

# Judgment & Repentance

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. It's good to be with you all here, both in person and on the live stream. Thank you for joining us this morning. I don't know about you, but when my alarm goes off in the morning, I almost always hit snooze. My kids will tell you sometimes I hit snooze too often, and they will come in and shake me and say, Daddy, we've got to get up to get to school on time.

So it's a little embarrassing, but it's true. I often want to ignore my alarm and roll over and go back to sleep. And I know that sometimes in my house, when my fire alarm goes off, I also similarly don't panic. I think, eh, it's because I'm cooking bacon and it's burning a little.

Or sometimes I just think, yep, the battery's gone bad. I don't actually think there's a fire. Eventually, I'll get to pulling it down and turning it off, which is what I usually do. And some of you may live in dormitories or apartment buildings, and you know what it's like when the alarm goes off at three in the morning, and you just think, somebody's cooking in the kitchenette again, or my neighbor downstairs is smoking pot, and the alarms go off. And that just happens when you're living in those kind of communal living circumstances, and your tendency is to ignore them. We ignore our alarms because it's inconvenient to respond to them. It disrupts our lives. It impinges on what we're doing, our routines in the moment. And often it's because we really don't think that the danger is very great. Now, some of you may have lived somewhere on the Pacific Rim or in Tornado Alley in the Midwest, and where there are alarms that go off that have a much greater cost, don't they? If the tsunami alarm goes off or the tornado alarm goes off, the danger could be very real and pretty significant. I've never lived in those places, so I don't quite know. But clearly, the alarms in those places are not to annoy or to hassle or inconvenience us, but they're to warn us of a great danger and to give time to respond to it.

This brings us to our passage in the book of Joel today. We're looking at Joel chapter 2. If you have a paper Bible and you're trying to find Joel, here's... the Psalms is usually the middle of your Bible, so you can open up there and then start flipping forward. You go through the major prophets, the big ones, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. And then after that are the 12 minor prophets, minor not because they're less important, but because they're smaller. And Joel is the second one between Hosea and Amos. And it's only about one page in my Bible, you know, four total, but one flap. And so, it's easy to miss, but if you have a paper Bible you're looking for that, that's where you can find it. And we're going to be looking at the first part of chapter 2 this morning, Joel chapter 2, verses 1 through 17. And I'm going to read it, and then we're going to pray, and then we will continue with our service. So, please read along with me.

Blow a trumpet in Zion. Sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble. For the day of the Lord is coming. It is near. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and thick darkness. Like blackness, there is spread upon the mountains. A great and powerful people.

[ 3 : 48 ] Their like has never been before, nor will it be ever after them throughout the years of all generations. Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like a garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of mountains. Like the crackling of a flame of fire, devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. Before them peoples are in anguish. All faces grow pale.

Like warriors they charge. Like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way. They do not swerve from their paths. They do not jostle one another. Each marches in his path, and they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city. They run upon the walls. They climb up into the houses. They enter through the windows like a thief. The earth quakes

before them. The heavens tremble. The sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord utters his voice before his army. For his camp is exceedingly great. He who executes his word is powerful.

For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome. Who can endure it? Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments. 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. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a solemn assembly, gather the people, consecrate the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber between the vestibule and the altar. Let the priests and the ministers of the Lord weep and say, spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God?

Let's pray together. Lord, we thank you for your word. We thank you that you have not left us to grasp and seek after you in our own imaginations and thoughts, but Lord, you have revealed yourself, and you have revealed yourself clearly in your word. And Lord, thank you that in your revelation, Lord, you teach us, Lord, timeless truths about yourself and about us and about our world. Lord, we ask this morning that you would give us hearts to receive your word, hearts to understand it, hearts to obey and respond as you would have us. God, we ask for your help in this, for we are weak and we are easily distracted and we are by nature willful. Lord, will you help us this morning? I ask for your help in speaking clearly that my words would be useful in the hands of your spirit as we sit under your word together this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

After having described in chapter 1 a locust plague that has come upon the people of God in Israel and having called people to respond and lament in chapter 1, here in chapter 2, the prophet Joel looks from what has happened before. He turns and he looks to what is coming and he sounds an alarm, an alarm to warn us of a coming danger and a summons for us to return to him in time to know his salvation.

