

Joel 1-2

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[0 : 00] Joel chapter 1. I want to try and deal with Joel in three Sunday evenings. I sometimes it's just great to kind of blitz an Old Testament prophet. And somebody said they're like covenantal hand grenades, the minor prophets.

And I think there's a sense in which as you read them, they're full of this glorious picture language. Now actions have consequences, don't they? So if you get as many speeding points on your license as I have, then you need to be a little bit more cautious when you go fast speed cameras for a while, isn't it?

But there is a problem, and the problem is we tend to be slow learners. Actually maybe, if we're honest tonight, we have to confess that we are a little bit stubborn and we often quickly forget our mistakes and how disastrous they were.

And we plough on in self-confidence. And that is probably most true when it comes to following Jesus Christ. How forgetful I can be.

How self-confident I can be. And I need to be reminded again and again and again of the consequences of my rebellion against God. What are the consequences of my sin?

[1 : 15] What are the consequences of rejecting God and going my own way in life? And that means that we need to be reminded again and again of what God has said, that he will discipline those whom he loves.

He will discipline us for the way that we disobey him. He loves us too much to let us get away with sin. And the message of the prophet Joel is very simple.

It's a very, very simple book. And it says we must learn from God's past judgment because it reminds us that there will be a future judgment. It's a very, very easy book to understand in many ways.

We must learn from God's past judgment because it reminds us that there will be a future judgment. And because of that, we must change today.

So let's hear the word of the Lord to us. Look at verse 2. Hear this. Wake up. Wake up. Hear this, you elders. Give you.

[2 : 19] Wake up, all inhabitants of the land. He says to the people of Israel, he says, think back on your history, says Joel. Can you remember anything like this? Look at verse 3.

Tell your children of it. Let your children tell their children and their children to another generation. Everybody in God's people should know about this from their parents' needs, Joel says.

This is not some great national success to relay. It's a disaster. And it's a disaster warning that is to be given to every generation.

Look at verse 4. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten. What the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. Wave upon wave of locusts.

And as each wave comes, what has happened is, it is stripped bare another layer of vegetation. Until there's not a shred of the crops that remain.

[3 : 17] One translator put it like this. The little left by the crunching locust, the gnawing locust has eaten. And the little left by the gnawing locust, the grinding locust has eaten.

And the little left by the grinding locust, the chomping locust has eaten. Now, I don't know whether you've ever seen a swarm of locusts. It's very often a preacher say, well, they're a little bit like grasshoppers.

They're absolutely nothing like grasshoppers. A grasshopper you can't find. It's in your lawn, isn't it? But the locust is up to about 10 centimeters long. And so a swarm of locusts, they say, in an area of about a square foot, you can have a thousand of the insects.

A thousand little 10 centimeter long creepy crawlies on steroids. It is an unstoppable mass of eating machines.

[4 : 18] And that has hit the people of God. So ask the drunks, look at verse 5, The drunks, well, they are literally crying into their beer. Because it's the last pint they're ever going to have, or they're going to have for a very long time.

Last orders has been called. There's no barley for beer. There's no apples for cider. There's no wines for wine. Look at verse 6. For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number.

Its teeth are lion's teeth. And it has the fangs of a lioness. It's more like an invading army, isn't it? Than an insect infestation.

Even the trees have been destroyed. Joel says so in verse 8. Doesn't he look what he says? He says, Lament like a virgin when sackcloth for the bridegroom of her eve.

Ask the bride how bad it is. That is the virgin. Her wedding is off. And no one's in parting mood.

Verse 9. Ask the priest in the temple. He's got nothing to offer the Lord.

[5 : 19] There is no grain offering. And there is no wine in the land. Ask the farmer in verses 10 to 12. Be ashamed, verse 11. You tillers of the soil.

Wail! Weep, O vine dressers. For the wheat and the barley. Because the harvest of the field has perished. The vines dry up. The fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm and apple.

All the trees of the field have dried up. And gladness dries up from the children of men. There's nothing left in the supermarket. The shelves are utterly bare. And everybody knows something that the weight of man's heart is through his stomach.

And so at the end of verse 12. Look what it says. It says, And gladness has dried up from the children of men. It's a picture of total and utter devastation.

But it's not the ministry of agriculture that the Lord holds responsible. It's not a question of poor farming technique. It's not a question of global warming. Because God's people, the people of Judah, they knew full well that they weren't just unlucky to suffer these swarms, were they?

[6 : 25] The locusts weren't a direct result of an unfortunate change in wind direction. No, God had told them. God had told them why locusts would come in the earlier book of the Bible.

Keep a finger in Joel because you'll spend the rest of the evening trying to find it again. If you lose it. But go back to Deuteronomy chapter 28. Deuteronomy chapter 28 and verse 42.

It's on page 170. And he says this. Deuteronomy 28 verse 42.

The cricket shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground. Now why would God promise such a thing? Because of verse 45. All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed.

Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord your God. To keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever.

[7 : 29] You see the reason why the locusts had destroyed every single living piece of vegetation in the land. Was because of the problem in their relationship with God. And that is why they must acknowledge that they have disobeyed their God.

