

August 24, 2025

Return: A Glorious Restoration

Joel 2:28-32; 3:17-21

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...As we have seen the past couple of weeks in the book of Joel, the people of Judah had experienced a massive plague of locusts that was followed by a severe drought and all this was sent by God as a judgment for Judah's sin. And the resulting devastation caused incredible suffering, not only for the people, but even for the land and the animals. And God led Joel to use this locust plague as the backdrop for his message to his people of not only a warning to return to a right relationship with God but also a promise of a future restoration based on his promises and covenant relationship with his people.

In the first chapter, Joel urged the people to pay attention to what God was saying to them through their circumstances. Joel identified the locust plague as the “day of the Lord.” As we've talked about throughout our look into the minor prophets, the “day of the Lord” in Scripture is a day of judgment for the unrepentant and a day of blessing for the believer. And, depending on the context, it could refer to either a day that has already taken place, an impending day in the future of God's people, or the “eschatological” day of the Lord, referring to that final day when Jesus comes again. All of which are referred to in the book of Joel.

Now, as we saw last week, the people of Judah heeded the warning of God and repented of their sin in response to God's judgement and his warning of a future judgement to come. So, God showed mercy and wonderfully restored his people because of their genuine repentance.

But he didn't stop there. As we will see in the passage today, God explains, through Joel, that in the same way as the locusts were a warning for future judgment, the restoration of Judah would be just a glimpse of the blessing God is going to pour out in the future as he speaks of one sign in particular that would be the signal that the great, eschatological, day of the Lord was at hand.

Let's read about this in Joel 2:28-3:21. Again, as we did last week, I will be breaking this final section of Joel down into sections and we will cover them one at a time. First, we come to the end of ch. 2. And I will be starting at vs. 28. You can remain seated again this week. [Read passage]

Right away, we are given this prophecy that as a precursor to the day of the Lord, the Spirit will be poured out. Often times, many Old Testament prophecies are difficult to interpret. And this can be for a variety of reasons. But there are those prophecies that are directly interpreted for us in the New Testament, so that, we know these at least are certain. Of these clear passages, none is more certain than Joel 2:28–32, a passage interpreted by the apostle Peter as applying to the events at Pentecost, as was read as our NT reading this morning.

Prior to Jesus' ascension into heaven, he told his disciples to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5). On the Day of Pentecost, fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, while the disciples were waiting together in Jerusalem, suddenly, Acts 2:2–4

says, “there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.”

When the people of Jerusalem heard the sound, they came to investigate, and Peter preached the first sermon after the resurrection and ascension of Christ to the assembled crowd. The people of Jerusalem, who were “from every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5) thought that the disciples were drunk because they heard the disciples speaking to each of them in their own language. So, Peter stated that the disciples were not drunk, as they supposed, but instead, he interpreted the pouring out of God’s Spirit as the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy.

Clearly, then, this portion of Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on all believers. They began to speak and witness to others about the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

James Montgomery Boice makes the point in his commentary on the book of Acts that “in each of nine cases [in the book of Acts] in which it is said that the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, the consequence of that filling was a witness to Jesus Christ.”

So, the clear and distinguishing mark of a person being filled with the Holy Spirit is not tongues, or signs and wonders, but through these signs and wonders, pointing others to the person and work of Jesus Christ. It is in this sense that the words spoken by Joel that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” must be taken.

So, the Holy Spirit was poured out on believers on the Day of Pentecost just as God said would happen through the prophet Joel. And ever since that day, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on people who are then enabled to repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. The evidence of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit is repentance and faith, and this is followed by witnessing to the person and work of Jesus Christ. We’re told that 3,000 “called on the name of the Lord and were saved.” And the Church was born! And everyone who has put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus is part of that number.

Yes, it says “everyone.” God’s offer of salvation is available to all no matter your race, nationality, gender identity or sexuality, but don’t get it twisted, there is a qualifier here, its available to “everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord.” Salvation is available to all but there is only one way to obtain it, through faith in the finished work of Jesus and submission to his authority in our lives.

Titus 2:11-14 says, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.”

So if the first part of the prophecy speaks of a sign that the day of the Lord was near, starting in ch. 3 Joel tells us that on the day of the Lord, for the enemies of God, judgment is poured out. Follow along with me in your Bibles as we make our way through the first 16 verses.

On that great and final day of the Lord, Joel said in Joel 3:1-2, “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the 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, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land....”

It appears that there will be several fulfillments of these verses throughout the history of Israel, but it will reach its final culmination in that great and final day of the Lord when the curse for sin is totally removed from God’s people and judgment will be poured out on all the enemies of God.