[ 8 : 31 ] This is the big idea of this passage and it breaks down into two very simple parts. The first 11 verses are the sounding of the alarm and the second from verses 12 to verse 17 are the invitation to return to him. So we're going to look at that in that sequence.

1 through 11, you see this, right? From the very beginning, blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Something bad is coming. Rouse yourself to respond.

There is a day that is yet coming. You've already seen a locust invasion and the devastation that has come upon your land. There is something greater than that that is but a foretaste of, that is forecasting what is to come. He says, what is coming is the day of the Lord.

Now, the day of the Lord is actually a very rich theological idea in the Scriptures, and it would take a long time to unpack all of it. I'm going to recommend, if those of you who have access to computers, the Gospel Coalition is a great website that has a... you can just go to the search button and type in the day of the Lord, and there's a great article on there that'll give you the broader picture of the biblical idea of the day of the Lord. And basically what it says in summary is that the day of the Lord has two major ideas. One is that the day of the Lord is a day of judgment, a day of judgment that may come through nature, that may come through nations, ultimately that will come through the return of the Lord, and that in this judgment, God will come, and He will end evil, and He will stop those who stand up against the kingdom of God.

This judgment is coming upon all the world for those who stand opposed to Him, and also upon His own people. This judgment will come upon His own people in a refining sense to bring His people back from their unfaithfulness, to expose their spiritual waywardness, and this is what the day of the Lord is and will be. But it is not merely a day of judgment. It is also a day of renewal and hope for God's people, that as God comes and He judges the world on that day, He will reset the world and make it right. Evil will be punished. Sin will cease. Goodness will be restored in its perfect form.

[ 11 : 19 ] Redemption will come to God's people. Vindication over those who have mocked and scorned and persecuted His people. And glory, a restoration to a place of honor in His kingdom. And ultimately, the renewal of joyful worship of God. This is the picture that when the day of the Lord comes, the result will be the reunion and the final consummation of God's kingdom where we will worship Him forever. And it will be a wonderful and a glorious thing. Now here in Joel, the

prophet is pulling more on the first idea than the second. He's saying the day of the Lord is coming in judgment and it is going to be fearsome.

Look at me with the images and verses 2 through 9 for just a minute. In verse 2, it talks about darkness and gloom coming in as if it's never been seen before and will never be seen again. On this day, it will be like nothing we've ever seen means it will be worse than whatever you have already experienced. Verse 3 says it comes like a forest fire devouring Eden. This picture of lush abundance and provision and goodness. This fire comes through and what is left behind is a desolate wilderness.

I was thinking about this week, I actually googled wildfires and some of the most stark pictures were from Australia and the Australian wildfires that happened earlier this year where these lush green valleys have been replaced with ash and stumps of burned out trees and the empty shells of homes.

Black and white, no more color upon those. This is the picture of what it's going to look like when the judgment comes.

And then verses 4 through 9, he says, this judgment is going to come like a relentless army, like an army that cannot be stopped. He uses odd images like chariots jumping over mountains.

[13:43] How is that possible? Well, he's obviously using this figuratively. And listen, we don't know exactly whether he's talking about another locust plague or whether he's talking about an actual army or is he talking about using both of those as images that are picturing something even greater than that.

But what we do know is that when this day comes, the judgment will come and it will destroy all the things. Even the stubble in the fields will be burned.

Even it will come into every nook and cranny of our lives so that even the houses, it describes the armies coming in through the windows. There is no place to escape. There is no place to hide.

And then in verse 10, we finally understand that this isn't just a locust army or a real army of humans.

But it's even greater than that. Look with me in verse 10. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. When the day of the Lord comes, it will almost be as if God is undoing His creation in judgment against its rebellion against Him.

[15:06] And then when we get to verse 11, we recognize that the high point of this passage is that when the day of the Lord comes, it is not a random event, nor is it something that simply happens that God allows, but that in fact the day of the Lord will be led by God Himself.