Wake up to what is going on says God. Go back to Joel chapter 1 and verse 13. And God says weep. Put on sackcloth.

And lament O priests. Wail O ministers of the altar. Go in past the night in sackcloth O ministers of my God. Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of God.

Wake up. Wake up. The priests are told to lead a procession of sorrow. But in verse 14. Can you see all the people join in? Consecrate a fast.

Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and the inhabitants of the land. To the house of the Lord your God. And cry out to the Lord. They are all the people there to join in at the temple. And they are to cry out.

[8 : 30] To the only one that can help them. The Lord who they have disobeyed. They need urgent action. To address the fact that they have been apathetic. With their relationship with God.

And the reason God's judgment is so serious. Is because it is not actually his final word on disobedience. In verse 15. Alas. Alas for the day.

For the day of the Lord is near. And as destruction from the almighty it comes. The locusts. The locusts. Yes. They were devastating. Absolutely devastating.

But remember says Joel. They just show us. That there will be another day of greater destruction. Destruction than is still to come. It's the day of the Lord. It's the day when he will finally bring judgment on all people.

And the locusts. They are well. They are just a smack across the wrist. Compared to the destruction of that day. No wonder Joel leads by example.

[9 : 31] Look at verse 19. He says this. To you oh Lord I call. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. And flame has burned all the trees of the field.

To you oh Lord I call. Now God doesn't change. God is still the sovereign God. Who still disciplines his people whom he loves.

I want to say that we are not under the same curses and blessings. Of the people under the old covenant. Sure God's people Judah were under the old covenant.

The great news for you and I is that if we follow the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches us. That he has once and for all. Taken God's curse upon the cross.

And therefore we have. Don't we according to Ephesians 1. Every spiritual blessing in Christ. But God still uses the circumstances of our lives to teach us. Doesn't he? Hebrews 12 verse 10.

[10 : 31] For they disciplined us for a short time. As it seemed best to them our mum and dad did. But he, God disciplines us for our good. That we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant.

But later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Of those who have been trained by it. That is the purpose of God's loving discipline. It's like a loving parent.

He ensures that. He enforces the boundaries that he has set. The purpose of his discipline. Is that we notice. We've made a mess of following the Lord. And therefore we change to become more like him.

To be more holy. To be more righteous. And God only disciplines his children. He brings judgment on his people. Out of his great love for them.

And do you see the purpose of these locusts in Joel chapter 1. It's not a fit of temper. It isn't God kind of getting his anger off his chest. It is a warning. So in verses 2 to 14.

[11 : 38] God is saying look back at what is going on. And turn to me. Because verse 15. There is a day that is too late. There is a day of the Lord.

When final judgment will come. And the problem is like the people of Judah. In the time of Joel. Isn't that for us? We are slow to learn the lessons of disobedience.

Because we do not read history. Through the lens of God's sovereignty. We don't really acknowledge. That God is in control.

Of all the circumstances of your life and mine. That doesn't mean that we blame him. For the consequences of the bad things we do.

Our bad decisions. That is not the way that God works. But it does mean doesn't it. That God will sometimes give us over. To the mess that we make.

[12 : 35] Put very simply this. Sin has consequences. And we are to be distressed about them. We are not to go into denial. Which is so often what we do.

Sin has consequences. Personally doesn't it? Think of sexual immorality. When you rip. Sex. Out of the context.

Of a man and a woman. In marriage. It leaves a trail. Of emotional scars. Doesn't it? Doesn't it?

It does. Think of abortion. The statistics. For 2012. Were that there were. 219,336 abortions. Half of all pregnancies.

In girls. Under 18. In this country. End in abortion. More abortion. Than in any other country. In Europe. Think of the emotional scars.

[13 : 35] That that leaves. Sin has consequences. And we should mourn. Shouldn't we. Over our personal sin. Now we know that.

Don't we. If you tell lies. You will not be trusted. And relationships. And relationships will break down. If we are greedy. Well we find that we'll end up living for something that never ever satisfies us.

If you make money you're God. In the end. You will discover it has destroyed your life. but the problems of Judah were not just individual they were corporate, it was the whole country the whole of God's people and that is the same for God's people today so as we look at the church in this country do you think it's a coincidence that so many churches so many church buildings are empty

do you think it's a coincidence that so many churches are skint do you think it's just bad luck that Christians just cannot keep out of the news for all the wrong reasons what's it been this week? I don't know what have we seen over the last month? we've seen all sorts of things alleged about church ministers what has gone on in churches God's hand of judgment rests so much on what calls itself the church in our country and so we should weep it makes our job of telling people about Jesus so much harder, doesn't it?

my brother is a minister in Swansea his son is now 17 when he was 16 he was doing his GCSEs and when his mates found out that his dad was a minister immediately they said he must be a paedophile there are times out there when we as a church have to corporately repent and within God's sovereignty that is the right attitude to have there may be nothing but it's a right question to ask so if under my ministry IPC contracted and a large number of people left well the easy thing to do in that point is to say well they were all wrong anyway weren't they?

