

Joel 2:15

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[0 : 00] We can turn back to the passage that we read in the book of Joel, chapter 2, and we can read again from verse 15.

Verse 15.

And especially these words, why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Now, the book of Joel is not one that I've been very familiar with, but I felt guided to this particular passage when I was asked to preach on this particular occasion.

And I've been looking at it, and often when you go to a book, particularly a book of prophet, the prophet himself will indicate, either with reference to kings or to some historic event, when he was prophesying or when he was operating.

[2 : 06] But in the instance of Joel, there is no such indication. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel. So it's difficult to place this historically.

There are some people that feel that Joel is prophesying after the exile, and there are some that indicate that he's prophesying before the exile.

And there are reasons why they can indicate both of these. So it's difficult, certainly for the likes of myself at any rate, to be clear as to when Joel was operating.

But there are certain things in the book of Joel that can apply after the exile. There are certain things that can apply before the exile.

And as I was going through it and reading this particular section, I was feeling and sensing particularly the situation that Judah was in.

[3 : 20] And that particularly when they were being attacked and besieged, in fact, by Assyria.

The Assyrian kingdom had come and had taken the northern ten tribes, Israel, so-called, into captivity and spread them throughout their realm in the north.

But Judah was left. But the king of Assyria came eventually and also tried to subdue Judah.

And you will recall that Hezekiah was the king at that time. And I would like just to look at this particular situation from four headings.

Looking at it, first of all, in terms of the darkness of the situation that the people found themselves in.

[4 : 25] Then secondly, looking at the taunts of the enemy. Where is your God, they say? Then thirdly, looking at the call of the prophet.

A call to repentance. And then finally, in the fourth section, looking at the promise of the Lord.

The Lord had pity. And the promise of the Lord. And just looking at some aspects of that fulfillment. Not just in the Old Testament, but also in the New. So, we can look, first of all, at the issue of the situation that the people found themselves in.

Now, in the first chapter, at verse 4, it says, What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.

[5 : 34] What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten. What the hopping locust has left, the destroying locust has eaten. And what this is depicting for us is a situation where the land was totally barren.

And it's looking at it from the context of looking at Eden and the fruitfulness of that land. And then looking back and seeing the devastation that the locusts have actually done.

Where they have eaten everything. Some of the locusts would eat certain of the crops and of the fruits. And others would then just come and continue that devastation until there was nothing left.

Now, some people will say, well, this is just a story that is talking about a situation that developed. But certainly I would prefer to take it as reality.

Because the Lord generally works. If the Lord is telling us through the prophet that this particular thing happened, I would prefer to accept that and say that was there as a signal to the people.
[6 : 53] The people of Judah that God was dealing with them and was also going to deal with them. So first of all, we have the situation with the locusts.

Where all the food and they are no longer able to get the things that they would require even to worship the Lord.

They don't have the grain offering. They don't have the vine for the wine. They don't have these things. It's all been taken away. And we can only just imagine what it would be like at a time when we are thankful to the Lord for the food that we've had.

For the fact that we can go to the shops and we can buy food and make things ourselves at home. But it's there for us. And we have the resources to be able to go and do it.

But if we think of the situation that this conveys, we would go to the shop and there would be nothing. We would go to our land and there would be nothing.

[8 : 01] There would be nothing available for anyone to eat. It's just very, very difficult. And then the prophet goes on and explains that that is then brought into another dimension.

By the reality of the way the Assyrians or the soldiers. It doesn't specifically say the Assyrians here. But it talks about the soldiers and them coming.

And them just coming across the land into the houses. Tearing the place apart. And there is utter devastation.

And certainly when the Assyrians came down the coast, they took parts of Judah. Some of the villages of Judah were taken. And they besieged the rest.

They besieged Jerusalem. And the king and the peoples were inside the city. But they were very, very poorly off. They were starving.

[9 : 10] Because they were confined and contained. And the people were looking out on a land that was once a breadbasket.

