

The Day of Judgment and Salvation

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- [0 : 0 0] Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that we have heard read this morning. We pray as we look at this last passage of Joel this morning, that you would help us to understand it, to believe it, that you would encourage us from it, that you would help us to trust in your promises.
- We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I want to start by asking, do you think that God is in control? Well, it's not hard, I think, to believe that God's in control when you're in Australia.
- We live fairly ordered and controlled lives. I feel like I do. I have three square meals a day. I sleep in a nice soft bed. I'm living in a country where I'm not persecuted, where very little goes wrong.
- So I feel like my life is very ordered and controlled. So I feel like it's not hard to believe that God is in control. But what if I live somewhere where it wasn't like that?
- If I lived in Egypt or Syria or Mali or Afghanistan, it would be much harder, I think, to believe that God is in control. You hear terrible stories of what happens to Christians in those places where your daughter might be forcibly taken, forcibly converted and forced to marry a Muslim man.
- [1 : 2 0] And I think it would be hard then to believe that God is in control. In our passage that we're looking at in Joel today, we're looking at the issues of justice and judgment.
- For God does see everything that goes on in the world and every wrong thing that people do. When a woman is raped in India, God sees it.
- When a Christian woman is forcibly taken and converted, God sees it. When Christians are tortured in the Middle East or other places, God sees it.
- And God is a God of justice and will set all wrongs to right. And today's passage is about exactly that, that God's final judgment will bring the perpetrators of evil to justice.
- I think it can be a bit hard though for us to feel that, if you like, when we come to passages in the prophets like this, because we're safe and sound in Australia and we're rarely persecuted.
- [2 : 1 9] But most of God's people throughout the world today and most of God's people throughout Christian history have been persecuted. And I think this topic of the day of judgment that you so often see in the prophets would be of great comfort to them.
- It would be of great comfort to know that there is a day when God will set things right and will avenge them. For God is in control of our world and he will make things right, which is what our passage is about today.
- Before we look at it, let me just recap briefly what we've seen so far. We've seen that judgment begins not so much with the nations, but with the house of God.
- So God's people, Joel told us, had broken the covenant, or that's implied at least, but he told us that God brought his judgment upon them in the form of a terrible natural disaster, that of a locust plague.

And he called on God's people to turn back to God, to turn to him in repentance and faith that God might have mercy on them. And they did. They repented. And so God removed the locust plague, poured out his blessings on them, gave them abundant rain and restored their food and crops.

[3 : 28] But Joel also has talked about the day of the Lord, the final day of judgment. And we've seen that the judgment of the locust plague foreshadows that great final day of judgment.

But Joel applied that final day of judgment first to his own people before the nations, that those amongst the people of Judah who didn't repent would face God's judgment on the last day.

And that those who did repent would be saved from God's judgment on that day, as we saw last week, that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But having dealt them with the final day of judgment for the people of Judah, Joel now in chapter three, looks at the final day of judgment for the nations.

And he's assuring God's people that God will judge the nations. Right towards the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 12, verse three, God said to Abraham that he would bless his descendants, that he'd bless those who bless them, and that he'd curse those who curse them.

And on the day of the Lord, the judgment day, those who have persecuted and oppressed God's people will receive that curse back on their own heads when they face God's judgment.

[4 : 43] So let's look at Joel chapter three and see what he says about that. Joel chapter three begins, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.

There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel. So verse one there speaks of God restoring his people.

That's what we looked at last week. We saw that God would remove the locust plague, pour out abundant rain, restore their food and crops, and that on the final day of judgment, God would save his people who turn to him.

And when God restores them in the future, he says, verse two, that he will gather all nations. And the purpose, verse two, of gathering the nations is to put them on trial, he says, to bring them to judgment.

Now, that's why he says he'll bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat, which might sound a bit exotic or strange, but I'm not sure it's an exact place. I don't think it's named after the king.

[5 : 54] The NIV footnote tells you that the word Jehoshaphat is actually Hebrew for the Lord judges. So the New English Bible, I think is a bit more helpful rather than saying the valley of Jehoshaphat, Jehoshaphat, it translates the valley of the Lord's judgment, which is what it means.

So it's speaking of God judging the nations at this place. And he'll judge the nations, verse two, he says, because of what they did to his inheritance, his people Israel.