God’s judgment on unbelievers, Joel says, will take place in the “Valley of Jehoshaphat.” What is interesting here is that this phrase literally means, ‘the valley where the Lord will judge.’ There is no place in Israel known as the “Valley of Jehoshaphat.” However, it is clear that on that great and final day of the Lord, there will be a judgment on unbelievers where the Lord will judge them. This is bad news side of the gospel message. Yes, there is salvation available for everyone but for those that reject God's grace and mercy, God's judgment is the only outcome.

God issues a summons to all the unbelieving nations of people to come for judgment. It comes in the form of a call to war. And God mocks them by encouraging them to take up arms against him as if they have any chance against the Lord Almighty. He says in vs. 9-11, “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; let the weak say, ‘I am a warrior.’ Hasten and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves there.”

God then uses the imagery of harvesting as the setting for the final judgment. He says in vs. 12-13, “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.”

And then God says in vs. 14, “Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.” Now, many have used this verse to urge people, supposedly in the “valley of decision,” to repent and turn to the Lord. But that is not what God is saying here! No, at the day of judgement, it will be too late to turn to the Lord in repentance. Again, James Boice says, “This is not the decision of the evangelistic meeting. It is the decision of the court, and the one making the decision is not the one who has rejected Christ but the Christ he or she has rejected. This is God’s decision, a decision that will determine people’s destinies forever.” No, the time of grace and accepting God's offer of salvation is now. We all need to make that decision before it's too late.

The passage goes on to say in vs. 15 & 16 that for those who will experience the judgment of God on the day of the Lord, “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, for those who have repented of their sin and trusted in the person and work of Jesus Christ, God says in the second part of vs. 16, “But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a

stronghold to the people of Israel,” connecting us back to the promise that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Well, we have seen that the pouring out of God's Spirit will be sign pointing to the final day of the Lord and that on that day God will judge his enemies and vindicate his people. And now, Joel concludes his book by confirming that after the judgment of the day of the Lord, a blessing will be poured out on his people. [Read 3:17-21]

In this final section, we see in the cycle of the book of Joel from the devastation of a locust plague, and then the repentance of his people, to God's mercy and promise of restoration, a microcosm of the whole creation which has been marred by sin, destroyed as though by locust, and God restoring it back and redeeming that which was lost and what sin had stolen. And Joel mentions four blessings that will be poured out in that Last Day, when Jesus comes again, the great hope of the Church.

First, Joel speaks of a holy city. God says in vs. 17, “So you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. (This is a call back to 2:27) And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.” After the judgment day of the Lord, God will inaugurate a new heaven and a new earth. It will be beyond our comprehension. And, we're told, there will be a new Jerusalem, a new holy city, set apart as a place for God to eternally dwell with his people, as one of the angels showed John the apostle in Revelation 21:

“And [an angel] carried [John] away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal... And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.” And what a day that will be.

Secondly, there will be a restored land. Not only will there be a new holy city, but the land will be restored to what it is like in the Garden of Eden. Joel wrote in vs. 18, “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.”

The book of Romans speaks of the whole creation groaning and waiting for redemption, to be made new, at the coming of the Lord. God will restore everything back to its original purpose never again to be marred by sin.

Third, there will be a cleansed people. God says that he will put in the holy city and restored land inhabitants who shall live there forever. Vs. 20, “But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem to all generations.” This includes all who have trusted in Christ and who have called on the name of the Lord.

And fourth, there will be a glorious king. Joel writes in vs. 21, “... for the Lord dwells in Zion.” What a wonderful way to close a book! God himself will live in the midst of his saved people in Zion, that is, in the new Jerusalem. There will now finally be eternal peace and

harmony, and no more sin and suffering for the people of God. And we will enjoy a real, intimate and personal relationship with the Lord our God.

The promises of God found in the book of Joel are for us today. God's promise of restoring the years the locust has eaten is wonderful and is followed by the promised outpouring of God's Spirit on all flesh and the restoration of all things. Once the Spirit was poured out on the Day of Pentecost, the way was now clear for the arrival of the final Day of Judgement, the last manifestation of the Day of the Lord. On that one day, the wicked will be utterly destroyed and the righteous will stand vindicated forever in his presence. This message presents great hope for God's people, while also sending a warning to all the nations of the earth, a warning that must be heeded, God's final judgment is coming, but everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

And so, in view of what we have learned from our passage today, let us live our lives in light of the ultimate day of the Lord. Let's pray.

Benediction: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1Tim. 1:17)