It is He who sovereignly commands the day of judgment. The language of darkness and gloom and all of the... Some of the imagery is reminiscent.

Listen, if you are a Hebrew reader and you read this, you would remember the language from Exodus when Moses went up to the mountain to meet with God. And as God descended, the theophany of His presence with Moses, it was attended with the same darkness, the same gloom, the same holiness descending in, where they put a boundary around the mountain so that the people wouldn't go up and be destroyed by the holiness of God.

When God shows up, really, we fall on our faces in the presence of a greater power, a greater majesty, a holiness that our sinful selves cannot endure.

We are unworthy. And for God to show up, it is a fearsome thing. And that's why the prophet ends this section with the question, who can endure it?

[16:41] It's a rhetorical question, and the answer is no one. No one can stand before God on their own on the day of judgment in righteousness.

So how do we apply this? How do we think about this for ourselves? The people in Joel's day heard this. They had already seen the devastation of a locust plague and endured military incursion, maybe not recently.

It's unclear exactly when he wrote this book. But they had seen the devastation and felt the fear. And Joel is saying, have you heard the alarm?

There's something worse coming. And I think we need to do the same thing. Look, COVID-19 is a major wake-up call.

Like locusts, it is a natural invasion that devastates and changes our lives. Our lifestyles have been altered. Certainly inconvenienced, but for some altered permanently by this.

[ 17 : 50 ] And many have their livelihoods threatened by it. And of course, most tragically, there are many who are dying here in this country and around the world.

Now, we need to be very careful here. Because there are many who might say, well, this has come because of sin X or sin Y.

God is judging this nation or that nation or doing this or that. And it's striking because Joel does not do that. Joel is actually... In lots of places in the prophets, they do.

They specify. This judgment has come because of their idolatry. Because they're worshipping other gods. Or because they have not trusted me. And they've trusted in human alliances to protect themselves.

Or they have... This judgment has come because of their injustice against the poor and the marginalized and the needy among them. And the prophets are very free to do that.

[ 18 : 46 ] But Joel doesn't. And we need to be careful not to do it either. But rather than a specific thing that he's challenging us for, he is allowing us to ask ourselves the question, where are we?

Are we hearing this as a wake-up call? That there will be a day of judgment. And are we ready for it?

Have you heard the warning? Or are you asleep in the light? Are you comfortable in your cozy world? Have you allowed your Christianity to become marginalized?

Or are you listening to the Lord and following Him? Are you cavalierly assuming that this present tragedy isn't affecting you very much?

And so you'll be fine. And you don't need to listen to the warning. Are you arrogantly pursuing your preferred life, no matter what the effect is? The Lord has sounded His trumpet call.

[ 19 : 56 ] The day of the Lord is coming. Are you ready? But of course, what does it mean to be ready? The first trumpet sound is this warning, but the second one is a summons.

We see this in verse 15. Blow the trumpet in Zion. Consecrate a fast. Call a solemn assembly. The Lord is not simply saying, there's something bad coming.

Be ready for it. But He's also giving us a way. How do we respond to that? The response is an invitation. Laced with hope. Return to me.

The hope is that as we return to the Lord, the day of the Lord will not be judgment, but salvation for us. What does this returning look like?

Well, first of all, it is a returning to whom? This is an important question. And you see in verses 12 and 13, return to me, the Lord your God. Look with me in verse 13.

[ 20 : 58 ] 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.

Who is this God that we're returning to? First of all, we see that it is returned to the Lord. And in your Bible, it may have little capitals, L-O-R-D in this funny little capital thing.

Do you know what that means? It's the special name that God revealed Himself to Moses in Exodus 3. I am the covenant-keeping God. I am the faithful God of Israel who has come and delivered you from Egypt and now brought you into this promised land as a foretaste of my creation of a people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

I am a covenant-keeping God. And not only am I a covenant-keeping God, but then He goes on and describes Himself as the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.

And again, if you were a Hebrew reader, this would resonate for this is the name that God revealed Himself to. This is the chant that was sounded out when God revealed Himself on Mount Sinai to Moses.

