

“An Exiled Nation’s Hope”

Who’s the Boss? – A series on the Kings

The Book of Joel

Introduction: Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Joel, the book of Joel. We will round out our study on the Kings of Israel this morning by considering the Word of the Lord to this nation as they found themselves living in the shadow of their own exile. We know very little about the prophet Joel. From his book we know his name and his father’s name and we can deduce that he was a prophet of Jehovah God to the two Southern Tribes known as Judah. We don’t know for sure when he wrote this prophecy because he is not mentioned in any of the other OT books, and there are no super clear time markers within the book. But we can deduce from what he says in the book that he is writing to the nation of Judah during a low point and he is writing with a clear agenda of pointing them to an imminent day – the Day of the Lord.

The voice of Joel in those days of Judah was kind of like the voice of Israel Bissell in the days of the American Revolution. I’m sure you’ve heard of Paul Revere and maybe even of Samuel Prescott, but did you know that there was a man who rode longer and farther on horseback in those early Spring days of April, 1775? Some of Israel’s ride is brought to us through history and some of it through legend, and honestly, where the one ends and the other begins is almost impossible to tell. But the story is told that he left the outskirts of Boston and rode 345 miles over a span of four and a quarter days. He rode his first horse so hard that it died just at the end of the first leg of the trip. But this didn’t stop him. He simply grabbed another horse and rode on, all the way to Philadelphia. His message was an urgent call to arms so that the colonial militias could be ready for the British onslaught that was coming. Reportedly he yelled as he rode – “To arms, to arms, the war has begun.” And in this brave and tireless act he became one of thousands who sacrificed much to win America’s freedom from British control. The burden and urgency of his message about impending danger mirrors the prophet Joel. It is an urgent message of impending danger, a call to immediate action, and a promise of salvation.

As we consider Joel’s message to God’s people I want us to look at the book through the eyes of an Israelite living in a post-exilic Judah. We have seen throughout our study of the Kings that this nation has long been on the march to judgment from God. As God’s people, called by His name, they had turned from Him, worshiped other gods, and become a reproach to His Name. Their refusal to repent from their idolatrous ways brought to them God’s work of exiling them from the land. You will remember that when we left the scene last week the Temple was destroyed, all the major homes of the city were destroyed, the walls were broken down, and most of the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah were carted off to Babylon into captivity. It was not a pretty scene – to say the least! And it is not a scene that I wanted to end this series on because the lot of God’s people is not one of despair, but of hope. Eventually some of the exiled nation trickled back into the capital city – God’s city – Jerusalem, and began the rebuilding process. The Temple was finished and the sacrifices were carried out, and after that the wall around the city was complete – but the nation was never the same. They continued to live in the shadow of the exile. And so in the years after the exile there was no son of David to sit on the throne and rule over Israel as an independent nation. The people prospered in some ways and struggled in others. These post-exilic years were certainly not the crown jewel of Israel’s existence. And yet, God spoke to His people through His prophets during this time. And one of those prophetic voices came from Joel.

Joel’s message is as simple as – the Day of the Lord is coming! And yet, it is so complex that we simply will never mine its depths. As you read this short prophetic book you quickly realize that there was an

unprecedented plague of locusts combined with a drought that had struck the land. It was so bad that Joel describes no vegetation being left. The land has been stripped bare by the locust infestation and drought combination. This unprecedented natural disaster stirred Joel to consider and prophesy about the impending Day of the Lord. And what a good time this was to bring a message like Joel's to God's people. So often after a major physical tragedy God's people are much more prone to listen to God and seek after Him. And so, God stirred up Joel to bring this word about the Day of the Lord. This word was a warning *and* a call to action. It was meant to rouse the people out of their self-sufficient ways and seek after the Lord. But more than anything, it was meant to give the people of God hope. Hope that was true and unshakable. Hope that was firmly founded in unchanging and unchangeable realities set in motion by the one true God. It was a message that the people of God living in the shadow of exile needed, and it is a hope that still rings true today. So, what does Joel's prophecy say about this impending day of the Lord? Well, this book makes clear that it will be a day of coming judgment upon Israel.

