

The Day of the Lord
Joel 2:1-11

Exodus 12:1-30
Revelation 6
Psalm 142

This morning we are going to be looking at chapter 2 of the book of Joel. Last week in chapter 1 we saw the arrival of a great swarm of locust, a black cloud of innumerable insects which have come in and devoured everything, destroying the crops, got into the storehouses and they would have even likely entered into the homes and got into the food there as well, basically very little to nothing. Even the animals were effected, leaving no pasture for them to graze. This was a great judgment upon Judah, and God had given Joel a message to cry out to God in repentance that he may relent and not utterly destroy them. So far as we have been going through these minor prophets, there is a trend..of judgment, and repentance and in it we see God's sovereign hand in the events of mankind. In Jonah the call went out for Nineveh to repent, repent and turn from her evil ways or be destroyed. It was a warning of pending judgment, here in Joel we see the judgment has arrived, and Joel is instructing the people, repent so that God may not utterly destroy them, as he did Edom in the book of Obadiah that we went through a few weeks ago.

All of chapter 1 here describes the plague of locust, how it as effected every person, and animal and livestock, the drunkard will have no wine, the farmer will have no harvest, and the priests will have no grain or drink offering, and the animals are even suffering because of the wasteland left behind from the locust all things are dried up, and fire spreads across the land devouring what is left. This is not something that is going to last a few weeks and be over, the ramifications of this will stretch out for years, in verse 19 it says, "For fire has devoured the open pastures, and a flame has burned all the trees of the field." This is likely going to be years of hardship and suffering as they work to rebuild from the destruction caused by the locust, and the fires. Even the seeds which would be saved for the next years planting season were effected. This is a dark time for the land of Judah, a time of suffering and mourning, a time of crying out to God for mercy, a time of repentance and turning from

But this was not the true message of Joel, his message was not merely dealing with this contemporary problem, but the Lord uses this time to point to another, a greater day of the Lord, a greater day of judgment not only upon Israel, but upon the world. There is an end times understanding here and warning here about the coming judgment of God upon mankind. The message is basically this, you think that this time of suffering, of destruction, of famine, plague, and fire is bad, there is coming a day of the Lord which is even greater, a day that no one can escape, a day in which the world is judged. This is what we get into here in chapter 2, this larger message making this call to cry out to God something larger, something bigger then just seeking rescue from the currently plague and destruction.

So let us go ahead this morning and read starting in verse 1, of chapter 2, and going to verse 11. As we have read through this, there is a lot of metaphor, a lot of descriptors trying to capture the ferocity of God's judgment, using I think human terms to try to describe a coming time of spiritual judgment. Using terms and analogies that could be understood, we can know that these things are metaphors and analogies because of the use of the word like. The usage here throughout these verses causes us the readers to compare what is coming, to something that we know, it isn't this thing..it is like this thing. For example, verse 4 it is very clearly a metaphor, "Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like swift steeds, so they run."

Joel is not saying here that literal horses will be coming out of the mountains, but the judgment that is coming is like swift and powerful horses coming upon the land, relentless, and fast. I think it is important as we study such passages to understand if what we are reading is to be taken literal, or if it is analogy, or metaphor for something else. It can be easy to be caught into the trap and idea that all these things are literal, but in doing so we can miss out on the message of what is being said here. Joel is trying to describe an event which has yet to come, using an example of these locusts, of this time of seemingly utter destruction and desolation in Judah, to describe a day of utter destruction and desolation as God returns to judge the world.

Verse 1, Joel says, “Blow the trumpet of Zion, and sound the alarm in my holy mountain.” Horns were used as an alarm, to signal attack in war, to gather troops for battle, but they were also used for joyous occasions as well. This is a time of warning, blow the trumpets and sound the alarms, for the Day of the Lord is near. This is a call to minister the word of the Lord, the one who will return. The warning we have to give today, is the gospel, it is the warning of the judgment of sin, the gospel is our trumpet of warning, repent and believe, flee sin, and turn to Christ. In ancient times, watchmen would patrol the city wall, looking for signs of invasion. In such an event they would sound the alarm, warning of the pending conflict, we are the watchmen on the wall, all of us who believe are looking out watching for the army of the Lord to return, and we are to shout warnings, we are to teach and preach the word of God so that when we are face to face with him, we can stand in blessings and ushered into the kingdom, instead of being cast out into the lake of fire. The watchmen warned of pending destruction and doom, and that is our calling, to watch and warn.

