

The Locust Joel 1

Jeremiah 14:1-10
Jeremiah 14:11-22
Psalm 40:1-9

This morning we are going to continue our journey through the Minor Prophets and we are going to be in the book of Joel. Little is known of this prophet, in the first verse we get his name, and his fathers name. The name Joel is also important to the message that is said in this book, the Hebrew is Yo'el, which means Yahweh is God, this aligns with the message of this book which is all about God's sovereign work in the world. The timeline of this prophesy is an estimate, but it is believed to have been around the 874-852 BC. Which would coincide with the ministry of Elijah, and the great drought that is recorded during the reign of Ahab. It makes it difficult to try to work through these books in chronological order when the timeline seems to be debated, I have seen others place this book to have been written around 835-796 during the reign of Joash as well, that's like a 50 year swing in the dates, and so far it seems that each of these books we have looked at are somewhat the same in their dating making it hard to place exactly which one came first, second, etc since there is such a large swing in the possible writing of these books.

But that is neither here nor there, the exact timeline isn't as important as the message that is being said. During the time of the prophesy of Joel the southern kingdom of Judah was struck by black cloud of locust, which descended upon the land and stripped it bare. Leaving nothing to offer the Lord, all the grain sacrifices, the cattle, the sheep was effected by this plague of locust. So let us just go ahead this morning and read chapter 1 of the prophesy of Joel. (Read Joel 1) It would seem that there was no specific sin listed here, but it is clear that this is a judgment upon Judah and Joel writes calling for repentance, to cry out to the lord. In chapter 2 he says, "rend your hearts not your garments" This is a call for true repentance, not just ritualistic, but a true, heartfelt crying out to God. We have examples of this difference even today, certain groups deprive themselves of necessities to facilitate suffering to appear in mourning, but that is not the mourning that God desires, he desires a broken heart which seeks after him, not a performative outward show. The action itself has little to no power, it is the heart, the purpose and meaning behind it which has power. An outward show of repentance is meaningless to God unless the inward heart follows.

We as humans can deal with this within our own relationships as well, as we all know, and have likely experienced there are different levels of apologies. Think of when we were kids and our parents would say.."now you apologize!" And we would respond with a quiet defiant...sorry. I doubt any of us were truly sorry in those moments, but it was performative and its purpose was to teach us a lesson in humility and responsibility. Such was the same with outward "rending of one clothes" but such an action means little if the heart itself is not repentant.

As we go through this book it will become apparent that Joel isn't just talking about the currently time that they are in, he isn't talking merely about the current issue of a famine and judgment, but of a future "day of the lord" as well. When spiritual blessings would be poured out upon his true followers, and divine judgment would be brought upon the unrepentant. Which is really the main theme of this little book, "the day of the Lord" The day of God's supernatural intervention within the course of human history, the day of pouring out his righteous judgment upon sinners and his blessings upon his people.

At the time of Joel's prophesy, it is apparent from chapter 1 here that Judah is in a bad way, crops, livestock, all the food is gone, there is even mention of flames and fire which appears to start up and consume even the little bit that was left. And Joel is essentially saying here, you think that this is bad? You think its bad now? There will come a day when it isn't crops that are destroyed, a day when it isn't the land that is on fire, but it will be the harvest of the souls of mankind, when the sinners shall be stripped of their pretenses and laid bare, exposing their sinfulness, and cast into fire and everlasting destruction. This time of hardship and famine is used as an object lesson of God's judgment upon the sinful, and his blessed provision of the faithful. The interesting thing about God working in these prophetic ways, is that it is really never just about the moment, but always has a further, deeper meaning as well. While Joel is writing about the hardships that Judah is currently facing, he is also warning of the final day of the Lord, that inevitable pending final judgment, which is why he says rend your hearts not your garments, for God is a God who judges the heart, the intention, the core of mankind, and we are either following him through faith by grace, or we are lost in our sins and await judgment.