I. **It will be a Day of Coming Judgment upon Israel (1:1-2:17)**

- a. The first 12 verses of chapter one tell us that this plague of locust has destroyed everything. The wheat, the barley, the vine, they have all been eaten by the locust. The fig tree, the pomegranate, the palm, the apple tree, all the trees are dried up, and because of this verse 12 tells us that gladness also dries up from the children of man because of this dire condition. In hot and dry Kansas we can certainly understand what this kind of condition must have been like. But can you imagine a good year with a good crop coming, and all of a sudden, out of the blue – the wind blows in millions of locusts who eat everything in sight completely obliterating any sign of vegetation?
- b. It is in the wake of such an event that Joel says this to the people of Judah. *Read 1:13-2:1.*
- c. Joel is sounding an alarm and calling the people together. The priests are to lament and mourn because there is no produce for the grain offering and no wine for the drink offering. They are to gather everyone together – all the inhabitants of the land – to cry out to the Lord. And why? Because the day of the Lord is at hand – it is coming! Therefore, according to Joel – they are to tremble and seek the Lord. There are three facets of this Day of the Lord that Joel presents in his book, but this first facet is something that propels Joel to call the people to mourn and lament and seek the Lord. This day is coming, and therefore they should tremble. This is in many ways unwelcome news for the nation of Israel. As if the locust invasion and drought combination wasn't enough – now they are told to tremble and mourn and lament because this drought and locust invasion is but a sign that the Day of the Lord is soon coming. But still, the day of the Lord was not always associated in the mind of the Jew with great trouble. Often their thoughts about the day of the Lord were wrapped around the hope of the sent Messiah who would rule and reign on David's throne and overthrow all of Israel's enemies. But if this is all that is coming in the Day of the Lord, then there is no reason to lament and mourn and tremble. So, the prophecy of Joel goes on to explain in chapter 2 what this day of the Lord will look like so as to make clear why it is a thing to be fearful of. *Read 2:2-11.*
- d. This locust infestation described in chapter 1 was but the tremor before the earthquake that is described in chapter 2. An army sent by God, a people who have no rival and who cannot be stopped, will overrun God's people and carry out God's judgment. From what we just read we can note that this Day of the Lord will be universal in nature – none will escape from it – as seen in verse 1. It will also be dark and dreadful – as seen in verse 2. This conquering army will be unstoppable – as seen in verses 2-10. And this conquering army is under the divine direction of

the Almighty God of Heaven – as seen in verse 11. In other words, this is a universal and unstoppable judgment that will be come from the hand of the Lord through a conquering army. Now we can understand why Joel was calling the people of Israel to lament and mourn and tremble. This judgment that will come during the Day of the Lord upon the nation of Israel is not a judgment that anyone wants to live through. But why was this judgment of the Lord coming upon his own people during the day of the Lord? Well, Joel doesn't address any specific sins among the Israelites, but in general, as we saw last week, this judgment must come because the people have unrepentant hearts. Sin did not earn them exile in a foreign land, and sin won't necessarily earn them this severe judgment on the day of the Lord. But an unrepentant heart will. A heart that hardens and a neck that stiffens – this was the pathway to exile, and it is the pathway to the Day of the Lord. And so, Joel goes on in chapter 2 to call his fellow Israelites to repentance. In fact, we read in verse 12 that the Lord's voice says this to his people – *Read 2:12-17.*