For the nations around about Judah had oppressed God's people. The Babylonians had come and defeated them, destroyed the temple, taking God's people into exile.

And then the nations, the little sort of city states and nations around about had taken advantage of what the Babylonians did and sort of put the boot in when God's people were down.

So they came in after the Babylonians and looted everything and took God's people and enslaved them and sent them far away. God is saying he'll avenge his people upon the nations for what they did to them.

[7 : 03] Verses two to three give three charges against the nations for what they did to God's people. It's saying God will punish the nations for these terrible things that they did.

First of all, verse two, they scattered God's people among the nations. They took them away from the promised land and sent them into exile. And secondly, they divided up his land.

And note there that it's his people, his land, God's people and God's land. When these nations attack God's people and land, they're attacking God himself.

It's a bit like the apostle Paul, who used to be called Saul. Saul was on the road to Damascus doing what he was doing at that time, which was to arrest Christians and put them in jail.

And the risen Lord Jesus met him on the road to Damascus and said to him, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? Because to persecute God's people is to persecute Jesus, to persecute God himself.

[8 : 06] And here the nations have scattered God's people, divided up their land. And that's an attack on God. The third charge is absolutely awful.

In verse three, it says that the nations cast lots for God's people, traded boys for prostitutes and sold girls for wine to drink.

So the nations cast lots for God's people to sell them as slaves. And it's saying they even sold their children as slaves and treated them with such contempt, treated them so cheaply that for brief, illicit pleasures, they'd sell, sell them for prostitutes and booze.

And God says he'll judge the nations for what they have done to his people and land. In verses four to eight, he speaks specifically of the nearby nations.

First of all, Tyre and Sidon, which were to the north of Judah on the coast. And then the Philistines, which were to the immediate west of Judah on the coast. So these little city states were on the coast and did a lot of trade by sea and sold God's people, the people of Judah as slaves to nations across the sea.

[9 : 17] God says in verse four, now, what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you're paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done.

God says he'll repay them for what they've done. And in verses five to six, he outlines what they've done. Two crimes against God's people this time. First of all, verse five, they took God's silver and gold and finest treasures, which might even refer to looting the temple.

And then secondly, verse six, they sold God's people as slaves to the Greeks. Purposely, it's saying there to send them far away from their homeland. And so God says he'll repay them for what they've done.

That the punishment will fit the crime. He'll do to them what they did to God's people. So verse seven, he says, see, I'm going to rouse them, my people, out of the places to which you sold them.

And I will return on your own heads what you have done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabaeans, a nation far away.

[10 : 29] The Lord has spoken. So God says there in verse seven, he'll bring his people back from captivity. And he'll bring back on the heads of the nations, what they have done, which repeats there in verse seven, what he said at the end of verse four.

And he's saying the punishment will fit the crime. So that as they took the children of Judah and sent them, sold them as slaves, sending them far away, their children will be sold as slaves and sent far away.

The punishment will fit the crime. And it's certain because it says God has spoken. So God will judge the nations. He will judge them.

He does judge them for what they do to his people. Historically, this in a sense happened. So the city of Sidon went into slavery in 345 BC.

And the city of Tyre and the city of Gaza, which is one of the Philistine cities, fell shortly thereafter in 332 BC. And it's only speculation, but it may well have been that the people of Judah sold them on as slaves.

[11 : 37] But I think it's not so important really to work out if this was fulfilled exactly historically, because I think what Joel and the other Old Testament prophets do is that they look ahead and they look ahead to see what will happen in future history, but also in future eternity.

And they sort of telescope it all together as one. So it's saying God will judge the nations in this lifetime or in the next. Either way, they'll be judged by God.

But often the prophets sort of look ahead to all those things and bring them together as one. We know, of course, that God will judge the nations, whether in this lifetime or the next, because he will raise people from the dead who will stand before him in judgment.

And God will judge the nations for what they've done. They won't get away with it. They'll be judged for their mistreatment of God's people. And that should be a comforting thought for persecuted Christians, that God will judge the nations, that those who presently mistreat Christians or torture them or forcibly convert them or burn down or destroy their churches, that God will have them stand before him to face him in judgment for what they have done.

God will judge the nations. And that's a comforting thought for persecuted Christians. Verses 9 to 12 go on to continue speaking about God's judgment of the nations.

