

The Final Day

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[0 : 0 0] Well, a warm welcome to you all today. It's lovely to be with you again for the last in our little series on Joel. And it's lovely to see the conversations and the friendship and the fellowship that you are all sharing before we start.

But now, let's pray as we come before God. Dear Lord God, we come today, this lunchtime, empty and needing to be filled.

Weary, many of us, and needing refreshment. Perhaps broken and needing restoration. Guilty, all of us, and needing pardon.

Sinful, and needing transformation. And so we ask, we pray that you will break into our lives once more with the power of your word and fill us, refresh us, restore us, pardon us and transform us.

May the power of your Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life itself, strengthen us now for your service. And give us great joy in your glory.

[1 : 1 1] An everlasting delight in knowing you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we're coming to the end, the final section of the book of Joel, a little book in the Old Testament, not often preached.

And the passage we look at today contains nearly all the bits of Joel that you would often see quoted. Perhaps, you know, on a little calendar of verses or an encouraging verse you might send to a friend.

And nearly all of them are in this section. But we've chosen to take all of it in one big chunk because I think it reveals something very, very important about Joel's message to us today.

And it's very much a message for us today. Not for the people of that day, but for us. You and me right now. So let's turn to Joel.

It's on page 762. And we're going to start at chapter 2, verse 30. Sorry, no, verse 28. That's page 762.

[2 : 2 1] Joel, chapter 2, verse 28. 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, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants, in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

For, behold, 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, and I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel.

[3 : 34] Because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land and have cast lots for my people and have traded a boy for a prostitute and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? 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 and 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 from 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 hand 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.

[4 : 45] Let the weak say, I am a worrier. 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 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, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

[5 : 50] And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds 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. Now we saw last week that Joel's purpose is that we might come to know God himself.

And you see that is very much at work in this passage. Verse 17, You shall know that I am the Lord your God who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And we'll see that by the end of this passage that God promises to make that happen.

That at the end, all who call on him, who call on his name, will not only know him, but live with him forever, provided for in every way possible. And that those who refuse him, on the other hand, who stand in the way of the knowledge of God for themselves or for others, will be destroyed.

[7 : 15] So it's a passage of joy and fear wrapped up together. But the passage has even more to say to us than that. And so to understand that, let's briefly cast our minds back over the book of Joel.

We started with one prophet, one man, hearing the word of God. And he was to warn the people of coming judgment. And he told them to turn to God, to escape the judgment, to call on God and repent.

And remarkably, they did. And then he declared to them a wonderful salvation, an incredible future, which we saw last week. Now we start in verse 228.

And we hear that all God's people, all of them, will be prophets. And then after that, we hear again, there is coming judgment, justice to come, punishment for evil.

But this time, not a temporary judgment for a single nation, but an eternal judgment for all nations. Now, if God sent one prophet to one nation about a temporary judgment, what will he do when there is a great judgment coming for all nations?

[8 : 21] The answer is, he will send a whole people of prophets to warn them. And judgment is coming. And so God's people, he says, will be made prophets so that they can declare to people that coming judgment.

Call them to come to him so they can share in the blessings of his people. So, we're going to look at this in three sections.

And the first is this, God's people will be prophets. And that's 228 and 29. Then we'll look at the people's message in two sections.

after that. So, firstly, God's people will be prophets, 28 and 29. Do you know, it is hard to grasp the remarkable preciousness of these two verses.

God's Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is poured out on all flesh. That is, everyone who believes. You know, all through the Old Testament, the Spirit of God did come on special people at special times for special purposes.

[9 : 35] But only a very few, prophets and kings particularly, would receive a deeper gift, having God's Spirit on them, living in them to equip them for greater task of serving his glory and serving his people.

and that's exactly what he promises every single one of his people, that they will have poured out on them, not a bet, you see, not a, I'll give you generously a good chunk of my Spirit, but I will pour out my Spirit on you.

He will give without stinting. He will fill us up with his Spirit. In other words, his own self-giving, he will come and live within us for a purpose.

And why? Very simple, he says, he will make all his people prophets. The sons and daughters will prophesy, the old men shall dream dreams and the young men shall see visions.

In other words, like Joel, we will be equipped to share God's message with others. Now, when will this happen? Now, you'll remember that after Jesus returned to heaven and the Holy Spirit came on the apostles at the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter stood up to preach and he said, this is what was said by the prophet Joel and he quoted these words.