And there was nothing but devastation. And siege mounds being erected. So that the Assyrians or this army that was coming would destroy them completely.

Or ask them to yield. They were being asked to yield. And to submit and to surrender. And you can just imagine the situation. The bleakness of that situation.

These people are looking into an abyss. They're looking into darkness itself in their situation. And they don't know what to do.

So there is darkness all around. There is darkness in the situation looking forward for them. For they can't see a way out of this.

[10 : 16] There is darkness as they look behind. Because they see that other peoples have been taken. Because the king of Assyria in particular makes mention of all the other places that had been devastated.

And all the other kingdoms that had been taken into captivity. And then in the second place the taunt begins. Because the king of Assyria sends his messengers.

And they speak to the people. And the leaders in Israel. The leaders in Judah. Said.

Don't speak to them in their own language. Speak to us. But they said. No we will speak to the people. And they shouted to the walls. And they gave them in very graphic detail.

The reality of what would happen. And what happened in other places. And they taunted them. With this taunt. Where is your God? Where is your God?

[11 : 21] And we may often ourselves feel like that as well. Because we may have put our trust in the Lord. And things have happened to us.

Situations have developed. And our hearts become heavy. And it may not be other people. But there is an enemy.

Who taunts us. There is one who comes to us. In the very. Solitude of our own heart. And our own experience.

And says. Where is your God? And if you have put your trust in Christ. It is likely that you will have experienced that. At some point or another.

Because the Lord tests his people. The Lord gives them. As they come to faith in Christ. He gives them the prop.

[12 : 23] And the crutch. So that they can walk. In his ways. And they are strengthened. And upheld. And they are given a zeal.

And they feel a confidence. In the love. And warmth. And reality. Of this newness. Of bondship. In Jesus Christ. But as they walk along the way.

They walk. Into the desert paths. Into the lonely places. Where God tests his people. And he tests them.

So that they will come forth. Refined. So that they will be purer. And better. For their experience. God. Takes away the props. And he allows his people. To walk. Through the darkness. And through the difficulties.

[13 : 30] And he allows the taunt. Of the evil. Where is your God? But as these people.

Experience. That taunt. And experience. The darkness. Of their situation. As they looked into that. Abyss. The prophet.

Comes to them. And the prophet. Calls. For repentance. Put on sackcloth.

And lament. O priests. Wail. O ministers. Of the altar. And in the verse. And in the verse. That we read. Between the vestibule. And the altar.

Let the priests. The ministers. Of the Lord. Weep. And say. Spare your people. O Lord. And make not your heritage. A reproach. A byword.

[14 : 27] Among the nations. Why should they say. Among the peoples. Where is their God? The prophet. The prophet calls. The people. To repentance.

And there are. Many times. In our experience. When repentance. Is the last thing. We think of. And certainly.

As people. Who are unregenerate. The last thing. We have on our mind. Is that we would repent. Why should we repent? What have we done?

We have a strength. In ourselves. And we will continue. In our own way. The heart. Is deceitful. Above all things.

And desperately wicked. And yet. This is the call. A call. To repentance. And is this not. Also the call. To our land.

[15 : 29] Today. A land. Which once knew. The dew. Of heaven. Which once knew. The power. Of God. And we don't need. To go beyond. The shores. Of these islands. To know. That there was. Times. Of blessing. And of refreshing. There was days.

In which. People. Knew. In a special way. That God. Was moving. Amongst his people. People. And I had a reminder.

Of that. Just in these past days. When a. Friend. Of my mother's. Who was living. In Glasgow. Passed away.

And it brought. To my mind. The fact. That she phoned me. When my mother died. And she was. Just telling me. That.

[16 : 25] She and my mother. Had started following. In the revival. In 1939. And she talked. Of the blessing. That they experienced.

And the bond. That they had. The camaraderie. That they had. Down through. All these years. There was something. Of. The blessing.

Of God. And revival. Had stayed with. God. Is calling us. To repentance. God.

Is asking us. To recognize. Where we are. And as we look. Across. The situation. Of our own nation. Today. Can we not see.

