

Judgment & Restoration

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[0:00] It's good to be with you this morning. How long will this go on? I don't know about you, but that's a question that I've been asking a lot these days.

As the plague of COVID-19 continues to take its toll both in our daily lives and in the very cost of toll of real lives in our country, as our political situation seems impossibly divided, contentious, and broken, and as our country wrestles with the scourge of racism and violence, how long will this go on?

For many of us, there may be more personal situations that provoke the same question, a difficult marriage that doesn't seem to be improving, a workplace that is fractured, antagonistic, political.

Maybe a personal relationship that's gone bad and one who was once a friend now seems out to wreak havoc on your life. Maybe you're facing chronic illness or the decline of old age.

How long? How long will it last? When will it end? As we're asking this question, it's worth asking ourselves, where do we look in times like this for comfort, for hope, for strength?

[1:31] Maybe some of us in this time are motivated to become activists. We work to cure the disease, to change the policies. Maybe some of us become cynics.

We withdraw from engagement, allow bitterness to control our hearts. Maybe we become hedonists. We think, let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.

Maybe we become workaholics. If only I can try hard enough, I will get through this. You know, the Bible has a very simple encouragement to us.

As we're navigating the question of how long. And it is this, that we are to look not to ourselves, but to God. How long, O Lord, is the cry throughout the Bible of God's people.

How long, O Lord, till you return and make things right. And this brings us to our text this morning. We are finishing our series in the book of Joel this week.

[2:38] So we're in Joel chapter 3. If you're looking for Joel, you can go to the middle of your Bible, Psalms. Start flipping forward through the major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel.

And then Hosea, Joel is where you will find it. So, Joel chapter 3. And what we've seen so far is that, in the chapter of Joel, is that we've seen God call His people to repent of their sins and to turn back to Him.

We've seen God explain the trials they've been experiencing as precursors of a final judgment that is to come. We've seen God promise a restoration of His people.

And the outpouring of His Holy Spirit upon them. And this brings us to chapter 3 this morning. Our text, which we'll read together.

So let's read Joel chapter 3. What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia?

[4 : 09] Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily. For you have taken my silver and my gold. You have carried my rich treasures into your temples.

You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. Behold, I will stir them up to the place to which you have sold them.

And I will return your payment on your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the people of Judah. And they will sell them to the Sabaeans, to a nation far away.

For the Lord has spoken. Proclaim this among the nations. Consecrate for war. Stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near.

Let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords. And your pruning hooks into spears. And let the weak say, I am a warrior.

[5 : 09] Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations. And gather yourselves there. Bring down your warriors, O Lord. Let the nations stir themselves up and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat.

For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon are darkened. And the stars withdraw their shining.

The Lord roars from Zion. And utters his voice from Jerusalem. And the heavens and the earth quake. But the Lord is a refuge to his people.

A stronghold to the people of Israel. So you shall know that I am the Lord your God. Who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy.

[6 : 15] And strangers shall never again pass through it. And in that day the mountain shall drip sweet wine. And the hills shall flow with milk. And all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water.

And a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord. And water the valley of Shittim. Egypt shall become a desolation.

And Edom a desolate wilderness. For the violence done to the people of Judah. Because they have shed innocent blood in their land. But Judah shall be inhabited forever.

And Jerusalem to all generations. I will avenge their blood. Blood I have not avenged. For the Lord dwells in Zion.

Let's pray together. Lord we hear this word. And it is a sobering one. Lord I pray this morning for your help. That Lord we would hear your word rightly.

[7 : 12] That your Holy Spirit would give us this morning understanding. Lord I pray for clarity of speech and thought. As I proclaim your word. And I pray for our hearts. Lord that you would protect us.

Lord from being led astray. Into misunderstandings about you and who you are. Help us Lord to see you as you truly are.

Lord in all of your glory and majesty. We pray this in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. As we look at this passage.

The final thing that the prophet Joel wants to say to his people is this. As we long for trials to end. We are to look to God. God who will judge his enemies.

And restore his people to eternal glory. Glory. This passage has two main ideas. You can see it in verses 1 and 2. That he will restore the fortunes of his people.

