

Through the Bible at 30,000 Feet
Joel | The Great & Terrible Day of the Lord
North Center | March 20, 2022
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Turn in your copy of God's Word to the book of Joel (second book in the Minor Prophets).

PRAY

Read **Joel 1:1**.

- This one sentence is almost all we know about Joel.
 - We don't know what family he came from.
 - We don't know for sure when he lived (*before or after the Babylonian captivity*).
 - We don't know for sure where he lived.
 - We don't know what his occupation was before God called him to prophesy.

This book is *called* "Joel," but it's **not about Joel**; it's about the word of the Lord.

- Most people have a strong desire to make a name for themselves in this life.
- Most people want to leave a legacy; they want to be remembered when they are gone.
- In fact, social media is largely built around this desire.
 - *Tell people what you're thinking...how you're feeling...what you're doing*
 - *Show people how you're looking*
- We have this strong desire for people to know us and remember us...

But that isn't the picture we get of Joel.

It seems the only thing that Joel is concerned about is sharing the Word of the Lord (**1:1**).

*Make it count, leave a mark, build a name for yourself
Dream your dreams, chase your heart, above all else
Make a name the world remembers...
...But Jesus is the only name to remember
I want to leave a legacy. I don't care if they remember me. Only Jesus.
I've only got one life to live. I'll let every second point to Him. Only Jesus.
~ **Casting Crowns, "Only Jesus"** ¹*

People like Joel are the kind of people you want to know (they're the kind of people you want to be friends with) because they are the kind of people who are going to spend their life showing you God.

What does Joel show us about God in his little book?

- The *seriousness* of God
- The *supremacy* of God
- The *salvation* of God

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXIBP2BdYR8>

1. **The Seriousness of God**

God takes His relationship with His people seriously.

I don't know how seriously you take your relationship with God, but the Bible is very clear when it comes to how seriously God takes His relationship with you.

So many people spend their lives playing with religion.

- **Church:** optional, when it doesn't conflict with other plans.
- **Prayer:** occasionally, when it feels really important.
- **Bible:** maybe sometimes, when I have time.
- **Evangelism:** maybe if somebody asks me directly.
- **Offering:** when it doesn't hurt.
- **Sing:** if I really like the song.
- **Serve in the church:** if I think I can fit it into my schedule.
- **Global missions:** not even on my radar.
- **Sin:** not really that big of a deal.
 - After all, God is a God of love and grace, and Jesus paid for all my sin on the cross. So, I know I should keep the 10 Commandments, but how I live my life (the choices I make) are really up to me.²

There are many, many people in our churches today who are playing games with God, and **God doesn't play** – not when it comes to having a covenant relationship with His chosen people.

The book of Joel gives us a picture of what happens when God's people don't take Him seriously.

*Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land!
Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?
Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children,
And their children another generation.
What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten;
What the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten;
And what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten.*
~ **Joel 1:2-4**

A locust plague has swept through the land and destroyed everything.

Many of us weren't raised in an agricultural setting, and so it might be hard to imagine how absolutely devastating a locust plague like this would have been. But God's people were largely an agricultural people, and their lives depended on the success of their crops. And Joel describes an agricultural disaster that would have been absolutely crippling.

² Psalm 10:11; 94:7.

III. Caterpillars that would consume the landscape in northern Minnesota and they would eat all the leaves on the trees... I remember it looking like winter because they trees were bare.

- Not only did these caterpillars cover the trees, but they covered the sidewalks & roads.
- You could hear them popping as you walked down the sidewalk or biked down the road.

It was annoying, but it wasn't devastating.

Joel is giving us a picture of a devastation that has affected every part of their lives:

- Eaten away at their *pleasure* (1:5)
- Eaten away at their *worship* (1:9)
- Eaten away at their *livelihood* (1:11)
- Eaten away at their *happiness* (1:12)

The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered;
The pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree—
All the trees of the field are withered;
Surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.
~ *Joel 1:12*

As I read through this story this past week, I circled all the words that Joel used to describe the devastation in the land:

- *Cut off, stripped bare, wasted, ruined, dried up, perished, withered, destruction, shrivels, shambles, broken down, devoured, flaming fire, burned, writhe in pain, tremble, desolate, darkness, gloominess, diminish, who can endure it...*

This is a picture of a devastation that has affected every part of their lives.

Message: God doesn't play games with His people... not when it comes to our hearts.

- God loves His children too much to leave them alone in their sin.
 - God is the only true source of happiness in this life. Sin separates us from God.
 - In His love, God fights against us in our sin.