- e. The day of the Lord will be a day of judgment upon Israel, and in light of this impending reality they are to repent and return to the Lord. The nature of this repentance is to be heart repentance. They are instructed by God to rend their hearts and not their garments. They are not just to put on the religious show of repentance, but their hearts are actually to be broken before God. Like David in Psalm 51 they are to understand that God does not delight in sacrifice or burnt offering that is detached from a broken and contrite heart. This rending of the heart God will not despise. This is the heart that will invoke His mercy – a heart that is truly broken over sin and filled with godly sorrow.
- f. The basis for this repentance is the sinner's sin, but it is also the character of God. He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and he relents over disaster. In other words, he does not delight in condemnation and judgment, but he will not overlook sin either. If there is no repentance – if no return to the Lord – then there will be judgment. But if there will be a return to the Lord – based on his character – he will abundantly pardon and forgive and restore. He will relent from disaster and humble repentance will be met with the mercy and grace of God. If God were any different then there would be no reason to repent. If he were simply a God of wrath or simply a God of power or simply a God of anger, then there would be no reason to repent. If God were like that, then repentance would merely be met with judgment and destruction. But God is perfectly just and wholly merciful. He is filled with righteous anger and steadfast love. He is not simply any one of these things to the exclusion of others, but rather he is perfectly all of these things all of the time. And so, there is good reason to repent and return to the Lord. Rebellion against God invokes the righteous judgment of God, but repentance from rebellion and a return to the Lord will be met with his mercy and grace. Notice that it is not the turning of the person that secures the salvation of the individual, but rather it is the character of God that secures their salvation. So, Joel says in verse 14 – who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him. The turning of the Lord is not guaranteed by the repentance of the people, but rather by the character of the Lord. Hence, Joel doesn't take for granted that their repentance will be met with mercy because he doesn't know God's perfect plan of justice and mercy and when and how judgment must be brought, but he does know that God has often relented of disastrous judgment in response to the repentance of the people – just think Nineveh in the days of Jonah. Because of God's character, he is prone to forgive.
- g. And so I must say to that man or woman, that young adult or that teenager that is here today with a stiffened neck against God and a hardened heart against Him – I must call you to

repentance not only because of impending judgment but mostly because of the character of God. He is a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Run to Him knowing that He is a God who delights to forgive and abundantly pardon.

- i. *Illustration:* I remember during a particularly dark time of my life where God showed me abundant mercy and steadfast love and it was mirrored to me through my parents. On one night in particular I had really messed up. I was a senior in high school and I had made a series of sinful choices that had put me in a very bad situation, and I got caught red handed in the situation. I'm not giving you details on purpose because details only exalt my sin, and believe me there is nothing to exalt in my sin. So, without the details of my sin, I must give you the details of a gracious and merciful dad and mom who mirrored to me the grace and mercy of God. Being caught red-handed by my parents their response was to send me to bed and to talk about the whole thing in the morning. With fear and trembling I approached the table that next morning expecting the hammer of judgment to fall upon my head – and believe me that is what I deserved. But instead I was met with mercy and grace. My parent's hearts were broken by my poor choices and they were saddened by my sin, and there were consequences for my choices, but their response was filled with mercy and grace. And in this they mirrored God to me. Friend – are you refusing to repent from sin because of what others may think of you? Are you refusing to repent because of the consequences that may come? Are you refusing to repent because of the judgment you may face from God? I point you this morning to the character of this God and say to you that in light of who He is do not wait another moment. Do not cling to your sin another nanosecond. The very character of God beckons you to return to Him. Repent and run to the merciful and gracious God!
- h. Notice also that the product of this repentance is not simply personal salvation, but glory to God. In verse 17 Joel instructs the people to return to the Lord and seek His salvation from this day of the Lord for the sake of His own name so that His people would not become a reproach and a byword among the nations and so that the people would not question and say – “where is their God?” The outcome of a repentant people seeking after the Lord will not simply be personal salvation, but a restored glory to the very name of God among the nations of the world. And so, the day of the Lord will be a day of judgment upon Israel, and so they must right now repent and return to the Lord.