[10 : 54] And so, at that moment, at the moment when the Spirit came on the early church and then on the church ever afterwards, these words were fulfilled. From that time forward, every Christian has the Spirit living in them and every Christian is, in Joel's terms, a prophet.

Now, at that point, we do need a quick check. We could easily get into deep disputes over these verses and there are deep and wonderful truths contained in them.

I cannot begin to touch here. But just one thing, Paul in the New Testament asks the question, are all prophets, are all apostles, are all prophets, are all teachers, do all work miracles?

Clearly expecting the response, no. So, in one sense, in the sense, Paul used the word, not everyone is a prophet. In another sense, in the way Joel uses it, they are.

And I think that makes us pay very careful attention to exactly what Joel is saying in the whole of this passage, which is, as I've already suggested, we are to be prophets like Joel, doing in his generation what he, sorry, doing what he did in his generation to our generation.

[12 : 10] The focus then isn't primarily on the dreams and the visions, the focus is primarily on the message. As I say, that doesn't exhaust the meaning of what's going on here.

But Peter in Acts 2 is a great example of what that means. As soon as he finishes quoting these words, he preaches to the people and what does he say? He says, you have sinned against God's representative Jesus Christ and you must repent.

You must call on the name of the Lord. And many of them do and they come to know God. So Peter not only tells us that the word is fulfilled, he gives an example of how to live it out.

Now, what this means is that you and I and every single one of us is a bearer of the message of God to the nations and particularly our own nation, our own place, our own people, our own friends and family.

The message that we are to call on the name of the Lord in order to be saved. As Joel puts it, that we are to avoid judgment and come to grace. Now, perhaps you think, as frankly, most of us do, that's all very well, but I'm not up to that.

[13 : 27] You know, I'm not gifted enough. I'm not good at speaking. I'm not an evangelist. I certainly don't feel like a prophet. I'm not a preacher. Or even, my faith is pretty weak. I struggle to believe these words of Joel at all, that there is a second coming.

And do you know what Joel says? I suspect, we can't ask him, but I suspect this is what he'd say. I suspect he'd say, well, welcome to the club. Read through the Old Testament prophets and see how they felt.

We don't know how Joel felt, but we know how Moses felt and Isaiah and Jeremiah and all the great prophets. We all know that right at the beginning when God called them, they felt an aching inadequacy. They told him, no, no, go choose someone else.

I'm not up to this. You know, even once Elijah, one of the greatest prophets of all time, was going, he felt such a failure he wanted to die. Perhaps, on the other hand, you think, when you think that God is calling you to speak to those around you, people don't listen to me.

All I do is offend them when I talk about this. And the answer, again, is read through the prophets, read through Ezekiel or Jeremiah or Isaiah or the story of Elijah. Again and again and again, they're rejected.

[14 : 44] But nonetheless, God speaks through them and it's worthwhile. Because some listen. Some call on God's name and some are saved. Now, I've had the privilege in the last week of being involved in pre-baptism interviews for our Farsi congregation.

One of the very remarkable things about that is that these people who have come from Iran have heard from someone else about Jesus Christ and about what he's done for them. And the person they've heard from in general is someone who's often a very young Christian themselves.

They may never have even seen a whole Bible or even a whole New Testament. They're pretty hard to get hold of in Iran, that country. They're not people who have been sitting in church every Sunday for years.

They're not people who are well taught. And yet, they are able to be prophets in Joel's sense. They're able to say, come to Jesus Christ, call on his name and you'll be saved.

And a year later, we have someone sitting on our couch who has not only heard and called, but has been willing to risk home and country and family in order to embrace that. God works through his people, small as they are and small as they feel.

[15 : 56] Secondly, though, let's go on to the rest of the passage because we need to know what God's people's message is. And God people, you see, are to declare salvation and they are to declare judgment.

Verses 2.30 to 3.12. You know, 2.30 to 3.2 summarizes this very clearly. There will be signs of coming judgment, he says.

Like, I don't know if you remember the three hours of darkness at Jesus' crucifixion. That's the kind of thing he's talking about. I will show wonders. The sun shall be turned to darkness. And there'll be other signs yet to come before the end.

But in between them, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. They will escape. They will be called by God. And that is the core of the message that God's people have.