As we can gather from the description here of this invading army described by Joel, when the Lord comes, he will be swift, he will be powerful, and he will be unstoppable. Just like the locust, as he gathers his people to himself, he will leave a wake of death and destruction behind in his judgment of this fallen world. The thought occurred to me, think of those in Judah who were enduring this current calamity, millions upon millions of locust, the sound of it, the black cloud of insects of which there would be no escape, they would be in your house, in your food storage, tormenting the animals who would be restless, it would be utter chaos and suffering...and in the midst of all this, the Prophet says, You think this is bad? This plague like we have never seen before? Well...there is coming a day that for many will be worse then this even, the locust bring destruction upon the land, but God will bring destruction upon the world in righteous judgment. I imagine, in the moment, anyone hearing these words would think to themselves..how can it get much worse then this?

Joel describes both this time, and the future day of the lord as days of darkness, days of gloom, of clouds and thick darkness. This massive horde of locust would have spread darkness upon the hills, everywhere you look you would see this blanket of locust covering the land, and clouds of them flying over the hills of Judah. He compares this to a military assault, verse 2 he says, they are LIKE a great and powerful people like ones who have never been, and like ones who will never come after, an unstoppable invading army. Before them sets the land like the garden of Eden, and behind them is left destruction and desolate wilderness of which none shall escape. These locust swarms give us a picture of a cataclysmic event, and are a harbinger of a greater day yet to come. Joel uses military descriptors to describe them, “they do not break ranks, they do not push one another, everyone marches in column, though they lunge between the weapons they are not cut down, they run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall, they clime into houses the enter the windows like a thief.” These locusts are the Lord’s army, he has orchestrated their march, and in judgment has brought destruction upon Judah, a destruction that is irresistible, with no defense.

This morning we read Revelation chapter 6, which shares some of the same language in the arrival of judgment upon the earth, unstoppable, indefensible, overwhelming power from God. We get a continuation of this image in chapter 19, verse 11 says, “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse, and he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood and his name is called the Word of God. And the armies in heaven clothed in fine linen, white and clean followed him on white horses. Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should strike the nations. And he himself shall rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepresses of the fierceness and wrath of the almighty God. And he has on his robe and on his thigh a name written, King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.” The great day of the Lord shall come, when he arrives with his army, to bring judgment upon the nations, this mighty king of kings and lord of lords who no one will be able to withstand or face.

John describes Jesus here, as a vengeful warrior who has come to conquer, to lay waste to all those who stand in opposition, and in doing so shall be freeing his people from the oppressive grip of sin once and for all. John wrote, “he alone treads the winepress of his wrath” and earlier he says, his robe is dipped in blood. The destruction of the wicked will be like the pressing of grapes, what a powerful, and horrific description, though before him will be trembling and death, following behind him is his army, clothed in fine white linen, clean and without blemish following him on white horses. His people shall be a witness to his wrath, but shall be spared from it as they follow him for by his blood they have been cleansed, been made clean, given white robes and made to ride on white horses. The bible describes God’s people as a nation of priests, and a nation of kings, this is reflected in the white horses, purity and power following in the wake of the one who goes before. Peter wrote in his letter to the churches, in 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

The nation of God is an innumerable people, a people who rule and reign with him. As believers we are not victims in this society, we are not a weak and powerless people..we are conquerors through Jesus Christ, this mighty king of kings and lord of lords who rides before us, whose word is sharper than any 2 edge sword which cuts to the heart of mankind, whose word holds both the power of death and life. Looking back at Joel, verse 10, continues this descriptor of the Lord’s army, “The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble then sun and moon grow dark and the stars diminish in their brightness. The Lord gives voice before his army, for his camp is very great, strong is the one who executes his word, for the day of the Lord is great, and very terrible, who can endure it.” No one will escape it, there will be no where to hide, keeping with the vine dresser metaphor, and the harvesting of grapes, When that Day the Lord has come he will harvest those who are ripe, and trample under foot those who are rotten. Scripture says, he will come again to gather his people, and judge the unrighteous and we have seen pictures of this throughout scripture, the angel of death upon first born of the Egyptians, Noah, as God judged the world and caused a great flood, Moses when we descended from the mountain and Israel was worshiping a golden calf, the serpents that God sent among the people of Israel in the desert, in each case death, suffering, and judgment, but also redemption and salvation for a remnant.