That the locusts. Have come. Can we not see. That the Lord. Is dealing with us. Even. In our financial. Situation. Yes.

[17 : 22] We will be told. From time. To time. There is nothing. To worry about. This is just. A global. A global situation.

That is affecting. Our land. It is now. Affecting. Europe. As well. But it is just. A thing. That will come. And will go. But we forget.

That we have. Transgressed. As a nation. The law. Of God. In ways. Which have. Unheard of. In times.

Of our forefathers. And is it not. Right. That we are right. For judgment. Should we not. Expect. That God. Would come. In judgment. Upon us. And should we not. Be seeing. That the very. Situation. We are in. Is none other.

[18 : 17] But the judgment. Of God. And God. Is calling us. To repentance. To repentance. As individuals. Because we are not.

What we should be. We are not. Where we should be. God. Eve. As. There. For us. He wants us to be close to him.

He wants us to have communion with him. He wants us to be on our knees. And when we read about the godly people of the past, that's the one thing that marks them out so much from ourselves, that they spent time with God.

They were on their knees. They were on their knees early in the morning of each day, praying, reading, and meditating upon the word of God.

And I came across a thought which was relating it to the animal kingdom. Cows, when they eat, they then regurgitate.

[19 : 36] They're called rumovators. And they chew that cud. And each time they chew it, they get something more out of it.

And it was just a reminder to myself how good a thing it is that we are in the word of God, that we are meditating on the word of God, that we are getting something out of it, that we are chewing it and chewing it until it becomes part of us, the essence of our being.

We have lost that as a generation. I know that in my own experience. When I think of the people of the past that we knew, that I knew, when they met with each other, they talked about what they were chewing.

They talked about the Lord in their experiences. They talked about what they were reading. They talked about what they were thinking about.

It became part of their experience as they walked along the road, like the two on the road to Emmaus. But we have lost that to a large measure.

[20 : 58] Our thoughts are on other things. But God is calling us to repentance. God is calling us before it is too late.

Yet, even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments.

God wants our hearts. God wants us to repent in our hearts. He doesn't want our offerings. Our offerings should flow from our repentance and from the change in our heart.

There is no point in giving God something external. What he wants is internal, so that the internal will affect the external.

God wants us to give our hearts to him. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

[22 : 20] Who knows whether he will not turn and relent? And I was reading just the other day in the book of Jonah. Jonah was asked to go to Nineveh, and Nineveh, of course, was the city, the capital city of this great Assyrian empire.

Jonah was asked to go there. It was a place of many, many people. Jonah didn't want to go. Jonah went to somewhere else, to the western side of the Mediterranean, away from where he was asked to go.

But God brought circumstances into the experience of Jonah, so that he did eventually go to Nineveh. And he did bring the message of God to the people.

And what happened? They repented. And this was the Gentiles. This was the people who were alien to Israel. They repented.

And is that not what we're seeing in our day as well? The word of God is going forth to other nations and other peoples. And they are repenting. When we think of the situation in South Korea, where there are thousands upon thousands going into the churches.

[23 : 43] One church gets filled. People go out. They go in again. There's another service. And so it goes on. One man I met said that he saw this happening four times in one day.

A thousand went in. And they went out. A thousand went in. And they went out four times. God is at work. But we, as it were, the Israel of God, are asleep.

But God is calling us to repentance. And that then takes us to the promise of the Lord. God is a God of mercy and of grace.

And he is able to do great things because he is jealous for his land. Then the Lord became jealous for his land. When the people repented, the Lord relented.

And we sometimes wonder what part we have in the work of God. Well, it's sometimes useful to see it as two different levels.

[25 : 02] We are seeing things from a temporal human perspective only. And we do not appreciate what is on the other side of the equation.

But God sees it all. And God uses human means. God uses even our repentance and turning to himself.

And God does the rest. But God is looking to us to pray. God is looking to us to come to him. God is looking to us to unburden ourselves before him. To cast all of our cares upon him. To acknowledge our sinfulness.