And then we have the detail in verses 1 to 16. 1 to 3 tell us that God is going to gather all nations in order to judge them. He will judge them because of what they have done to his people, particularly, and how they have treated his people.

[17:00] How they have treated, it says, Judah and Jerusalem, which of course then was the whole people of God, and so represents the whole church, the whole people of God nowadays. If you look closely, you'll see that it's not merely a trial, but it's a trial for war crimes.

Verse 3 of chapter 3, they've been selling the people into slavery, valuing them no more than a drink or a night with a prostitute. And so he will bring all people into the valley of Jehoshaphat.

That's not a place in any map, by the way, it means the Lord judges. You see, the people of the world have shown their opposition to God by opposing the people God has chosen as his messengers to the world.

And that is exactly, if you remember, what Jesus said would happen at the end. He says that one day he will sit on his glorious throne and all nations will be gathered before him. And he will divide them into sheep on his right and goats on his left.

And he will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom. And to those on the left, depart from me, you cursed. Into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

[18:09] Even stronger words than Joel uses. And what is the difference between those two groups? Jesus is very plain. He says that there were some who loved his people because they were his people.

Who in very simple ways, giving them a drink or food or clothing, showed that they had accepted God and his message and his people's message by responding to his people.

and others on the other side who ignored or hated his people. Even in very little ways sometimes by failing to give them a cup of water perhaps. And he says, this shows how you react to me.

How you react to my people shows how you react to me. And in verses 4 to 8, he carries on. And we give, we're given an example of the courtroom scene with some of the ancient enemies of Israel who had deposed them.

It's a courtroom scene. God speaks out against them. He says, are you trying to pay me back by hurting my people? You've taken away my temple treasures. You've sold my people into slavery.

[19:15] And so, verse 8, I will give you a punishment that fits the crime. Metaphorically speaking, exactly what you did to them will be done to you. And then in 9 to 12, rather frightening verses, the nations that have opposed God's people are called to face him.

They are, you see, like a kid who has beaten up a little child in the playground. They've knocked them down. They've kicked them black and blue. And they have ground their faces carefully into the tarmac.

And then they turn around. And they see the very, very, very big brother they didn't know about standing over them. Rolling up his sleeves.

And saying, okay then. Give it all you've got. You want to oppose God's people? Then you will face God.

You will face God himself. And so, in a reversal of the great promise to God's people, God's enemies get a call. Make your tools into swords and spears because, boy, you're going to need them.

[20 : 23] Verse 10. And you won't just need all your soldiers and your war machines. You'll need dad's army as well. Let the weak say, I'm a warrior. I can fight too.

And so you've got granddad standing there with his blunt old sword and the 12-year-olds with their coats of armor. But you know, there is no battle in this passage.

Verse 13. The nations that oppose God are no more threat to him than a field of standing grain as to a farmer. And so with the sweep of the sickle, they fall.

And in verse 14, they face God and they wait for his decision because in that day, the day for our decision is done. It is God's decision. And what does he say?

Verse 16. He roars from Zion and heaven and earth quake, but he is a refuge to his people. So there is an escape on that day and it is to belong to his people.

[21 : 23] It is to call on his name. And that is the future each and every one of us faces. Either of punishment because we have rejected God's people, his messengers, devalued them, hated what they have stood for, even if it's just by indifference.

Or it's a future of rescue, rescued by God. And if you are a Christian, this is not just your future. It is also your message.

Now, I think many of us are very reluctant to talk about judgment and sin when we talk to friends and family about the gospel. We want to talk about the positives and that's very understandable.

And of course, there need to be ways and means and times. We need to be wise, we need to be gentle, we need to be kind, we need to be prayerful and we need to be thoughtful. But nonetheless, this message has power.

Let me give you an example. I knew a man who knew a man, which I admit is not a good start to any story, but nonetheless, I had a very good friend who knew very well a man who worked for the BBC.

[22 : 33] And one day, this man who worked for the BBC was traveling up to Wales on business and at that time, there was a man who stood outside a London station with a sandwich board on saying, repent.

And he would shout at people, you're all sinners, you're going to burn. And I don't think the message was any more nuanced than that. I don't mean he was a street preacher, I mean he was someone who shouted that everyone was going to burn and virtually nothing else.