- [8 : 15] And he will gather the nations. And enter into judgment against them. So that's what we are going to explore this morning. Is those two ideas. And what they mean to us. We are going to take them in reverse order.
- So. First. God will judge. The nations. Now. Maybe you are like me. But this is a difficult concept to swallow.
- Maybe you will struggle with this. Maybe you have been raised. As many of us have in America. With Norton's anthology of American literature. Where the only religious reading. Is.
- Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. A sermon by Jonathan Edwards. By the way. If you have not read Jonathan Edwards. He is a wonderful theologian. And a wonderful pastor. But usually that.
- That little snippet. Is used in your classes. To make you think of a God. Who is capricious. And who dangles sinners. Over the fires of hell. The real message is actually.
- [9 : 17] That he holds you up by grace. Over the fires of hell. By the way. But that's not typically. How it's presented. It is presented as. God is a very angry.
- And malicious God. Maybe it's more like. Thinking about it. God is like Thanos. Come to destroy the world. And rain down destruction. In the Marvel Avengers movies. If you're familiar with those.
- How do we think about God. As one who will judge. The nations. Judge his enemies. Well. It's a big question. And I can't answer all of it today. But what I want to do.
- Is think about what Joel. Has to say to us about that. And Joel has a number of things. To say. About this. First of all. We want to recognize. That as. As God is. As Joel is describing.
- What God is going to do. He starts with particular nations. Tyre and Sidon. Which are cities of Phoenicia. And then the Philistines. The nation of Edom. Which is to the east.
- [10 : 14] Southeast. And then. Egypt. Right. These are the nations. And part of what we see. Is that. Joel is describing them.
- So that we understand. Why. God will bring judgment. Upon them. First. We see their actions. Look at verses 2 and 3. With me. They have engaged.
- In the dehumanizing trade. Of human beings. And not only that. But they have done this. Not only with adults. But with children. And not only with children.
- But they have done it. In a flippant way. Where they are trading. The lives of human beings. For momentary pleasures. Whether it be a moment.
- With a prostitute. Or a glass of wine. That is what verse 3 says. They are treating. The lives of people. Made in God's image. With rampant disregard.
- [11 : 12] For their true value. Not only this. But they have been marauders. Who take. And take. And take. They have taken land. From the people of God. They have taken money.
- They have plundered the nations. And so there is reason. That God is bringing a judgment. Against these. Because objectively.
- These are thieves. And sex traffickers. And slavers. They are not good people. Who are being unjustly.
- Judged by God. The passage goes on. And it recognizes. That these nations have stood. As enemies of God. And of God's people. And I need to spend a little bit of time.
- To explain why this. Is important. Because it's easy to misunderstand this. Think back about the big picture. Of the Bible. It talks about. The nation of Israel. Was raised up.

[12:09] The descendants of Abraham. As a political nation state. To be. A place where God would display. His glory to the world. And where the nations could come. And see the greatness of this God.

A God who is above all gods. And the center of it. Was the capital Jerusalem. And Zion was a word. That referred to the seat. Where God would rule.

And would reign over the world. And these nations have all. Been enemies of God's people.

In that place. Phoenicia traded their people. And introduced a worship of Baal. Worship of other gods. The Philistines famously warred with David.

Over and over again. Even stole the Ark of the Covenant. Egypt. The well-known story. They took the descendants of Abraham. They enslaved them. And kept them.

[13:08] In servitude. For hundreds of years. And then later on in the history. Egypt saw Israel. As a little football. In the regional. Global.

The regional. Political. Affairs of the. As Egypt was fighting against. Assyria. And later Babylon. For control of the region. And Israel was this little football.

That. Egypt would use. Or abuse. And Edom. Probably the one we're least familiar with.

And Edom. You can read the book of Obadiah. To learn about Edom. But it seems the greatest. Greatest cause for harm of Edom. Is that they stood by.

And watched. Rather than coming to the. Their aid. Edom was a descendant. Of the. Of the. Brother. Of. Of. Nephew. Of. Of Abraham.

[14:03] And. And they were. They. They should have come to Israel's aid. When Babylon. Invaded them. And instead. According to the book of Obadiah. They sat by. And watched.