Q. Where did this destruction come from?

A. It came from God.

Joel doesn't call this scene "*the Day of the Locust.*" He calls it "*the Day of the Lord.*"

Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand;
It shall come as destruction from the Almighty.
~ *Joel 1:15*

Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;
For the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand:
A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness...
~ *Joel 2:1-2*

The Lord gives voice before His army. For His camp is very great;
For strong is the One who executes His word.
For **the day of the Lord** is great and very terrible:
Who can endure it?

~ **Joel 2:11**

What is this destruction? *It's the Day of the Lord.*
Where is this destruction coming from? *It's coming from the Lord.*
Why is the Lord doing this? *Because He loves you too much to leave you alone in your sin.*

There are many people who hear about “The Day of the Lord”, and they say, “*I could never love a God like this.*”

- I've read several books over the past few years where the authors have looked at passages like Joel and said that a God who causes devastation like this must be a monster.³

III. The Grand Canyon.

- I remember going to the Grand Canyon for the first time as a child. I have a picture of my dad holding my hand as we stood at the edge, looking out over the canyon together.
 - Imagine that instead of holding my dad's hand, I took off running toward the edge of the cliff.
 - And imagine that my dad ran after me and tackled me right before I jump off.
 - **Q.** What kind of dad tackles his son to the ground, knowing that he is going to cause his pain as a result?
 - **A.** A dad who loves his son.

God is serious about His relationship with His children.
If you will not hold His hand, then (in His love) He will pursue you and bring you down – to save you from the everlasting destruction of your sin.

The ultimate purpose behind this devastation was not punishment.

- The only fitting punishment for our sin took place once and for all on the cross.
- Your sin was punished on the cross.
- Jesus absorbed the full punishment for the sin of God's people: past, present, and future.

The ultimate purpose behind the devastation is not punishment; it's **repentance**.
God wants His people to wake up, to see the consequences of their rebellion, and turn to Him.

Now, **therefore**, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.
So rend your heart, and not your garments;
Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful,
Slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm.⁴
~ **Joel 2:12-13**

³ E.g., Roger Olson, “Against Calvinism.” Richard Dawkins, “The God Delusion.”

⁴ **Repentance:** Joel 1:13-14; 2:12-17

2. **The Supremacy of God**

If the *purpose* of all this devastation is *repentance*, what is the final result?

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel:
I am the Lord your God, and there is no other...

~ **Joel 2:27**

God aims for His people to know that He is the Lord your God, and there is no other.

- There is nothing in your life *more important* than God.
- There is nothing *higher* than God.
- There is nothing *better* than God.
- There is nothing *more satisfying* than God.
- There is nothing *more powerful* than God.
- There is nothing *more precious* than God.
- There is nothing *more glorious* than God.
- There is no *greater happiness*.
- There is no *superior treasure*.

God's aim in this plague – and in this book – and in everything that has ever happened in our life – is that you and I might see the supremacy of God over all things...and love it!

You were made *to know* God and *to treasure* God and *to live for His glory*.⁵
That's why you exist.

When this life is over – and you and I stand in the presence of God on that “*great and awesome day of the Lord*” – the only thing that will matter is the relationship we have with God.

When that day comes, many people are going to experience an infinitely greater devastation than the people in Joel's day experienced in the locust plague. It's one thing to look across the horizon of Palestine and see **empty fields**. It's another thing to look across the horizon of a lifetime and see an **empty life**... years destroyed by sin and selfishness.

Here's the thing: in the end...

- It didn't matter how hard these people worked.
- It didn't matter how diligently they planned.
- It didn't matter how carefully they saved.
- It didn't matter how many hours they put into cultivating the land & caring for the crops.

At the end of the day, they had nothing to show for all their labor.

⁵ Isaiah 43:7

The Bible tells us this is how the story ends for everyone who lives for themselves instead of living for the glory of God. When the Day of the Lord comes, the only thing that is going to matter is how you lived your life in relationship to God.

That's the standard by which all success will be measured in that day.

- Did you orient your relationships around God?
- Did you orient your work around God?
- Did you orient your parenting around God?
- Did you honor God with your finances?
- Did you honor God with your possessions?
- Did you honor God with your time?

I don't know how you judge success, but the message in Joel is that if God isn't supreme in your heart, then there is no such thing as success.

God takes away everything else in front of their eyes so that His people might be able to see that He is all that truly matters: "I am the Lord your God, and there is no other" (2:27).