He screamed, you know. The kind of person who often puts us off. And as that man from the BBC walked past him on the way to catch his train to Wales, he thought, my goodness, it sounds mad, but you know, just in case it's true, I better check this out.

Just in case. And so he went into WH Smith at the station and he got himself a Bible and he sat down on the train on his journey to Wales and he read through the Gospels. And he got out at the other end in Wales having decided to become a Christian.

Now that isn't normal, I think you'll agree. But it shows there is power in the awareness that there is a judgment to come. And if you can share it a tiny bit more sensitively than that man with his sandwich board, perhaps you will see even more fruit and results than he did.

[23 : 57] Then, finally, 17 to 21. God's people have a message of final justice. Great good for his people and great destruction for his enemies. 17 to 18 give a picture of great good for God's people.

Last week, we saw peace and plenty promise to those who repented and called on God. Well, this goes further. This is the ultimate in peace and plenty. Just a little snapshot but it's something that will go on forever.

And at the heart of it is this, that God will dwell in Zion. That is, God will dwell once again at the heart of his people. He'll be with them. And you'll see that in verse 18 as well.

The water that comes is from God's house. And to be with him, verse 17, is to have safety from all attack ever again. And the incredible plenty of verse 18.

All the streams will be full of water. Just think of that. Think of the people of Joel's time who had lived with years of drought and hunger and then seen the locusts come and devour everything.

[25 : 01] And now, now God says to them, all the streams, everyone will be full of water. And there'll be water even in the driest places. And there'll be wine and milk dripping from the mountains and hills.

It's a pretty hot image, isn't it? I don't know if you're familiar with the old American folk song, Big Rock Candy Mountain, where you can go to the lemonade springs where the bluebird sings and hens lay soft-boiled eggs.

Where there's a lake of stew and of whiskey too. And you can paddle around them in a big canoe. It's an old fantasy, isn't it? You know, you're tired of nine to five trying to get that paycheck so you can feed the family?

You're tired of spending it and your time going around the supermarket every single week. You're tired of having to cook dinner every evening when you get home. Well, as days come and God says, well, all you need to get dinner is a plate and a glass.

That's how I'll look after you. But on the other hand, 19 to 21, there is destruction coming too. Violence has been done to God's people.

[26 : 11] God's message has been rejected. His people have been rejected and abused and so there will be a day when God avenges them.

and the lands of the people who have reposed them will be empty. So we've got to be clear for ourselves and for those around us. There is a day when we will all stand before God on the day of His decision.

When it is too late for us to choose anymore. When He will look at our lives and ask, what do the things in your lives show me about your attitude to me, about your attitude to my people?

Do they show that you were someone who really called on my name? Or that you were someone who was depending on me and loving the message my people brought? Or that you rejected it?

And if you have called on Him, remember this, you are called for a purpose. You might not be a great evangelist or a great preacher and yet you have the very Spirit of God Himself living in you right now.

[27 : 17] And if you know your Bible, even moderately well, you know more of the coming grace and justice than perhaps any of the Old Testament prophets did.

And that is more than enough to tell those around you to hold out the promise of life that all who call on the name of the Lord will be saved as well as a warning that that offer will not be always open but rather that there is judgment to come for those who refuse it.

Christianity is not just a lifestyle choice. It is about an ultimate future, an ultimate reality and about facing God one day Himself and whether we will hear Him say, come and be with me forever or depart from me.

Now if you are not a Christian, perhaps you feel there is an unfairness and unpleasantness in this and all this talk of judgment.

But just think about what we have been saying. God has chosen all over this world millions upon millions of people and has not merely given them a message for you.

[28 : 36] He has put His very self in them to equip them, to declare to you, to plead with you, come, come, call on me, be with me, live with me forever, taste that day when I will look after my people with unbelievable kindness and safety and plenty, come and be with us.

He extends that offer every day. Don't oppose me, don't stand against me, don't refuse me, don't turn your back on this offer, but come. He not only says that now, but millions of people around this world He equips to say it to you and those like you.

That is the God who pleads with you now. Let's pray. Lord God, you are a God of justice and a God of mercy.

One day, Jesus Christ will sit on His throne and we thank you that before He ever sat on that throne, He came to take the punishment that we deserve injustice if we call on His name.

Help us to call and help us to look forward to that future and help us to declare the truths that we see in this passage by the power of your Holy Spirit living in us.

[30 : 10] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.