[13 : 10] But now it's a different sort of picture. In Joel's time, we've seen that God, chapter 2 told us, brought this enormous army of locusts against his people. And verses 9 to 12 is saying, God in the future will bring an enormous army of the nations against his people like the locusts.

And some of the Old Testament prophets speak about this. Ezekiel and Zechariah talk about there being a final battle where all the nations will be gathered like an enormous horde of people against Jerusalem and against God's people before the end.

But God, it says here, is gathering them to the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of God's judgment, merely to judge them. It's not that they'll actually harm or defeat God's people.

They're only being gathered together in war to be defeated themselves. So in verse 9, God himself calls the nations to war. He says, Proclaim this among the nations.

Prepare for war. Rouse the warriors. Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. God is the one who calls them to come and fight against Jerusalem. Verse 10, which he says to them is ironic.

[14 : 20] The 8th century prophets Isaiah and Micah in Isaiah chapter 2, Micah chapter 4. They talked about this time at the end where there will be universal peace, where everyone will take their weapons of war and turn them into farming tools.

And here it's reversed in Joel. He says people will all take their farming tools and turn them into weapons of war to come and attack God's people. So verse 10, he says, Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears.

So God calls the nations to come and amass and attack his people. He says, verse 11, Come quickly, all you nations from every side and assemble there.

There being the valley of Jehoshaphat. So verse 12, he says, Let the nations be roused. Let them advance into the valley of Jehoshaphat. But God gathers them there merely to judge them.

In verse 12, God says, There I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. God's people are his people. And when they attack God's people, they are attacking God himself.

[15 : 29] And so he judges them. Verse 13 changes the picture again. We're still speaking about judgment on the nations, but there's a new picture with a metaphor of a harvest, which makes sense because in Joel, we've seen lots of stuff about harvests.

After the locust plague, God would send the rain and they'd have an abundant harvest. And now this looks forward to an abundant harvest of judgment on the nations.

Verse 13, Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come trample the grapes for the winepress is full and the vats overflow. So great is their wickedness.

Note that last phrase there, how great their wickedness is, that in the Bible, it often says God waits for the sin of the nations to reach its full measure before he judges.

Our second reading from the book of Revelation picked up on this imagery, as Graham said, but particularly from this verse. And it describes the son of man, Jesus at the final judgment, harvesting the nations.

[16 : 35] Jesus himself spoke about that. You know, Matthew chapter 25, a famous passage about the sheep and the goats. Jesus said that he would gather all nations and judge them and that he judged them for how they've treated the least of his people, because how they treat the least of his people is how they have treated him.

So on the day of the Lord, the final judgment day, God will judge all the nations for how they have treated his people.

Verses 14 to 16 continue this picture of gathering the nations for judgment, but now uses the cosmic sort of end of the world language that we've seen in Joel.

Verse 14 says, multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The valley of decision is not some new valley.

It's the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of God's judgment. Here it's called the valley of God's decision or verdict of judgment against the nations. And the day of the Lord, Joel says, is near for God to bring his decision, his judgment against the nations for how they have treated his people.

[17 : 51] It will be the end of the world. Verse 15 repeats words we've seen in Joel already. The sun and moon will be darkened and the stars no longer shine. That's end of the world language to describe God bringing his final judgment when he judges the nations.

And as the nations gather around Jerusalem, ready to attack it and God's people, they lose and God defeats them because God is present in Jerusalem with his people.

In verse 16, it says, the Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. That's a quote, which if you turn over the page in Amos chapter one, verse two, it's an exact quote from there.

He said, the Lord roars from Zion and thunders from Jerusalem, which comes from much earlier than Joel. It's saying that God is enthroned in Zion in Jerusalem and that on the day of judgment, he will roar and thunder out his judgment from Jerusalem.

And I think the idea is that it's saying at a mere word, he will bring this world and creation to an end. At a mere word, he will thunder out his judgment upon the nations and bring them to an end.

[19 : 06] And then verse 17, then God's people will know that God is with them. Then you will know that I, the Lord, your God dwell in Zion, my holy hill.

God is in Jerusalem dwelling with his people. Back at verse 16, then again, God said that he would be a refuge and a stronghold for his people.

That is on the day of judgment. He will protect his people from the nations as they attack. He will protect them from his own judgment so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

God will be present with his people forever. They will know that God dwells in Zion in Jerusalem. They will know that Jerusalem will be holy forever because God is whole.