If we consider the unblushing promises of reward
and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels,
it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak.
We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition
when infinite joy is offered us,
like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum
because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.
We are far too easily pleased.
~ C. S. Lewis ⁶

God takes away all the distractions in their life so that He might give them the greatest gift in the universe: Himself.

3. **The Salvation of God**

Finally, Joel wants for us to see the salvation of God (which is the main theme in the second half of this little book⁷).

Maybe as you're listening this morning...and you're reflecting over your life (your relationships, your possessions, your ambitions, the choices you've made in the past, the choices you are making right now), and you're feeling overwhelmed by the thought of how much of your life has been devastated by your sin or all the years you have squandered on yourself.

⁶ C.S. Lewis, "Weight of Glory"

⁷ Joel 2:12-3:21

- Maybe you look back over the horizon of your life, and all you see is a landscape of hurt, loss, disappointment, brokenness, missed opportunities, shattered dreams... it feels empty, meaningless, wasted...

If that's you, then Joel has one of the most powerful verses in the Bible for you.

When God's people repent of their sin and their selfishness and turn to God, this is what He promises:

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten,
The crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust,
My great army which I sent among you.
You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
And praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dwelt wondrously with you;
And My people shall never be put to shame.

~ **Joel 2:25**

God says, *"I will restore to you the years that the locust has stolen away."*⁸

What does He mean by this?

- He doesn't mean that you get those years back. You can't ever get those years back. That's why "time" is so precious.

We don't ever get those years back, but God promises to take those sinful choices and those wasted years and make something beautiful out of them – like only He can do.

- God takes dry bones in a field and turns them into an army.⁹
- God takes a harlot from the redlight district and makes her an example of His love.¹⁰
- God takes a field that was destroyed by a plague and makes it so that His people "eat in plenty" until they are "satisfied" (2:26).

Only God can do that. And He has been doing it since the beginning.

- Adam & Eve lost the Garden of Eden because of their sin. But God used their sin as the catalyst for the Gospel. The day they sinned was the day that God promised the Savior, and the relationship that we have with God through Jesus is better than the relationship that Adam & Eve had in the Garden of Eden before sin.
 - They didn't know the love of God as we do.
 - They didn't know the grace of God as we do.
 - They didn't know the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit as we do.
 - Their sin cost them much, but God restored it.

⁸ I remember hearing that promise for the first time. It was my first week of pastoring a small church in Nebraska, and I sitting in an old country farmhouse, studying the Bible with maybe a dozen people from the church. And during our prayer time at the end of our study, when of the ladies (who had experienced her share of hardships) was holding onto the promise that God would restore the years the locust had stolen away.

⁹ Ezekiel

¹⁰ Hosea

We have seen this same story of devastation & restoration repeated over and over throughout the Bible.

I don't know what hurt or loss or shame you may be experiencing right now, but I know that God can restore to you the years that the locust has stolen away.

- That's the story of Joseph, Ruth, Bathsheba, Esther, David, Jonah, Paul, John.

God takes the most devastating things in lives of His people and He restores them into something beautiful beyond words.

The question is not how great is your *sin* or how great is your *suffering*, but how great is your *Savior*?

Regardless of the devastation you see as you look at your life, the message of Joel is that our God is mighty to save and to restore all who put their trust in Him.

READ Joel 2:28–32

Hundreds of years later, after Jesus had given His life as a sacrifice for our sin, died, was buried, rose again, and ascended into Heaven, as the Spirit of God was being poured out at Pentecost, Peter pointed to this passage in Joel and said, "*This is talking about Jesus*" (Joel 2:17–24).

Years later, after Jesus rescued and restored Paul's life, Paul was writing a letter to the Christians in Rome, and He pointed to this passage, and said, "*It's talking about Jesus*" (Rom. 10:13).

No matter how much of your life the locust have destroyed, if you will turn to Jesus and call on His Name, God promises that He will save you, and He will restore to you the years that the locust have stolen away.

- God is **serious** about you.
- God wants to be the **supreme treasure** of your life.
- And the hope of the gospel is that our God is **strong to save and to restore**.

PRAY

Who is like the Lord our God?
Strong to save, faithful in love
My debt is paid and the vict'ry won
The Lord is my salvation

My hope is hidden in the Lord
He flows each promise of His Word
When winter fades I know spring will come
The Lord is my salvation

And when I reach my final day
He will not leave me in the grave
But I will rise
He will call me home
The Lord is my salvation