Jerusalem fall. And even. Potentially. Plundered. Or took advantage. Of it. To grab land. And prosperity. After that. So all of these nations.

Had acted. Evil. Towards God's people. The place that God had. Intended. And we see in verse 19. It describes them as. Nations that have shed.

Innocent blood. In the land. In light of all of this. Recognizing that Israel. Had been in the Old Testament.

Constantly surrounded. By nations like these. Israel was often. Crying out to the Lord. How long oh Lord. How long will you free us.

[14:59] From these enemies. That sit waiting to pounce. On our. On our borders. And Joel brings them.

A word of hope. Judgment is coming. Justice will happen. And we. And God will make it right. He will bring to them.

A repayment. For their evil. A repayment. What they have done. To the nation of Israel. Will be done to them. Now it's worth noting. That as I read this. In verses 9 through 12.

There is no physical army. That God is calling. To execute this judgment. There's no human agency. But instead. God is going to gather them. In the valley of Jehoshaphat.

And Jehoshaphat. Is a word that simply means. Yahweh judges. Or God judges. So he's calling them. Into a valley of judgment. And then he will carry out. This judgment. In his own power.

[15:56] And maybe with his heavenly armies. But certainly not with a human. Agency. And it is a fearsome one. His enemies will be trampled.

Like the grapes in the wine press. As it says in verse 13. Because their evil was great. This imagery is vivid.

But it points. To a broader truth of scripture. And that is that the wages of sin. Is death. When we as human beings.

Turn from the God. Who created this world. From the God. Who is the source of all life. God who is the perfect embodiment. Of all that is good. And right. And beautiful. God who is holy in this world.

When we turn away from him. And go our own way. And do our own things. We make ourselves enemies. Of that God. And there will be a judgment.

[16:59] Here's the thing. If we think about it. We want wrongdoing and evil to be just judged. We want Stalin and Mao and Hitler and others to be brought to justice.

We want rapists and sex predators to be judged. We want sex traffickers and pornographers to bear punishment.

And for their evil to end. This is why we long for judgment in the right cases. And this is what Israel longed for in the time of Joel.

That God would judge those around them that had done such great wrong to their nation. But friends we also must realize that this is a fearsome and a terrifying thing.

Is it not? Because as we look ahead to the broader picture of scripture. Just as the wages of sin is death. We also recognize that Romans 3 reminds us. That all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

[18:05] That there is no one righteous. Not one. The nations of today are no different. Is there any nation today. That does not have enough sin to be deserving of God's judgment.

There is no nation that is Zion where God sits and rules and reigns. It's not in Israel. It's not in America. It's not in Canada or Sweden or whatever your utopian society might be.

It's not in any of the nations of the world. It's not in Israel. It's not in Israel. It's not in Israel. It's not in Israel. It's not in Israel. And so we recognize that this stands. As a fearsome reality for our world.

But we also must recognize that what God is doing in our age today is a little different than what he was doing in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament God had a location, a physical place, a physical nation where he was displaying his glory.

And we see very clearly this transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Where in the New Testament it's not a nation state. But it's a transnational entity called the church.

[19:15] And it is this people that God has poured his spirit out on. And if you think about the day of Pentecost. The promise that Joel has just talked about. It came down and allowed the gospel to be preached in languages that people didn't even know how to speak.

So that many nations could hear the good news. And hear the call. And what was a beginning of a down payment through the nation of Israel. Now the doors have been blown open.

And God's great plan is to create a people from every tribe and tongue and nation. This is what we see in Revelation 5. The vision of worshiping Jesus where it says, Worthy are you, Jesus, to take the scroll and open its seals.

For you were slain. And by your blood you ransomed people for God. From every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom and priests to our God.

And they shall reign on the earth. And friends, as we sit here now in this moment today. The fulfillment of the hopes of God for his people.

[20:25] And the warning about the judgment about those who are outside. Is not a national distinction. But is a distinction between those who are under the blood of Christ.

That is the church. And those who are not. Now we've seen that the church is not perfect either.

And the first two chapters of Joel have warned us and reminded us that God will bring judgment as discipline to his own people first. But then also he will judge the world for its rebellion against him.