[ 22 : 09 ] Do you remember the story? After Moses went up, got the Ten Commandments, came back down, the people had failed. They went off and worshiped a golden calf. God was ready to wipe them out. Moses pleaded and said, Relent, Lord.

And the Lord did relent. Moses said, God, I can't do this alone. I need to know that You're with me. I need to see Your face. God said, No, you can't see my face and live.

But I will hide you in the cleft of a rock. And I will pass by and you will see the backside of my glory. Basically is what He says. And as this happens, as the glory of the Lord passes by, there is this chant, this resounding, The Lord, the Lord, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness.

This is the special name of the Lord. And once you have that, memorize that verse and then start to read your Old Testament over and over again, you will see it. It's like a refrain. It's like a title. It's a descriptor over and over again of what the God of the Bible, who the God of the Bible is.

That He is gracious. And that He is one who invites us to return to Him. One who will not forsake His people.

[ 23 : 28 ] So that's who we're returning to. How do we return? There's all sorts of things that Joel tells us here. We're to return in repentance. That is, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

Fasting meaning laying aside good gifts that God has given us for a season so that we might want the giver more than the gifts so that our hunger for God would be greater than the hunger for the pleasures and the blessings that He gives us.

Weeping because we acknowledge our ongoing sinfulness in the way that our hearts are wayward. We're mourning because we have grieved the God who has saved us. We return in repentance because we need to be consistently repenting.

If we say we have no sin, we lie and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins and cleanse us of all unrighteousness.

So we're meant to return in repentance. We're meant to return with all of our heart, you see, in verse 12. This is why in verse 13 it says, rend your heart and not your garments.

[ 24 : 32 ] Repentance and turning to the Lord is not a formal action. Maybe coming to church would be a great step in it, but God doesn't care if you're in the pew or if you're on a live stream and your heart is far from Him.

Rending your garments is what you do when you recognize how terrible your grief is. It's an outward sign. And God says, I want the inward reality more than the outward sign.

Not only is it in repentance and with all of our heart, but it's with humility. Verse 14, perhaps He will return. I don't think Joel is saying, oh, I don't know, we'll roll the dice and see what happens.

Joel is saying, we have no standing to demand that God would receive us. We have no standing before Him to say, we deserve to be welcomed back.

But because of His character, because He is a gracious and loving God who is merciful, we have great hope that He will receive us.

[ 25 : 40 ] Verse 15 and 16 talks about the urgency of this. This is for all people. No one is exempt. The old, the young, the nursing mothers and the nursing babies, even the brides and the bridegrooms, cancel your honeymoon and get to the temple, is the idea.

Come to this solemn assembly, which is a special time, not part of the regular patterns of worship, a special time set aside for the people of God to return and to renew their relationship with God.

And finally, in repentance, with all of our heart, with humility, with urgency, and in hope. Hope of restoration. Verse 15, no, verse 14 talks about who knows whether He will relent and leave a blessing behind Him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God.

Pastor Nick pointed out last week that the part of the effect of the locust plague is that when you wipe out all the grain and wipe out all the vineyards, there's no wine to bring as a drink offering. There's no grain to bring as a grain offering to the Lord. And so their worship of the Lord was disrupted by this tragedy. But the hope is that as we turn to Him, He will restore.

[ 27 : 05 ] He will restore our lives. And most importantly, He will restore our worship of Him. And this leads us to the last verse in this section, verse 17.

We're returning to a merciful God. We're returning in all of these ways. What are we returning for? We're returning so that we might worship God. And it's not just for His own people.

Clearly, for those of us in the church, the wake-up call and the warning of what is to come is meant to return us who have been a part of His church, who have heard the message of the gospel.

But it is more than that because God's desire has always been for Him to display His glory to the ends of the earth so that all people would know His greatness and His mercy and His love and His justice.

So verse 17 says, God, would you do this so that your people in being restored and drawn to you would be a witness to the world and that nations, the nations who have stood against you, the nations that have rejected you, the nations that have not known you would turn to you and see that you are a great God above all gods.