II. It will be a Day of Judgment on Israel's Enemies (3:1-16)

- a. This day of the Lord is not only a day of judgment upon Israel, but it is also a day of judgment upon Israel's enemies. In chapter 3 Joel tells us about the much anticipated day of reckoning for the many nations of the world who have sinfully rejected and abused God's people. *Read 3:1-3.*
- b. This Day of Judgment will come when the Lord returns the fugitive nation of Israel to the land that God had promised to her. It will be then that God will bring about this judgment of the nations in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. As I read the ESV you probably noted in verse one that it said, “when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.” The wording in Hebrew is much more clearly linked with slavery and captivity. In other words, what is being referenced here is a re-gathering of Israel to her land – to God's land, the Promised Land. Ever since the watershed moment of the exile that was completed in 587BC there have been several re-gatherings of the Jewish people to this Promised Land. However, none of them have been complete, and none of them have been permanent. The most recent one that you are most assuredly aware of is the one that began in 1947 when the United Nations finally recognized Israel as its own nation in the

land of Palestine. The pilgrimage of many Jews back to the Promised Land still continues to this day, but there are still many, many Jews who live outside of Israel. But there is coming a day – the Day of the Lord – where all of ethnic Israel will be regathered to the Land. It is in this period – this Day of the Lord – that the judgment of the nations will come. This Day of the Lord will be known for its judgment upon Israel and for its judgment upon the nations of the world who have hated and mistreated the Jewish people.

- c. And so, God says to them through the prophet Joel in verses 9-16 that the nations better gear up for war. Instead of turning their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks – like Isaiah says will happen during the Millennial reign of the Messiah – here Joel tells the nations of the world to turn their plowshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears and gather in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. But this isn't going to be a war, but rather it is going to be more like a harvesting of judgment upon them. So in verse 13 the sickle is to go in and harvest the grain and the winepress is to be tread because it is full. In other words, their evil is full and ready to harvest. They have reached the point of the fullness of their iniquity and they are ready to reap what they have sown – the eternal wrath of Almighty God. Apparently those gathered in this valley will be like a sea of people as Joel repeats the word “multitudes” in verse 14 to make this point. They are gathered in this valley of Jehoshaphat awaiting the decision of the Lord. The name Jehoshaphat means “Jehovah has judged.” We don't know what valley this is specifically, but it is a valley around Jerusalem somewhere, and in this valley the nations who have plundered and abused and warred against and mistreated God's people, all the nations of the world – these nations will receive the righteous wrath of the judgment of God. The Lord will roar from Zion and his voice will utter from Jerusalem and the heavens and the earth will quake.
- d. This will happen as part of the Day of the Lord. We don't have time this morning to get into all of the intricacies of the End Times to talk about when this will happen and why we think it will happen then, but based on a combination of many passages this judgment of the nations in the Valley of Decision will take place near the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. But the point of the prophet Joel is not to give us a timeline, but to give us hope! Here is the hope – the nations that have ravaged God's people will be dealt with. The millennia that have passed with the Jews being the floor mat of the world – the thousands of years that have gone by with the seeming silence of God in defense of His chosen people – they will one day end! And they will end with the roaring voice of the Lord from Jerusalem as he renders his decision upon the nations of the world. Here is the hope – God is not willing for his name to be forever trampled by the unbelieving nations of the world. He is not willing for his glory to be forever mocked and forever set aside. He is not willing for his people to be tread upon forever. He will defend His people who are called by His name. He will deal with those who have despised Him by abusing His people. He will overcome and he will righteously judge! And this gives great hope to God's people of Joel's day. They didn't know at that point that it would be still many more years until this Day of the Lord, but what they needed to know was that the Lord would vanquish their enemies and defend His glorious Name. This will happen on the Day of the Lord.