Verse 16. The Lord roars from Zion. And utters his voice from Jerusalem and the heavens and the earthquake. And so it should. Before the God who judges that which is wrong.

We all should rightly tremble before him. But look at the second half of that verse. But the Lord is a refuge to his people.

[21 : 30] And a stronghold to the people of Israel. You see because if we see that Joel is saying there is a vindication for the people of God.

In that their enemies will be defeated. And evil will not continue forever. There is also a word of hope. Word of hope that God will restore his people.

To eternal glory. What will this look like? Oh my friends. This is such a beautiful picture. First. His people will be vindicated and find peace from their enemies.

You see this in verse 17. That the Lord. The covenant keeping God. Will come. And he will reestablish a place where his people can dwell in peace.

Where the strangers of the world will no longer trample through Jerusalem. As a road for their armies between Egypt and Assyria and the northern kingdoms.

[22 : 33] As they had done before. But instead there will be peace. For those enemies will be judged. And they will be destroyed.

And they will be no more. Friends we have the privilege here in America. Of living in a country where. We have experienced very little.

Real war. On our soil. But around the world. There are many who experience this on an. Ongoing basis.

And the promise. The promise that because God will come and judge. That there will be peace one day. That he will reestablish his kingdom. And peace will come.

Where there is no more need for a sword. And the. And the plowshares that were beaten into swords. Will now be turned back. And beaten into plowshares once again. When the lion will lie down with the lamb.

[23 : 32] In the words of the prophet. There will be no more bloodshed. And no more violence. Can you imagine that? Not only will there be peace.

When God restores his people. But there will be an abundance of life. Images of wine and milk flow. The wine is significant. Because we've seen already.

In the book of Joel. How the drought. And the attack of the locusts. Had destroyed their vineyards. And so they had no wine. It says God will produce.

In his restoration. So much wine. That the mountains will drip with it. And then he uses an image of milk. Which brings to mind from the book of Joshua.

That God is taking his people. Out of slavery. And into a promised land. A land flowing with milk and honey. Flowing. Overflowing with the things that provide life.

[24 : 28] To his people. And not only milk. But water. But water. Water. As well. We don't live in a very arid area.

Maybe some of you have lived in deserts. Maybe you've been to Israel. And seen how dry it can be. The wadis that are only flowing streams. During the rainy season.

And the rest of the year. They're just dry stream beds. Joel says. When the Lord restores his people. They will flow.

They will flow with life giving water. And that water brings. If you've ever seen. There's this great planet earth. Where there's a dry river in Africa. I wish I knew where it was.

I should have looked this up. This is an off the cuff illustration. But. And there's this beautiful picture. Where it's just completely dry. And then the rains come. And as the rains come. The animals come.

[25 : 22] And the vegetation sprouts up. And it's just. Literally within like two days. It goes from a complete dry plain. To this.

Verdant. Beautiful. Green. Abundantly living. Plain. And that's a picture. Of what God is going to do for us.

There will be not only in the stream beds. But in Jerusalem. A fountain that overflows to the world. Friends. Not only will there be peace. And not only will there be this abundance of life.

But the greatest joy of all. Verse 21. The last word. For the Lord will dwell in Zion. The Lord will come and dwell among his people.

This is the promise. Given. To Moses. As he was. Delivering. As God had delivered his people out. God came and said. I will be your God. And you will be my people.

[26 : 20] And I will dwell among you. This is the promise. That is given by Jesus. As he's waiting to be ascended to heaven. After his resurrection.

He says. I am with you. To the end of the age. To be with him. Is to know and experience.

The intimacy of relationship with him. The reality of his love. The greatness of his power. The riches of his grace. Are all a refuge to his people.

And this is the picture. That Joel holds forth. Of what God will do when he restores his people. And friends. Can we not see that this is exactly.

What God has given. To us. His church. In Jesus Christ. We the church. The transnational people of God. We who are longing for a new Jerusalem. In the end of this age.

[27 : 17] We who lament now. How long oh Lord. Can we not see that Jesus has defeated. Our greatest enemies. That by his life and death.

And resurrection. He's defeated sin and death. That he's defeated the power of Satan. And that we know. In the book of Revelation. That one day. He will be destroyed.