[ 28 : 29 ] The summons to return to the Lord is to return to all of this sweetness of knowing that we are gods and that we will be with Him forever.

It is the joy of knowing that we will be a part of His kingdom. How do we respond? How do we respond to this coming day of the Lord and this invitation?

For those of you who are believers in Christ, for those of you who have placed your faith would say, I am a Christian. We must ask ourselves the questions, what do we need to turn from?

Where do we need to return to the Lord? Are we wholeheartedly pursuing a life fully for God? Are we tolerating sin or compromise knowingly and willfully in our lives?

Are we complacent with lukewarmness in our hearts? Do we live in name for Christ but in fact for ourselves? Do we invest our time, our money, our love, our talents for God or for our own pleasure, advancement, success, or pleasure?

[ 30 : 01 ] Do we treasure worshiping God above all things? These are the questions that we as God's people need to ask.

But maybe some of you are here this morning and you're asking yourselves, I don't know this God yet. There is a call here and an invitation.

Turn. Turn before it's too late because the day of the Lord will be a fearsome thing for those who are outside of Christ. And that doesn't make those of us who are inside of Christ better.

It simply means that we have seen our need and run to Christ for salvation because in Christ is everything that we need to be prepared for that day. Because you see, Jesus came and He left the glories of heaven to come and walk with us on this earth.

And on the day of His death, the darkness and the gloom descended on the world according to the Scriptures. For three hours, the world turned dark as Jesus hung on the cross bearing our sin.

[ 31 : 13 ] and the judgment and the wrath and the relentlessness and the devastation and all of the pictures of the day of the Lord were rained down on the Son of God as He hung on the cross for us in our place.

So that when we, by faith, wholly trust in Him and run to Him to be our refuge, He becomes our covering.

And the threat of that wrath falling upon us is taken away because we know it has already been taken by Jesus.

So the invitation is, will you turn? Will you turn from your own self-salvation projects? My life will be saved because I am successful in these things.

Will you turn from trusting in yourself, your own goodness, your own righteousness? Will you turn to Jesus who is the only hope and place your faith in Him?

[ 32 : 25 ] This is the invitation for us today. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this time. We thank you for this word.

Lord, we thank you for the hope, Lord, that though our sin is great and deserving of judgment, Lord, your salvation is greater and your mercy is more.

Lord, that in Jesus we can find a place of safety and refuge even in the day that is to come. Lord, I pray for your work in our hearts as we continue in our service.

Lord, show us where we need to turn away from other things and turn toward you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. So, as we end our service this morning we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

Those of you who are at home, if you have not gathered, this would be a time to go and gather elements to do this. As we do this, we come to the very place where we celebrate this thing, this thing that we have just talked about, that what God has done for us in Jesus, His death on the cross for our sins, His resurrection from the dead for our eternal life.

[ 33 : 55 ] The cross is a place where justice and mercy meet and it is what we celebrate as we come to a table to celebrate the Lord's Supper together. As we come to this table, we're going to sing a great hymn, It Is Well With My Soul.

And we're singing this hymn because the story of it fits with the story of Joel and the pattern of it.

The man who wrote it suffered great calamities of the Chicago fire of 1871, a destruction of all of his fortunes and then the loss of all of his children and a tragic sinking of a transatlantic boat.

And as he followed his cross to meet his wife in Europe, he wrote this song. It is a song that recognizes the grief and loss of devastation and calamities.

It is a song that calls us to the cross recognizing that the present moments of sorrow that we experience are foretaste of a greater sorrow that we would have outside of Christ but that because of Christ we can have hope.

And then at the end, and I want you to listen carefully when we sing this at the end, Lord haste the day when my face shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll.

[ 35 : 19 ] The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend. And I always thought, man, this is the high point, this is great. But then he says, even so, it is well with my soul.

Even so, because that day when the trump resounds and the Lord descends is both a fearsome and a glorious moment. But as we come to the table, we remember how we can see it as both because the fearsome part has been taken on Jesus for us so that the glory can be ours.

So we're going to sing in preparation to celebrate the Lord's Supper and then we'll observe together.