The thought occurred to me while meditating upon this, think of the sound ringing all across Egypt as the angel of death swooped into every household, every barn, and every field causing the first born to die. The cries of the people would have likely filled the air, what a great and awful judgment. Or the sound of these locust, we know what a few grasshoppers sound like, imagine 10s of thousands, verse 5 Joel describes it as a sound like chariots as they leap over the mountains and the noise of a flaming fire that devours stubble. Their chewing, their gnawing sounds like the crackling of fire. What an awful and terrible judgment...but there will come a time even greater, when the cries are louder, when the destruction is even more desolate as the armies of God leap the mountains like Chariots, and destroy the world in fiery judgment.

So what is the answer to this, judgment is coming, death and destruction are inevitable and there is not a single person who will be unscathed, well, Joel answers that in verse 12 which opens up the 3rd part of this book. As I had mentioned last week, this book can be divided into 3 parts, the plague of locust in Israel, the coming great day of the Lord, and the day of redemption. Here in verse 12 begins to bridge that moment, between the great day of the Lord and the day of redemption, where Joel says, "Now, therefore says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and with mourning. So rend your hearts 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."

How to be prepared for the mighty army of the Lord? How can we be prepared to endure the judgment. Repent, call upon him, look to him, and follow him. That is the answer, that is the only answer, no amount of preparation, storing up for the end of days will bring you salvation..only believing upon Jesus Christ, the King of Kings who rides in to judge the world upon a white horse. There is no storing up for yourself enough good in your life to escape the judgment, there is no action or deed, or works that you can do which will stand before the mighty king in judgment. Only those to whom he clothes in white robes, of those who have been washed by his blood, and are found just and holy in his name. We always read these apocalyptic passages as a future time, and yes, of course they are speaking of a future time...but it may not be our fate to see that day, for that day may never come in our lifetime, he may never come in a 1000 life times, we don't know when that great and awesome day of the Lord will come...but be sure, that each and every one of us will face him, if not that day, we will have our own day. None of us are guaranteed tomorrow, none of us are guaranteed next hour.

Just as swiftly as the locust descending upon Judah, or the Angel of Death descending upon Egypt, so too could our own lives come to an end and we could find ourselves standing before the throne of God. That is rather a sobering thought is it not? We look to this warning in Joel, we look to the writings in Revelation and we tremble at the thought of enduring such a time...yet we will each have our own, when God comes for you will he find you ready? Have you believed upon him? Have you rested in him? We will each stand before him to make accounts of our lives...as he shows us our life, our sin, our unworthiness before him...will our answer be..but look at all the good stuff Lord!!...or will it be...yes Lord, I am unworthy, but you alone are worthy and in you I have put my trust. As Joel says, repent now, today is the day, God does not desire performative repentance, he doesn't desire a temporary reformation of your life as we humans try to do, no, he says come to him with a broken heart, rend your heart, cry out to him in mercy, and the Lord who is rich in mercy, and grace, slow to anger will reach down, lift you up, and welcome you as his own child.

He is our only hope in death, he is our only hope in life, without him we are most miserable, caught in our sins, blinded by our lusts and desires, feeding upon everything like the locust, leading to destruction and desolation. But God, who is rich in mercy and grace, not only is able, but is willing to forgive, if we only cry out to him, repent, turn from your sin, and follow him. The same message that Jonah brought to Nineveh, is the same message the Joel brings to Judah, and it is the same message we have today as ministers of the Gospel of Christ, repent, and believe so that God may relent, so that he may see you as sons and daughters of whom he blesses and not rebellious sinners of whom will shall pour out his wrath. This great day of the Lord, is a day of great fear, of great darkness, of great suffering and turmoil, but we who have been covered by his blood, we who have believed upon the one who gave of himself upon the cross, do not have to live in fear of the judgment, we do not need to live in fear of the wrath, we do not need to live in fear of that Great and Awesome Day of the Lord, and we do not need to live in fear of the day in which we pass from this life. For if we are resting in God, he will watch over us, he will care for us, and he will usher us into the land of milk and honey which he has promised, to a place of which he has prepared for us. Are you ready? Are you resting in him?