

THE GREAT AND AWESOME DAY OF THE LORD

Joel (selected Scriptures)

Two weeks ago we began a journey through what we called the Dark Continent of Scripture. And if you were here you know that the Dark Continent of which we speak is the last 12 books of the OT, which we call the Minor Prophets. These prophets are not minor because their message is in anyway inferior to the Major Prophets, but only because they didn't have as much to say. We began our journey with a look at the message of Hosea. It was a message of God's unconditional love of sinners. And God demonstrated that love in a beautiful, dramatic way and in a very painful way for Hosea, when He commanded Hosea to go to the slave market and buy back his unfaithful wife Gomer, and to love her as if she had never been unfaithful to Him at all. But the overall message of Hosea is, God loves lost sinners and God loves His own, and He is reaching out in love to us all, to save lost sinners or to restore His backslidden children.

Today we are going to examine the message of the prophet Joel. We know very little about Joel, only that he was the son of Pethuel, of which we know nothing about. But several key verses in Joel indicate that he wrote in the 9th century BC and that he wrote to the southern tribe of Judah. But though we don't know much about Joel himself, his message to us is as clear as clear can be. And that message is, "The day of the Lord is coming!" (Joel 2:1) And we see this same phrase four other times in this short book. Beloved, this is God's urgent, certified, special delivery letter for you and me this morning. This is God's message for the world. The day of the Lord is coming!

Now, the phrase "Day of the Lord" is not obscure in the Scriptures. It is used 31 times by 11 different writers, 26 times in the Old Testament and 5 times in the New Testament. Occasionally it is used referring to the deliverance of God's people during the end times (Malachi 4:5; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 2 Corinthians 1:14). Sometimes it refers to a time of judgment upon Israel, and sometimes it refers to judgment on a particular heathen nation or upon the whole world at the end of the age. And we are going to see this morning that Joel speaks of all three.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to Joel 1:1-4, and 15-20. In these verses we read of the Day of the Lord in God's two-fold judgment upon Israel. One was a plague of locusts. Perhaps you have seen a documentary or a You Tube clip about locusts, but if you have not let me tell you, it is an awesome sight. A swarm of locusts in the Middle East can be several miles wide. In 1889 a swarm in the area of the Red Sea was estimated to cover an area of 2000 square miles, and back in 1938 it was reported that a swarm came through Palestine that was six inches deep. Locusts can be so numerous that they darken the sun. But the

locusts were only a part of the Day of the Lord. For verses 19-20 speak of a parching drought that also had come upon the land.

And beloved, these plagues did not bring just minor inconveniences. Chapter 2:11 says, "...For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" Friends, when God gets ready to send down His judgment, He does not play games. Look at verse 10 to see the effect of the locusts. A locust swarm devours everything in his path, everything that is green. And Joel says that what the locusts didn't eat up the drought-sparked wild fires burned up. Look back to verse 2 at Joel's description of the damage. Joel says that nothing of such magnitude had ever happened in their lifetimes. And he tells God's people, "Listen, Israel! God is speaking to you through what is going on here. And make sure that you pass this story down all the way to your great grandchildren". But he also says that they must do more than that; they must repent from the sins that brought the plagues upon them in the first place. In verses 13-14 he calls on the priests to repent and then to lead all the people to repent.

Beloved, with all of my heart I say to you that Joel is still speaking. He is speaking to America, and he is speaking to the whole world. For we have turned our backs upon Him and His judgments have begun to fall. And He is saying, "Listen, all you citizens of earth! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? Listen, and repent!"

But what events could Joel be talking about that have happened just in the 21st century? Well, go back to 9-11. It was an unprecedented event that changed the course of history. It unmasked the fiendish nature of Islam, and never again will we look at Islam the same. Go back to the day after Christmas eight years ago. That was the day of the Tsunami in Southeast Asia that killed about 225,000 people. Or go back to Aug. 28, 2005, when the most destructive hurricane ever to hit the US slammed into the Gulf Coast, killing over 1800 people. Or go back to just a few weeks ago when Sandy blew into the Northeast. Or go back to the parching drought that we experienced in the Southeast just a few years ago or the one the Midwest experienced just this year. Now, the secularists will quickly give you their spin on the cause of all of these. In the case of 9-11, they say it was obviously a backlash to American expansionism; we are to blame. And as far as the tsunami and Katrina and Sandy and the droughts, what other explanation is there but climate change?

