

The Valley of Judgment Joel 3

2nd Chronicles 20:1-14

2nd Chronicles 20:15-30

Psalms 110

This morning we are starting out I chapter 3 of the book of Joel, the final chapter of this little book. It would appear that the final theme of this book is the final judgment, and God's promise to keep and uphold his people. Let us just go ahead and start out this morning by reading our passage, we are going to go ahead and take all of chapter 3 this morning, since there was no real good place to break it up. As we can see in verse 1 that this is a prophesy telling of an upcoming time, and it would appear that Joel's focus here is upon the final judgment, the end of days as he gathers all nations in judgment. There does not seem to be a time in Israel's history that would line up with this passage, that is, there are indeed future wars, future conflicts from the time that this was written but none of them really fit the description of what Joel is describing here, so it would seem that this is a case of Joel writing of the coming final judgment.

In verse 2, it is mentioned that he will gather the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Hebrew translation means, the Valley of Yahweh's judgment. There are speculations as to where this could physically be, many suggest the Kidron valley which was located on the eastern side of Jerusalem between the city walls and the Mount of Olives. Others believe it suggests some future change near Jerusalem being associated with end times. I think either of these things are speculations at best there is no way of knowing if either of these are what Joel is talking about here and in fact if would seem to suggest, at least to me that it is neither of these, but rather a place of spiritual significance, that is not a valley, or location that can be found here on this earth, but rather prophetic wording to describe an action, a time, when God shall judge all peoples.

The reason why I have come to this conclusion is that there does not appear to be any historical event describing what Joel is writing about here. There is a biblical account recorded in 2nd Chronicles 20 describes a miraculous victory where Judah did not have to fight her enemies, but God rather dispatched them. When King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah arose to meet the Ammonites, and the Moabites who had come against them, instead they found the valley full of dead bodies. It would appear that this could be the fulfillment of this prophesy in Joel, except the problem is, this likely happened before the prophesy of Joel was written. Scholars have dated the reign of Jehoshaphat around 850bc, and the book of Joel is estimated to be written about the 800bc.

So, the images of the conflict with the Moabites and the Ammonites under king Jehoshaphat would possibly still be in the mind of the people, and it would seem that God is recalling such imagery in reference to his final day of judgment. It also fits in line with the writing of Joel, how he has taken the plague of locusts and later equates it to a future judgment of the world. Like I was saying last week, a sort of fluid back and forth between the current and the future, but in this case it is the use of the relatively recent past, within the last 50 years or so to bring forth an image of this final judgment. The valley of Yahweh's Judgment, full of the body of his enemies. There are other parallels here, I 2nd Chronicles Judah faces swarms of armies from various other nations which has come upon them to plunder and destroy not unlike the Locust we see here in chapter 1. And Joel calls the people to fast, and to pray to God that he may deliver them, and we see that as well in the account in 2nd Chronicles, a nationwide fast and prayer is called which included everyone. Commanding everyone to call upon the Lord that he may relent, that he may save them from their destruction.

And we also see the work of the holy spirit mentioned in both accounts, in 2nd Chronicles we see that the spirit comes upon the Levite named Jaheziel, and he prophesies of their pending deliverance. Joel says that in the coming days the spirit will not just fall upon individual prophets like himself, or Jahaziel, but will be poured out upon all flesh. There is coming a day when God no longer speaks through the prophets, but rather speaks to his people through the spirit, through his written word. So it would seem that rather than 2nd Chronicles being a fulfillment of Joel, which from its descriptions sounds like it could very well be, there is the issue that it seems to have come before the prophesy, so what is likely happening here is that Joel is using these real life historical accounts showing the deliverance of God's people against God's enemy, and God's righteous judgment upon those who stand against him. To sort of paraphrase what Joel is saying here, just as God miraculously saved King Jehoshaphat and Judah from a much larger far superior army without Judah having to even pick up a sword, God will do so again on a global scale in the ultimate Valley of Judgment.

So I think that is how we should understand this passage, as imagery taken from a historical event to teach his readers, and by extension us today about this great and awesome day of the Lord when he will return again in Judgment upon the earth. In verse 2 God says, "I will enter into judgment with them there, on account of My people, MY heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. This valley of Judgment is God's courtroom, where he will gather to himself all the nations and judge them for the wrongs they have committed against his people. Looking at this as an apocalyptic event this is God's wrath being poured upon the unbelievers, every nation, every tribe, every person with no exceptions. The covenant that God made with Abraham says that he will bless those who bless him, and curse those who curse him. As we know from the teachings of Paul in Galatians says, "Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Therefore know that only those who are of the faith are sons of Abraham. And the scripture foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand saying, in you all the nations shall be blessed."

So I tend to take a stance here, that when God says, that he will judge the nations and the people for the wrong they have done to his people, to his heritage Israel, he isn't talking about the land here, but rather the spiritual descendants of Abraham. His people throughout all of time, who have been scattered across the world, who he will bring together again when he comes and will fulfill his promises of the children of Abraham inheriting the true promised land, and all others shall be utterly destroyed. That is the picture we get here in this passage, that God brings judgment upon the nations, upon all peoples for their sin, and mistreatment of his people.