God has given us these accounts of historical events to teach us some eschatological truths. We are to see these things in the bigger picture, which is why we are to interpret the old testament through the lens of the new, that is we take what we know and have learned through the recorded teachings of Christ, and his apostles, and apply them to understanding the old testament teachings. Some want to switch that around and see the understanding of scripture as linear, from start to finish, but as Jesus himself taught the 2 disciples traveling on the road when he appeared to them after his resurrection, he showed that all scriptures, the law and the prophets pointed to himself. Jesus revealed himself to them through the teachings of the old testament, he set the precedent for understanding the old through the teachings of the new. So then, these books become relevant to us, they are not just merely accounts of history, or of times past, but contain within themselves valuable lessons about God, about Jesus, and about ourselves. Some of our brothers and sisters like to divide the bible into 2 segments, and teach that God was dealing with 2 groups of people in a different way, salvation through law keeping, and salvation through faith. Yet, if we read the letters of Paul, we see that it was never the law that saved, it was always by faith, faith in the promised one who would take the punishment that the law gives upon himself, faith in the one to come, where we on this side of history must have faith in the one who has come.

Salvation hinges all upon Christ, upon that one moment in history, all that came before looked ahead to that day, and all who have come after look back to it. So we must understand the writings of what came before as looking ahead to that day, as teaching tools to show the nature of God, and the nature of mankind, and what God needed to do to accomplish reconciliation, the means that he must accomplish to bring about salvation, to call his people to himself. So when we look at things like this, it becomes apparent the message that is predominate, when these old testament prophets call on the people to repent, they are not just calling on them to repent from the current sin, not just calling on them to seek God's deliverance from the current trial, but there is a bigger picture here, of true repentance, of setting aside not merely the sins of a nation, but our own personal sins, and come to God as individuals, in faith, seeking repentance.

For there will be a "great day of the lord." A day of judgment, a day of accountability, this is unavoidable, and inevitable. Whether we face God on the day we die, or in his second coming, we will face him, and we will either be judged, according to our sins, our judged according to our righteousness which was given to us by faith through Christ Jesus, so took our sins upon himself and nailed them to the cross.

The book of Joel can basically be broken up into 3 sections, chapter 1 describes the current events of the day, the contemporary day of the Lord, in which we see the land is suffering a massive devastation, swarms of insects, drought, no food, and fire and there is a call for a communal repentance, for Judah to repent, return to God in her time of trial. The second section is chapter 2, is seeing this contemporary calamity in a larger picture, tying this historical day of the Lord, to a future eschatological day of the Lord. Here we see the prophet Joel intensify the call to repentance, not to escape the currently calamity, but the future judgment of God upon their sins. The last section is the last half of chapter 2, and into chapter 3, which is the Lord's response to repentance, and sets forth 3 promises to assure them of his presence among them, the divine healing of the land, the outpouring of the spirit and the judgment on the unrighteous encompassing the restoration of the faithful remnant of Israel to her rightful place among the nations.

God never forsakes his people, while there maybe trials and hardships, or even judgment there is always a remnant which remains, he has always set aside for himself a people who will stand as a witness to his glory, and his mercy. The purpose of Joel's writing is to wake Israel up from their spiritual complacency, stirring them up to repent. God uses such times to cause such a reaction, we as humans are so short sided, quick to forget and to be caught up in the moment, and there is always the danger of becoming complacent in our faith, but when trials come, when hardships arise, we are driven to cry out to God, we are reminded of his grace, as we cry out for his mercy. This plague of locust, the subsequent famine, was a judgment upon Israel, it was a call to repent and return back, and Joel points to a future day, a day full of blessing, and judgment. Blessing for God's people, and judgment upon the rebellious sinners.