III. It will be a Day of Redemption (2:18-32; 3:17-21)

- a. But while this provides hope, it is an empty hope if it is not partnered with the final reality of the Day of the Lord as it is presented in the book of Joel. Joel is careful to present the Day of the Lord as a day of redemption for Israel. So in chapter 2 starting in verse 18 we read of how the Lord redeemed what the locusts had destroyed – *Read 2:18-26a.*

- b. Up to this point in the text it seems as though this redemption will come in mostly physical ways, and most certainly this could have happened during the days of Joel as the people responded to the call to repentance and God met them with abundant mercy and grace. They don't deserve this grace. They don't deserve to have these things restored to them. But the Lord has pity upon them and lavishes grace upon them – giving them what they have not deserved. The years of damage that has been done by the swarming locust has been restored by the gracious hand of the Lord.
- c. But this redemption is not simply physical. So, he goes on to say in verse 26 – “And my people shall never again be put to shame.” This just raised the bar of this redemptive work of God. There is more going on here than restoration of locust eaten crop lands. God is at work to take away his people's shame forever! He goes on to say in verse 27 that “You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame.” You see, this redemption of God's people is about restoring God to His people. This salvation from their enemies is not a mere physical salvation, but it is an eternal salvation from all that mankind's sin has wrought. The insurmountable rift that sin has created between God and man will be overcome by the powerful work of God in the redemption of His people. God will dwell in their midst and they will know Him and they will never again be put to shame.
- d. Joel goes on to describe this spiritual redemption in some of the most famous verses of his book. *Read verses 28-31.* God's powerful work to redeem His people and thereby exalt his name will take place through the pouring out of His Spirit upon all flesh. As you read these verses you should be thinking of the time in Numbers 11 when the Spirit that was on Moses came also to the elders of Israel and they were prophesying in the meeting tent but there were two elders, Medad and Eldad who didn't come to the meeting but upon whom the Spirit of the Lord also came and they prophesied in the camp among the people. Then a young man ran to tattle on them to Moses and Joshua got quite upset and told Moses to do something to stop these men from prophesying, but Moses' response was “Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them!” And it is this desire of Moses that is predicted in Joel 2. Joel tells of a day where the outpouring of the Spirit will be on all flesh.
- e. In Acts 2, on that famous Day of Pentecost, the Spirit of the Lord comes upon the disciples of Jesus in supernatural power. Peter quotes Joel 2 to identify that what is happening is like what Joel predicted would happen. I do not think that Acts 2 is the final fulfillment of this prophecy, but rather that it is a sort of prequel to the supernatural power of God that will fall upon His people, Israel, during the Day of the Lord. But Joel mixes in the hope of supernatural power falling down upon the nation of Israel with the reality that the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment. And so in verses 30-31 the Lord makes clear what kind of cataclysmic events will take place right before this Day of the Lord. And all of this is followed up with the glorious promise of verse 32. *Read 2:32*
- f. This redemption will be upon those who call upon the name of the Lord. You know this verse as it is quoted in Romans 10 to make the point that anyone – whether Jew or Gentile – anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. And so here in Joel 2, there is the promise of salvation for those who call upon His name. This calling upon the name of the Lord will be done by those who have been called by the Lord, as is made clear at the end of the verse. And so, in one verse of Scripture we have the paradox of the responsibility of man in salvation – the responsibility to call upon the name of the Lord to be saved – and the sovereignty of God – the

sovereignty to call whom He chooses to salvation. They are interlinked and inseparable and we dare not divide them asunder. What the text has joined, let us not divide simply for our own ease of understanding. God calls men unto himself for salvation and they respond because of His gracious and efficacious call. Those whom the Lord calls will be the ones who call upon the Lord. Or to say it the other way, those who call upon the Lord to be saved will be those whom the Lord calls. What is paradoxical to us, is totally glorious to God. The point of Joel is to say that this work of redemption is a work of God's grace. The Jews of his day don't deserve it, and the Jews of the Day of the Lord don't deserve it, and the Gentiles of the Church Age don't deserve it either. This is why it is grace, and this is why it brings great glory to God!