Now, beloved, I cannot tell you that every storm that we have has a lightning bolt of divine wrath in it. But I ask you, why should we believe that God has ceased to use floods and locusts and droughts to send judgment upon sin as He did in the days of the prophets? Does He take sin any more lightly than He did back then? Is His power to punish any less? A thousand times no! So why

should we think that all of these disasters “just happen?” Why should we not look up and ask, “Lord, what are you trying to say to us?”

So in chapter 1 we see Joel’s first “Day of the Lord”, God’s judgment upon Israel through a locusts plague and drought, trying to get their attention and call them to repentance. But we see another “Day of the Lord” in chapter 2. As we read earlier, verse 1 says, “For the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand”. But this time the judgment upon Israel is not by **natural disaster**, it is by **national defeat**. Look at verse 2. Joel says, “A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been...” And the people that Joel speaks of are probably the Assyrians, who conquered the 10 northern tribes in 722 BC and made an assault on Jerusalem in 701 BC. And though God miraculously delivered Jerusalem from their attack, they still brought much pain and destruction to many other parts of Judah (2 Kings 18:13 and 19:25).

I want you to notice how relentless the Assyrians would be when they began their invasion of Judah. Look at 2:3-11. What a bleak picture! What a picture of doom that Judah was facing. Just like the locusts, Assyria would swarm over Judah and utterly devour them. And what is worst of all is that it is not Assyria who is ultimately attacking Israel, it is God! Verse 11 says that Assyria is His army, and that His camp is very great. That is, God’s power is very great, and no man or nation can stand up to it.

But friends, just like God had a message for us through Judah’s natural disasters, there is a message here regarding its national defeat. And the message is, just as God can humble America by nature, so can He humble us by nations. And, brethren, unless something happens to change the direction we are going, it could be sooner than we think.

Have you been reading the newspaper lately? There is a phrase that is appearing now regarding our economy that is new to me, and it is called the “financial cliff”. Now, I think that we all know what that means. It means the financial collapse that every economist with any credibility at all is forecasting America is swiftly approaching. And if we go over it, we could be at the absolute mercy of our creditor nations, the largest being Communist China. But what is most scary about the financial cliff possibility is that some of our lawmakers are actually saying that the best way to deal with it is to go on over it and then try to recover! That is like saying instead of setting your broken leg and letting it heal, a better method of healing is to just go ahead and cut it off and then try to attach it back on. But a financial cliff is not the only national danger we face. If we continue to downsize our military, we could no longer be a power broker in world affairs, but a powerless suggester and a yes-man, to our own peril. Friends, I am not crying wolf. If it could happen to Judah, and it did, we are no more favored with God than they were, and it could happen to us.

So God calls upon Joel to sound the alarm to His people. Just like the locusts had completely destroyed their land, so it could happen again, but this time it would be even worse, by a foreign conqueror. But God's mercy is great toward His children, and God has a word for them in addition to their warning. And it is the same word that He gave along with plague of the locusts. REPENT! Look at 2:12-14.

What do you think of when you hear the word "repent?" Let me tell you what many people think. They think that it is an old fashioned word that was for another day and age and certainly has no place in modern society. For some, when they hear the word "repent" they think of an old, raggedy, grey-bearded man walking up and down the city sidewalks with a "repent" sign on a stick.

But friends, may I say to you that repentance will never be out of vogue in God's economy. Without repentance there is no forgiveness, there is no salvation. Jesus told a group of people in Luke 13 that unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Without repentance there is no restoration from a backslidden condition. When Job finally saw how wrong he had been to question God's goodness in his trials he exclaimed to God, "Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:6). Without repentance there is no joy, no power, no success in the Christian life. When David confessed his double sin of adultery and murder and asked for cleansing, he also prayed, "Restore to me the joy of Your salvation".

So if repentance is so necessary, then just what is repentance? Well, in verse 12 God tells us what repentance is as clear as any place in the Bible. "Now, therefore", says the Lord, "Turn to Me with all your heart..." Beloved, that's repentance. When you or I in bitterness of soul turn away from our sin, turn to God, and beg for His forgiveness and His cleansing. True repentance carries a desire to cease from sin. Did you catch that? True repentance carries a desire to cease from sin. In Judah's case God told them to turn to Him with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Now, I do not say that repentance cannot come without fasting or weeping. At times you may be compelled to fast and repent, and at times your sins may cause you to literally weep. But beloved, you need to know that there is no true repentance without mourning. Without grieving over your sin, without a deep agony that you've offended a holy God, and without a deep longing in your soul to be cleansed of that sin which robs you of your sweet fellowship with Jesus and the peace of God deep down in your soul. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted". And the mourning He is talking about is mourning over sin.