And he will be there dwelling forever. And so never again, never again, he says, will foreigners invade her. The new Jerusalem will be safe from all harm, protected from all oppression and persecution.

[20 : 13] And we saw last week that not only would God save his people from his judgment, not only would he be their refuge and their strength, but he would pour out his blessings upon them.

And that's what verse 18 is about as a description of the new Jerusalem and the blessings of God there. In that day, the mountains will drip new wine and the hills will flow with milk.

All the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of Acacias. So the land will once again flow with milk and honey.

He's saying. Back at the start of this series in chapter one, verse five, we read of the new wine being snatched away because of the locust plague.

But here it says the mountains that day will drip with new wine. And at the end of chapter one, verse 20, we read about the ravines being dried up.

[21 : 10] But here the ravines will run with water. Out of the Lord's house, it says out of the temple will flow a fountain that will water the whole land. And I think you could almost imagine Joel's fellow people of Judah looking out on this parched and barren land stripped by the locust plague, where he says God will send rain, abundant rain again that will refresh the land and it will produce crops.

And in time to come, that there will be the new Jerusalem where the city will flow with water and with milk and with new wine. And the reason why is because God is there.

God is present in the new Jerusalem and the fountain of water flows from him. There's a whole theme of that that you can trace through the Bible.

Before Joel's time, back in Ezekiel, at the end of the book of Ezekiel, chapter 47, verses one to 12, there's a whole passage that speaks about the new temple to come, where there will be a river flowing out of the temple to water the whole land and to water the tree of life.

In the book of Zechariah, at the end, chapter 14, it describes that last battle of the nations where they are defeated and then says living waters on that day will flow out of Jerusalem.

[22 : 27] On Wednesday night in the summer series, we saw how this is fulfilled in Jesus, that John's gospel says that Jesus is the temple, the place where God and man dwells.

And that Jesus says in John's gospel, out of him flow the living waters. And then right at the end of the Bible in Revelation chapter 22, out from the throne of God and the lamb flows this stream of water down the middle of the street of the new Jerusalem, watering it and watering the tree of life there.

So Joel is using this picture language that the rest of the Bible picks up on to describe God being there in the new Jerusalem, the new heavens and new earth where he is the source of life, where Jesus is the source of life and where God pours out his blessings upon us.

By contrast, verse 19, the land of the enemies of God's people will be desolate, a desert waste. And we've seen that exact phrase, a desert waste before in Joel as well.

Back in chapter two, verse three, it described the land of Judah stripped by the locust plague. It was a desert waste. But now Joel's saying in time to come, the new Jerusalem will be flowing with water and milk and honey.

[23 : 48] But the lands of their enemies will be desolate and a desert waste. And the reason why is because verse 19, because of violence done to the people of Judah in whose land they shed innocent blood.

The nations oppressed and persecuted God's people. And so God says in verse 21, that he will avenge their innocent blood.

He will avenge the wrongs done to his people. But verse 20, Judah and Jerusalem will be inhabited forever. Never again will they be depopulated.

People sent into slavery and exile. God's people will dwell safe and secure in the new Jerusalem, in the presence of God forever. Well, the theme of Joel chapter three is fairly clear.

The day of the Lord will mean judgment for the nations and judgment for how they have treated or mistreated God's people. The great day of the Lord will come.

[24 : 51] Joel is saying God will avenge the wrongs done to his people by punishing the nations. He will gather them in a final battle in which they will be defeated.

And God's people will dwell safe and secure in the new Jerusalem forever. For as Joel finishes, the Lord dwells in Zion. God is there with them in the new Jerusalem.

Now, the book of Revelation actually picks up on a lot of this imagery in its closing chapters. It speaks of the final battle, which people know as Armageddon.

And it's quite a simple description. It's not all strange and wonderful. It speaks about Jesus being at the head of his armies and easily defeating the devil and his armies.

And right back at the beginning of Revelation, like the rest of the New Testament, it says the reason why Jesus wins is because he's already won. He's already won the victory in his death on the cross.

[25 : 49] Because there at the cross, he has defeated sin and the devil. He has paid the penalty for our sins by dying in our place. He has disarmed the devil so that he can no longer accuse us of our sins before God and demand the death penalty because it's been paid already by Jesus' death in full.