So, the first part, which is what we are going to be looking at today, is the contemporary Day of the Lord, the issue that is at hand when Joel makes this proclamation from the Lord, to repent. This was a message that God had given Joel to tell the people, verse 1 says, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel. The focus here being upon the historical nature of what is happened, as he asks the question..has anyone ever seen a day such as this? This is a time of great significance, a famine as Israel has never seen, and it is a time that shall be remembered for generations, verse 3, "tell your children about it, and let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. The land was laid bare, was stripped...yet God, shows mercy, yet God brings deliverance, yet God relents and does not utterly destroy. Though Joel is saying, remember this time of trial, remember this calamity, a part of that remembrance is the deliverance of it as well. Which stands as a reminder of God's faithfulness, and his provision, and of his mercy. Imagine what is being described here, such a great swarm of locust as to come and devour everything, and that which is not eaten, is burned in fire..total and utter desolation across the land...the feeling of defeat, of hopelessness as your crops are destroyed, as your food for the remaining year until the next harvest is devoured by insects and burned up in fire.

We can likewise face such moments within our own lives, moments of absolute uncertainty, moments of seeming destruction even, whether it be our health, or economically, yet through it God shows us his sovereignty, as Jesus said recorded in the book of Matthew, 6:25. " Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or what you will drink, nor about your body what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more then clothing? Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, et your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value then they? Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the fields, how they grow, they neither toil, nor spin, and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

So if God so clothed the grass of the field, which today is and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith? Therefore do not worry saying, What shall we eat? What shall we drink? Or What shall we wear? For all these things the Gentiles seek, for you heavenly father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” This plague of locust, this famine would have caused these questions..how are we to eat? How are we to live? But God always provides. Such things are to drive us to him, to seek after him, to repent and turn to him. This is the point of chapter 1, repent so that God may relent. All peoples were called to repent, all peoples were called to cry out to the Lord, verse 5, “awake you drunkards and weep, and wail all you drinkers of wine because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth.” This plague has effected every aspect of life, not a person would have gone unaffected.

Verse 8-10, is a call to the priests, “Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth. The grain offering and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, who minister to the Lord.” Joel is asking the priests to mourn in a manner fitting of the dire situation, he says, like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom. They are to trade in the pomp, and glories of the temple worship and cry out to the Lord, as a woman who trades in her wedding gown and celebration for sackcloth and mourning. They are to mourn because the grain offering and drink offerings have been cut off, not only has this interrupted their worship practices, it also effected their own lively hood. Again, there is not a person would was not effected by this plague. Verse 11 we get to those who work the land, the tillers of the soil and the vine-dressers, the fields have dried up, and burned up, the fruit trees have been burned down, no grain, no fruit, where there would normally be a harvest celebration, there would be only mourning.

So Joel says, pray, repent, turn to God that he may bring restoration He calls on the priests to put aside their ornate garments and mourn, to gather all the inhabitants of the land to the the house of the lord and repent and cry out to God. The law normally required that all the men would come before the Lord 3 times a year, but this was not such an occasion, this was a special call with none of those limitations, all come, all cry out. There is a great urgency here, for this plague is unlike any which had been seen before, but the real urgency here that takes Joel's focus is not the contemporary, but the future, the dire situation of the world in that great day of the Lord, when he comes in judgment and fire to burn up the sinful like the dried fields. He begins to use this current situation to draw attention to the future, more terrifying day, the present time is a foreshadowing of a day yet to come.

So this become relevant for us today, 1000's of years later, for that great and awesome day of the Lord of which Joel is speaking has yet to come, the day of his return and of his judgment upon the land, and upon the peoples of the land. We have been given more time, God has not yet sent total destruction upon us, though we are full of rebellion and sin he has so far relented. We should not ignore what we have been given, we should not take for granted the time of which we are in for as the locust quickly swarmed upon Israel, and they went from abundance, to desperation, from joy, to grief, so to could be that great day of the Lord. Jesus said, it will come as a thief in the night, quickly, and unsuspecting..so we are to be prepared, repent and believe upon him so that we are not caught in our sins, so that we are not devoured in the destruction of the wicked. And we are to be the watchmen on the wall, shouting out the warnings of the coming wrath, calling others to repent, to turn, to follow him so that they maybe spared, so that they may not be swallowed up in the judgment of God upon his return.