I want to ask each of you, have you ever repented? I'm not talking about joining a church, or being baptized. I'm talking about being brought to a place of conviction for your sin that caused you to abhor your wretched sinful condition before a holy God. And more than anything in all of the world, wanting God to

remove your sin and make you a totally committed follower of Jesus Christ, a disciple, a learner, one whose passion was to know and serve Him. Friend, that is true repentance. And so many in this world think that they have repented when they have not. They may have shed a bucket of tears, and they may have gotten excited about Jesus and church for a short while, but they were rocky ground or thorny ground, and the seed of the gospel never took root, and they soon forsook a faith that was false to begin with. Have you repented? Friend, if you have not repented, you are not saved; you are bound for eternal hell. And I pray that the Holy Spirit will give you a spirit of repentance today.

But I have another question to ask. If you have repented and have been saved, are you still repenting? Beloved, repentance is not something that you do once a week to a priest. You should repent every time you sin. Charles Spurgeon said that repentance and faith should be inseparable companions throughout our pilgrimage to glory. We are ever trusting, we are ever repenting. And if we are not we live as estranged children of a king, cut off from his blessings, subject to His judgment. Beloved, God chastises individuals just as like He chastises nations. And when we refuse to listen to the Holy Spirit's convicting voice and repent, God will turn up the burner until we do.

But let me say this about repentance. Beloved, it is not the fear of God that should cause you to repent, it should be the grace of God!! The God of glory, perfect and holy, sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to die a shameful and hideous death on an old rugged cross and suffer the penalty of eternal torment in your place. And for no other reason than out of love to Him for such a sacrifice, we should live lives of continual repentance. We love Him, therefore we want to walk in holiness and honor Him.

Now, let me share a precious promise that God makes to those who repent. Look at 2:25-26. God is talking to His people who've been destroyed by the swarming locusts, and who would be destroyed by the marauding army of Assyria. And God said, "One day I'm going to restore all that the locusts and the Assyrians have taken away. You will have plenty. You will be satisfied. And you will praise My name." Oh, what a promise!! Friend, I don't care how far away you are from God this morning. I don't care how many times you've failed Him. I don't care how hopeless you feel that your situation is today. God says that if you repent He will restore all that your sinful ways have robbed from you. Now, it may be too late to restore a spouse who's remarried. It may be too late to reclaim health that's been destroyed. But it is not too late to be blessed by the presence and power of God in your life like you've never been blessed before. It is not too late to glorify God in your life like you've never glorified Him before. That is the amazing, awesome love of God toward you. And all He is waiting for you to do is to repent.

I want us to briefly see one more thing this morning concerning the Day of the Lord. We've seen the judgment that came upon God's people, but in the latter part of chapter 2 and in chapter 3 we see the deliverance of God's people and the final judgment of the wicked. Look at 2:28-31. Joel is talking here about God visiting His people in the last days and bringing them back to Him. Peter says in Acts 2 that Pentecost was also a partial fulfillment. But the primary fulfillment will take place when Jesus comes again and the Jews finally accept Him as their Messiah.

And in chapter 3 we see the Day of the Lord coming down on the wicked. Look at verse 1-2, 12-14. The stage is the end of the age. After being scattered all over the world, God has brought His people back to their homeland. And God has also brought the nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat to bring them into judgment. Now, the Valley of Jehoshaphat is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. But Jehoshaphat was a king of Judah, and his name means, "The Lord Judges". The valley is also called the "valley of decision" in verse 14, but this does not mean that God brings the nations into it in order for them to decide to follow Him or not. The decision has already been made. These rebellious nations, who have hated God and hated His people, will be judged for their sins.

So just where could the Valley of Jehoshaphat be? Surely at least part of the answer is at the Battle of Armageddon. Look at chapter 3:13 and then look at Revelation 14:17-20.

So the message of God's prophet Joel is, "The Day of the Lord is coming!" It is coming now on nations and on unsaved individuals and on Christians who revel in their sin and refuse to repent. It is coming on nations who rebel against Jesus when He comes again. But for all who repent and follow Jesus, God promises that He will forgive, restore, and bless beyond measure. Will you escape the Day of the Lord? Let us pray.