And then at the end of Revelation, there is the new Jerusalem, where those who repent from God's people, the Jews and from the nations, come into the city of God to be in the presence of God blessed forever.

Well, I want to close by mentioning three applications fairly briefly. The first application is really the main one, but I think is not so much for us, but it's for most Christians most of the time.

And that is it's comfort. For persecuted Christians, because this is saying that God will judge the nations and they will not get away with their oppression and persecution of God's people.

And I think that will be a great comfort for Christians who are persecuted around the world today. They are reminded that God is in control of our world, that he will avenge them and will judge their persecutors.

[27 : 02] And that's a great comfort. I think that doesn't apply so much to us because thank God we are not persecuted physically in Australia. But what I want to apply to us then is to apply that theme more spiritually, that Jesus wins the victory over the world, the flesh and the devil, because standing behind the enemies of physical flesh and blood enemies is actually the world, the flesh and the devil.

The devil stands behind them. For in the book of Revelation, it says the devil fights in two ways. First of all, through physical persecution, but secondly, through lies.

And in the New Testament, the spiritual battle that we are involved in, if we trust in Jesus, the spiritual battle we're involved in is against our own sinfulness and against the lies of the devil.

And we fight both by trusting in God's word, by believing the truth, by holding on to his promises. We trust that God is in sovereign control of the world and that he will judge the nations.

Now, I'm preaching this very much to myself as much as to you, but when times are tough, when the going is tough, we need to believe that God is in control of the world and of our own situation.

[28 : 21] We need to believe that Jesus defeats the world, the flesh and the devil. We need to believe that the new Jerusalem will come, where there will be no more sin or opposition or trouble or pain, where we will be safe with God forever.

We need to trust that Jesus in his death on the cross has won the victory. And so to combat the devil's lies by trusting God's word and the truth, by trusting in his promises, by trusting that God is in control of us and the world.

When things are tough, we need to remember God's judgment, that God has judged our sins already at the cross and that he will judge the nations. He will remove the devil and all sin and all opposition.

When he returns, Jesus defeats the sin and the devil. Third and finally, I want to speak about evangelism as the last application, because I'm aware that even though we don't face physical persecution in Australia, we do face some persecution, sometimes in the form of mocking or reviling.

And that occurs, especially I realise when we seek to share the good news of Jesus. So the media in particular, and sometimes our friend and family, mock these Christian truths.

[29 : 46] They mock the idea that God will bring the world to an end. They mock the idea that God will judge, that they will stand before God in judgment. They mock the idea that we need to repent and trust in Jesus as our Lord and Saviour.

And therefore, we're tempted to keep quiet about Jesus as a result, which we know, of course, is not the right way forward. And we know it because God will judge our friends and family who have not yet repented.

But God will also avenge any mistreatment that you and I suffer as we seek to share the good news of Jesus. And so again, we need to keep trusting God, to keep trusting his promises and that he is in control.

And to keep sharing the good news of Jesus. And especially in Australia, we have the freedom to go for it in sharing the good news of Jesus, because we won't face physical persecution.

Some people we share the gospel with will believe it and become Christian. And even mocking and reviling, I think is quite rare, certainly rare in my experience.

[30 : 52] But if you are mocked or reviled for sharing the gospel, God will avenge you. A day of reckoning will come. And God will be our strength and refuge.

God will set things right. All wrongs will be righted. And we will be safe with God in the new Jerusalem, protected from all harm, awash with God's blessings forever.

So do you believe that? Will you trust what God says? When the going is tough, will you trust God's promises?

When evangelism is tough, will you trust God's promises? Let me finish by reading from the end of the Bible. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them.

[32 : 07] They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life as clear as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing 12 crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the lamb will be in the city and his servants will serve him.

They will see his face and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of the lamp or the light of the sun for the Lord God will give them light and they will reign forever and ever.

Let's pray. We thank you so much, our heavenly father, that you will set all things right when Jesus returns to judge.

[33 : 19] And we do pray that you would send him soon. Please help us in the meantime to trust in your promises when the going is tough. Please help us to trust in your promises when we are sharing the good news of Jesus, even if we are mocked.

We thank you for your great promises to judge the world in righteousness and to take us to be with you forever, where you will be our strength and refuge in the new Jerusalem, where we will be blessed forever.

And we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.