And there will be no more evil. And no more sin. And no more wrong. In the whole world. That the spiritual warfare. Not the physical warfare of the Old Testament.

But the spiritual warfare that we are in today. Will end. And God will be victorious. Not only has he defeated our greatest enemies.

But he's brought us abundant life in Jesus. We are no longer dead. In our sins and trespasses.

[28 : 09] But when by faith we are joined with Jesus. We are raised with him to new life. And a new life that is indestructible. A new life that means that even our physical death.

Is not the end. But the beginning and the entree. Into an eternity with God. Jesus is the fountain of life. From which we drink by faith.

And finally the promise that Jesus will be with us. He will never leave us or forsake us. Even in the midst of the challenges we face right now.

Personally and nationally. Jesus is with us. And though in this in-between time we wait. And we long. And we cry out. How long? Oh Lord.

Joel reminds us that a restoration is coming. I want to leave you with a vision from the book of Revelation.

[29 : 06] As the apostle John. Gives us this picture of what is to come. And I hope you will hear in it. The resonance of all these promises that we've seen in Joel. Chapter 21.

John writes this. Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city. New Jerusalem.

Coming down out of heaven from God. Prepared as a bride. Adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne. Saying behold. The dwelling place of God is with humanity.

He will dwell with them. And they will be his people. And God himself will be with them as their God. And he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. And death shall be no more.

Neither shall there be mourning. Nor crying. Nor pain anymore. For the former things have passed away. And then in chapter 22. Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life.

[30 : 06] Bright as crystal. Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. Through the middle of the street of the city. Also on either side of the river. The tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit.

Yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed. But the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it.

And his servants will worship him. They will see his face. And his name will be on their forehead. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun.

For the Lord God will be their light. And they will reign forever and ever. Do you hear it? How long, O Lord, will end in this glorious vision?

Jesus has done all that is needed for this to be a certain future reality. And as we fix our eyes on that, it will be able to give us hope.

[31 : 14] Hope for today and strength for today. As we endure these days of how long, O Lord. The knowledge of his judgment against sin and the restoration of his people.

This is the word that Joel has for us today. Let's pray. Lord, thank you for this word. And thank you for your glory that you have revealed in these things.

Lord, I pray that by your spirit, you would help us to know and understand these things. Lord, I pray, especially this morning, that a knowledge of what a great God, a great and mighty God you are.

Lord, would both sober us and would humble us. Lord, would gladden our hearts and strengthen our hope. Lord, we pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen. Let's stand.

[32 : 27] Let's stand. Let's stand.

Let's stand. Let's stand. We are a moment. You are forever. Lord of the ages. God before a time.

We are a vapor. You are eternal. Love everlasting. Reigning on us.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Highest praises, honor and glory. Be unto your name. Be unto your name.

[33 : 38] We are a moment. We are a moment. You are forever. Lord of the ages.

God before a time. We are a vapor. You are eternal. Love everlasting. Reigning on us.

Reigning on us. Holy, holy, Lord God almighty. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

Highest praises, honor and glory. Be unto your name.

unto your name. We are the broken. You are the healer.

[34 : 40] Jesus, Redeemer. Mighty to save. You are the love song. We'll sing forever. Bowing before you.

Blessing your name. And holy, holy, Lord God almighty.

Worthy is the Lamb who was slain. Highest praises, honor and glory. Be unto your name.

Be unto your name. Be unto your name.

Be unto your name. You may be seated.

[36 : 09] Friends, we're glad that you have joined us for worship this morning, both on the live stream and here in person. We pray that the Lord will encourage you today. Quick announcements.

Don't forget, next week, outdoor service is 4 o'clock, not 4.30. And please continue to RSVP to both services so that we know that you are coming.

For those of you who are here, just so you know, if you're new here, the ushers will come and dismiss you. We'll go out the back. And just to remind you, we want to avoid having a choke point right outside the door.

So if you can go out, turn right, go stand on the grass in front of Trinity House. Please stay off the sidewalk so that our neighbors can get by. That would be great. Hear now the benediction from the book of Jude.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy. To the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

[37 : 13] Be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority before all time, now and forever. Amen. Go in peace. Go in peace.

Go in peace.

Go in peace.