he received the Holy Spirit and then poured out the Holy Spirit on all who have repented and turned to God.

And Peter is saying in Acts chapter 2 that we have now entered the last days. As our Gillian was saying before in the children's talk, we are in those days that Joel was talking about.

The new covenant that Jeremiah spoke about has come. We now have the forgiveness of sins. God now pours out his Holy Spirit on men and women, young and old, rich and poor.

So that if you put your trust in Jesus, you receive the Holy Spirit. And Romans chapter 8, if you want to look it up later, makes it very clear that there's no such thing as a Christian without the Holy

Spirit.

[24 : 57] If you trust in Jesus, you have God's Holy Spirit dwelling in you, present with you. It's interesting, Joel says, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And when he says Lord, you might have missed it. It's all in capitals in the NIV. It's actually God's name, Yahweh. So that when Peter picks up on this in Acts chapter 2, he says that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord, Yahweh, will be saved.

And he says that's Jesus. Jesus is the Lord, whose name we're to call on. Jesus is Yahweh. That actually happens several times in the New Testament and it's just an aside here, but that alone annihilates the argument of the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Many other reasons why what they teach is wrong. The New Testament is saying Jesus is God. He is Yahweh. He is the one we turn to in repentance. He is the one we put our trust in and then pours out the Holy Spirit on us as the Lord.

If you put your trust in Jesus, you will be spared God's judgment. But there's more again. God abundantly pours out his blessings on us.

[26 : 12] When we turn to Jesus, we are made God's sons and daughters. We are given every spiritual blessing in Christ, Ephesians 1.3 says. We are given the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come, that in the new heavens and new earth, there will be no more mourning or hunger or crying or pain or death.

We will be raised from death to eternal life to be with God forever. God pours out his blessings on us when we turn to him. As an aside, I want to mention the prosperity gospel again, which I've spoken about a couple of times.

They have this right that God does want to bless us richly. And they can back that up, of course, with lots of Bible verses that say that. What they have wrong is the timing.

There's a very important theme in the New Testament, which we call the now, not yet theme. And what it means is that now we have all sorts of blessings from God, but there are all sorts of other blessings that are not yet, that are yet to come when Jesus returns.

So now we have every spiritual blessing in Christ. We have forgiveness of our sins and redemption and adoption into God's family as his sons and daughters. Amazing spiritual blessings.

[27 : 30] But there are blessings that we don't yet have that are still to come. We don't yet have perfect health. We get sick and we die. We don't yet have wealth, not the sort of wealth we'll have in heaven.

We don't yet have sinless perfection or perfect justice. All those things are to come in the new heavens and new earth, but not yet. What we do have now, though, is the Holy Spirit as a deposit guaranteeing those blessings to come and also giving us now every spiritual blessing in Christ. Well, finally, I want to finish with just a couple of brief applications. And the first application I want to give is the one that Peter gives in Acts chapter 2, which is that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Which is saying that if you're not yet a Christian, if you put your trust in Jesus, in his death on the cross, you'll be saved. What that means is accepting that even if we're a good person compared to those around us, we are in fact sinful.

We are facing God's judgment and rightly so, but trusting that Jesus has taken my judgment. He's paid for my sins. He's given me forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

[28 : 50] If you trust in Jesus, you are forgiven your sins and you'll be spared God's judgment. I talked a bit more at length last week about what it means to repent, to turn to God.

And if you missed last week's sermon, it is up on the web and I hope you'll listen to it to hear how you can do that. But either way, I hope today, if you are not yet a Christian, that you'll put your trust in Jesus because you'll be forgiven your sins and saved.

The second application I want to give is to those of us who have done that, who have put our trust in Jesus and have repented and turned to God. This is saying that God will spare us from his judgment to come, that God has given us his Holy Spirit and poured out on us every spiritual blessing in Christ.

We've been forgiven all our sins, which is astounding enough in itself that God would not treat us as our sins deserve. But we're not saved empty handed. God has adopted us into his family as his sons and daughters.

We now know God and are in relationship with him. We know our future. We have purpose in life. We know God's will which he has made clear to us in his word.

[30 : 08] We have fellowship with God's people. We have God present with us, dwelling in us by his Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit is a deposit which guarantees for us our future blessings of perfect health, of wealth, of justice, of sinless perfection, of eternal life, of being with God in heaven forever.

And so we have so much to be thankful for. And the application really is in verse 23 of our passage, the command that Joel gives there to be glad and rejoice in God's salvation and blessings.

It's something that I often pray for myself and others that we would have joy in God's salvation. So I guess I should ask you whether you pray that yourself, whether you have joy in God's salvation and blessings.

It's a simple application in a way but it's a great one. This is saying we should be glad and rejoice in the amazing salvation of God through Jesus. We should be glad and rejoice in all his blessings and his spiritual blessings which he showers on us and we should be glad and rejoice as we look ahead to the incredible blessings we will have in heaven and we should praise God and thank him for all those things.

We're going to do that as we sing together in a moment but first let me do that in prayer for us.

Heavenly Father we do thank you so much for our life our health for safety for all your amazing material blessings that you pour out on us in this day and age for modern medicine for our work for leisure we have so much but we thank you above all for giving your dear son Jesus to die in our place and pay for our sins.

[32 : 02] We thank you that you have promised and that we know for a certainty that you will save us from your judgment to come because of what Jesus has done. We thank you for pouring out on us every spiritual blessing in Christ and we pray that you would give us gladness and joy in your salvation as we look ahead as well to our blessings to come.

We pray for any who do not yet know you here today that you would work by them in them by your spirit to grant them salvation that they may enjoy your salvation and blessings with us and we ask it in Jesus name Amen.