- g. And this glorious God who is in the business of redeeming people to Himself is a God of great hope! This redemption is further described at the end of the book where Joel tells them that there is coming a day when the Lord will dwell in Jerusalem and it shall be holy. This will be accompanied with a land of great blessing described as mountains that drip sweet wine and hills that flow with milk and streambeds that are full of water and a fountain that flows from the very house of the Lord. These are all ideas presented in so many other prophetic texts and they find their culmination in the book of Revelation where we read of the Eternal Kingdom of God when he re-creates the Heavens and the Earth and His holy city, the New Jerusalem descends from Heaven and resides on Earth and dwells with mankind! Certainly, as Joel's prophecy says – Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem – to all generations. God will avenge the blood of His people and the Lord will dwell in Zion! The Day of the Lord will be a day of redemption
- h. Do you see how this message of prophecy would bring great hope to God's people who were living in the shambles of Israel after their exile? They were to look ahead to the Day of the Lord.
 - i. A day of judgment upon God's unrepentant people – hence all should repent and rend their hearts before the Lord because He is a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
 - ii. A day of judgment upon Israel's foes in which God's name would be defended and exalted and in which the enemies of God's people will finally and fully be dealt with – hence all should rejoice in a God who will defend His glory and vanquish His enemies.
 - iii. A day of redemption in which he will supernaturally pour His Spirit upon those whom He calls. A day of great salvation and glorious redemption – hence all should have a settled confidence in this saving and redeeming God!
- i. So, what message is there here for you? Well, the clearest call of the text is to find all hope in God for in the God of Joel's prophecy we have an unshakable hope based upon unchangeable future realities. We must find hope in a God who will conquer all of his enemies and save His people. We must find hope in a God whose good news is the same in the book of Joel as it is in the book of Romans and Galatians and Hebrews and Revelation. All of the glorious truths of the Gospel are to be found right here in the book of Joel. Mankind is in sinful rebellion against God and mankind is deserving of God's righteous judgment upon that sin, but God supernaturally works to provide salvation for those He calls unto Himself. Sin will be finally and fully dealt with, and you can be saved from the eternal wrath of God because God is a God who is merciful and gracious and ready to pardon. He can pardon you because He has placed the judgment of your sin upon His very own Son – the Son of David who will one day sit on the Throne of David and rule the world in righteousness and peace – this Son of David – Jesus, came and took God's wrath for you by becoming the perfect sacrificial Lamb. There is hope in the face of your own sin because God has made a way through the King of Kings.

- j. But there is also great hope here for the daily life of the believer. This salvation that is secured for us through the Cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ is all about a restoration of our relationship with God. It is not about giving you your best life now or about giving you a pathway to achieve your own ends. Jesus is not simply the best option for you to get what you have always wanted in personal happiness and success. No, Jesus is the perfect Son of God who has secured for you a right relationship with the God of Heaven. This right relationship has glorious eternal realities – like dwelling in an eternal Kingdom with the God of Heaven dwelling in our midst. But this right relationship also has glorious immediate realities. Your sinful heart has looked to every other relationship in life to provide for you the acceptance and the purpose and the meaning that only a right relationship with God can provide. So you have often hoped that this relationship or that would give you what can only be found in God. You have often hoped that this gift from God or that one would bring you what can only be found in a right relationship with God. And so often our lives don't look too much different from the worlds because we find ourselves pursuing the same meaning, purpose, and satisfaction through the same means, while all the while we have all that we need in a right relationship with God. And how glorious it is to know God. How all of the appeal of other pursuits fades away when one has tasted the joyous presence of the glorious God of Heaven!
- k. And so Christian, does this kind of hope in the eternally right relationship with God dominate your life? Or are you running after the gifts of the Giver seeking what only the Giver Himself can supply?

Conclusion: There is eternal hope that provides direction and meaning and purpose to the here and now reality of life that can only be found in the God of the book of Joel. He is a God who will deal with sin and who has dealt with that sin in the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is a God who has saved you for the sake of restoring you to Himself – thereby giving you all that you need! Let's pray.