In verse 4 is a rhetorical question, God asks, "what have you to do with me? In essence he is asking, what have my people ever done to you to illicit this treatment? This evil that you bring upon them? The descriptions here for slavery, of being sold for next to nothing, giving a boy as payment for a harlot, and a girl as payment for wine shows that the value put upon the head of God's people by the world is nothing. God is saying here, you have treated my people with no respect, you have used and abused them, captured them, killed them, sold them, all for your own pleasure, my people who have done nothing to invoke this behavior, therefor I will avenge them, I will return your own payment upon your own head swiftly and speedily. We get a picture here in this passage that God is a God of wrath, he doesn't take idle the threats and ill treatment of his people. As Paul wrote to the Romans, chapter 12:19" Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay says the Lord.

We get an image of this repayment here in Joel, and that image is the battle that was recorded in 2nd Chronicles that we read this morning, where the nations rose up against Judah, but God caused them to fight among themselves, so when the people of Judah went out they found nothing but a valley of corpses. Again if we go back to chapter 2, we get more descriptors of this day of judgment, verse 3 “A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The Land is like the Garden of Eden before them and behind them a desolate wilderness nothing shall escape them. Verse 6 “Before them the people writhe in pain, all faces are drained of Color, verse 10, the earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark and the stars diminish their brightness. 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 terrible, who can endure it?”

Then we come to chapter 3, and we see a connection as God gathers the nations together in the valley to bring judgment upon them. In all this judgment, and within the pictures of death we see in verse 16 this moment of comfort and reassurance. “The Lord also will roar from Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; the heavens and earth will shake but the Lord will be a shelter for his people, and the strength of the children of Israel. In that day, that great day of the Lord he is not coming to punish the sins of his people, but of those who are against him verse 20 and 21 ends the prophesy saying “But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation, For I will acquit them of the guilt of bloodshed, whom I had not acquitted; for the Lord dwells in Zion.” There are 2 ways that we can look at this, again as the physical nation, or as the spiritual nation. I think that there is an element where we can say it definitely applies to physical Israel, God has made promises all throughout scripture that his people will endure, I think that can be taken both as the physical and spiritual people, and we see that throughout the old testament, whatever befalls the people of Israel, even if they are scatted to the corners of the earth they are never destroyed nor eradicated. So in that since we can apply this to the physical descendants of Abraham, but I think that this is talking about a much larger picture, a much larger event.

This is the culmination, the reason why I equate this to the final judgment and the end of days is because of verse 21, he says he will acquit his people of bloodshed, this whole passage is about the violence against God’s people, and God’s wrath being poured out upon all who have stood against him, in this final verse we see God’s promise of salvation, that he will not hold the sins of his people against them, because he has forgiven them. I read all of this as a metaphor for the final days, what a great and terrible day that will be, a day of great mourning, and anguish as the righteous wrath of God is poured out upon mankind, and a day of great rejoicing for those who have been covered by the blood of Jesus, who’s sins are forgiven, who God will relent his judgment upon them.

Everyone will know that he is God, everyone will see his mighty and fearful arrival as he gathers his people to himself. Look at verse 17 here, “So you shall know that I Am the Lord your God Dwelling in Zion My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall ever pass through her again.” What could this mean? If he was talking about a physical city, the physical place of Jerusalem here on this earth I don’t think that this makes much sense...a city of only his people, and no outsiders shall enter in. I don’t think that he is talking about a purely Jewish city, but rather heaven itself, a place where only his people will be and no outsider can enter in because the only entrance is through him. I think verse 18 here is a description of heaven, of the place that God will take his people, as it says, “ And it will come to pass that day, that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water, a fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Acacias.”

A land of peace, a land of plenty, a land not lacking in anything, completely provided and supplied by God, for the fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord. We who are in Christ have no need to fear that day, for that will be the day of our redemption fully realized, that will be the day when sin will no longer be a struggle, a day when we shall be with our savior. I think some can read these passages that show God's wrath and judgment and be fearful, but his judgment is not upon his people, his wrath is not poured out upon those covered by the blood, the image we get of the passover, the households whose door posts were covered by the blood of the lamb escaped the judgment of God. This is the reality of which we are living in, if you are in Christ then you are secure, the wrath of God for your sins has been paid, they have been nailed to the cross, God sent Jesus to take that punishment for you, so that you are now sons and daughters.

There isn't much more that can be said here, in this final chapter we get this description of a great judgment, a great time of death and destruction, but in the midst, salvation and the promised fulfillment of that land, flowing with milk and new wine. The true culmination of the promises given all the way back to Abraham, a city in Zion, for God's people, in the very presence of our Lord and Savior. That is the day we are looking to, the day that we can be brought into that city, just as the thief on the cross said to Jesus, "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, Truly I tell you, today you shall be with me in paradise."

The Lord is coming, whether we live to see that day, or we pass before, we shall all stand before him in judgment. As I was saying last week, the point of Joel is to prepare for that coming day, the call to repentance is repeated throughout, and this book stands as a warning to not be caught off guard. Repent, believe, and follow Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith. And we can live in confidence through him, and by him, that no matter what befalls us in this life we are secure in the next. There is a hard line drawn here in this last chapter, you are either counted among the judged, or you are counted among the people of God, there is no middle ground with God. Jesus is the gate, he is the entrance into that Holy City, he is the only way, as it says in verse 17 "Jerusalem shall be holy, and no aliens shall pass through her again" Because only those who are in Christ can enter into that gate, only those whose sins have been paid for by his blood can enter into that city, only God's people. So again, the call goes out...repent, believe, and follow him while you have today...none of us are guaranteed another day, another moment, make each moment we have count.