To recognize that we are lost. To recognize that we are looking into an abyss. and to come to him in repentance and in faith.

[26 : 13] And he then is promising that he will do great and wonderful things. And he even tells them that the threshing floor shall be full of grain.

Things the vats will overflow with wine. This was a place remember that was devastated. There was nothing growing and yet God is making this promise. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.

The hopper, the destroyer and the cutter. My great army which I sent among you. I will restore the years that the locust has eaten.

And how relevant that can be even for ourselves. For the Lord is telling us that if we repent, if we turn to him, he can restore the years that we have lost.

He is also speaking to those who have not put their trust in the Lord. You may be here today and you have been going to the house of God for many, many years and you have still not put your trust in him.

[27 : 23] If you do, if you acknowledge your sinfulness, if you repent before the Lord, if you turn from your sin, God can restore to you as well the years that the locust has eaten.

And 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 then the Lord promises something remarkable and it shall come to pass afterwards that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions, even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my spirit.

And we see this then in the New Testament. in the book of Acts in chapter 2, Peter on the day of Pentecost, and we heard about this day of Pentecost in the Thanksgiving service and it was so beautifully brought to our attention the way that the Lord was working in the Old Testament and in the New.

[28 : 48] And here again we see it. Here again we have the Pentecost. And the Apostle Peter is making reference to these words in the book of Joel when he is talking about what is being experienced there at Pentecost.

And it's just a wonderful expression of this promise of God that the Lord comes in power. for it meant Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape.

And those are people that are brought to faith and we remember that on the day of Pentecost there was over 3,000 people added to the church. Just wonderful things happening and it's the fulfillment of this prophecy of joy.

God working. But there is also looking forward again. God is promising that he will bring his people to be with him and that he is going to do great and wonderful things for them.

So we see the fulfillment of the prophecy in the experience of the people of Judah at the time. But we also see it in the fulfillment of what Jesus Christ has done and what that brings to us even at the time of Pentecost when there was this fulfillment of the prophecy and people were indeed prophesying.

[30 : 30] Signs, specific signs were given to them. Where they would know and relate back to the prophecies of the Old Testament and recognize that this was none other than God himself at work.

And God is also giving to us, even here in the book of Joel, the promise of his coming, the promise of that great fulfillment in the day when Jesus Christ will come again and when he will take his people to be with him and there will be no more famine, no more war.

It will be peace forever. But just one thought in closing, in terms of what the people were conscious of and where we go looking for the answer.

For we have this situation that Augustine referred to, the New, talking about the New Testament, is the Old Concealed and the Old is the New Revealed.

We have here the people questioning the situation that they were in and the power of darkness questioning them as well.

[31 : 52] Where is your God, they say. These people were looking into the abyss that they were experiencing at the time. And we can have our own abysses.

We can have situations of darkness which we cannot understand. But if we have these situations, where should we go looking?

We should go to the greatest abyss of all, to the abyss of the cross of Calvary, to the darkness that reveals light.

Because it was in the death of Christ that we find the reality of life and of light. And it is the other side of that equation.

We may have the darkness, but as we pass over into the darkness of God and his Son, we see eternal day. And if we are looking for answers to our questions today of why, we too must go to Calvary.

[33 : 08] For God hath not given us, in 2nd Timothy this is put down for us, for God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel, according to the power of God, who hath saved us, and called us with unholy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

If we want answers to the darkest of questions, take it to the darkest place of all, to the cross of Jesus Christ, Christ, where life and immortality is brought to light through the gospel.

Let's pray. O Lord, our God, we bless you for those things which we cannot understand, for those things which are in the realms beyond our understanding, but we thank you that we can come to one who knows us, who knows all about us, who knows our fears, who knows our darkness.

We thank you that he was the man of sorrows who was acquainted with grief, and we thank you, O Lord, that he can help us in our understanding of our situation too.

[35 : 21] Be with us then, Lord, and bless to us your word and you and pardon our sins for Christ's sake. Amen.