[15 : 45] the right thing to do is to say this well God is in control and me personally where in my ministry am I failing to be obedient to him? and we need to call anyone who confesses to follow Jesus back to wholehearted obedience that Jesus did in the hands and if we don't we are as much to blame for Jesus' reputation in our land as the people who drag it and down with their sin but before we think that the situation of the locusts in the past has been bad God says well you ain't seen nothing yet so here's our second heading our second heading is Tremble look at chapter 2 verse 1 blow a trumpet in Zion sound an alarm on my holy mountain let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming it is near it's a call to war but however strong the defence is it's going to be a very one-sided campaign look at verse 2 a day of darkness and gloom a day of clouds and thick darkness like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and a powerful people their like has never been seen before nor will be again after them through the years of all generations it's a call to war can you imagine an army that's so huge that the darkness of the night comes over the whole land the country's image is of isn't it the orcs in Lord of the Rings and the darkness that covers the whole land well this is the day when God brings judgment judgment that starts where does it start?

look at verse 1 it starts on my holy mountain on my holy hill right in the middle of God's people this isn't just judgment on the nations this is judgment that starts with the people of God as Peter says it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God there's never been an army like it it's like an impenetrable storm cloud it sweeps across the land like a forest fire and if there's 3 it devours everything before it everything that is green is gone behind it it is all desolate it is like mighty cavalry in verse 4 and 5 chariots that rumble effortlessly across mountains they make any modern tank look pathetic and weak look at verse 6 before them peoples are in anguish all faces grow pale the colour drains from the face of every single human being who stands upon the earth verse 7 like warriors they charge like soldiers they scale the wall they march each on his way they do not swerve from their paths they do not jostle one another each marches in his path they burst through the weapons and are not halted no wall can stop them no defences can make them bring their stride it is relentless it is terrifying such is the terrifying force that even creation is fearful of them verse 10 the earthquakes before them the heavens tremble the sun and moon are darkened the stars withdraw their shining and most terrifying of all is verse 11 their commander the lord utters his voice before his army for his camp is exceedingly great he who executes his word is powerful for the day of the lord is great and very awesome who can endure it and that's the problem isn't it at the end of verse 11 there is only one answer who can endure it no one can no one can endure it but on the day when the living god returns in the person of his son the lord Jesus Christ to judge the world no one can endure it it's like a massed army that brings darkness to the land and smashes through solid stone walls no one can endure it

Jesus says in Matthew 24 the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light the stars will fall from heaven the powers of the heavens should be shaken then will appear in heaven the sign of the son of man and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and they will see the son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with great power and great glory and the locusts of Joel 1 they're just a foreshadowing of the judgment God will bring through Jesus Christ on judgment day and the message to the people of June and the message to us is very very simple it is this if you will not learn from what I have done in the past says God then you will face the full force of my unstoppable judgment in the future if you will not heed my discipline now you will face my righteous anger in the future it's sad isn't it that the new testament mentions Jesus returned to judge the world on average

once every ten verses you cannot read the bible you cannot read the new testament and ignore the certainty of the day of the lord and it's a day that should motivate us to action because this is a day where we will be and whether you are following the lord jesus christ tonight or not you will be there and you will stand before him in judgment and who can endure it no one can so how do you cope how do you respond to a god who can reduce every human being to a fearful wreck well the great news is this it's not the threat of a distant heart-hearted god is it no this is the threat of a tender-hearted god who offers relationship to his people tremble thirdly turn look at verse 12 yet even now even now even now return to me no matter how far you feel you've rejected god however many times you've heard the message of the gospel however often you've been somewhere and you've heard about jesus but you know that you're not following him there is always an even now with god he never shuts the door on those who will return even now let me tell you a story this week I was at a wedding this girl I was going up with she was 16 years old she stopped coming to youth group one week stopped coming to church she completely rebelled went off the rails and didn't send her parents mother's day card father's day card contacted them at christmas it was an awful situation I was out for a I was out with a friend on wednesday night and it's his sister-in-law I said how's bethen his eyes filled up with tears and he said three months ago bethen had her second child and there was something in her which couldn't cope she cried out to the lord and was gloriously converted I was at a wedding on friday I saw her father I said father I hear wonderful news about bethen his eyes welled up with tears he said I had a father's day card from her for the first time in what is it 22 years on the father's day card was written train a child up in the way of the lord that will not depart from it it's amazing isn't it you see many of you have children who have gone away from the lord many of you have been praying for people for years look at verse 12 yet even now return to me with all your heart no matter how far you feel far away but notice this the lord is not going to be conned you see verse 13 he's not going to be conned by lip service do you see what he says he says rend your hearts and not your garments it's a relationship of the heart isn't it god will not be fooled by a burst of religious activity no matter how dramatic you might rip your shirt off and wail in sorrow said the lord but it's what goes on beneath the skin that I'm interested rend your heart and not your garments return to the lord your god he doesn't want you to suck up to him he doesn't want you to start kind of just trying your best look what he says in verse 13 return to him look at how he's described return to the lord your god for he is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and he relents over disaster he is the lord your god he is the gracious god who made promises to these people in judah he is the merciful god who rescued them from egypt he is the generous god who had blessed them by putting them in a fruitful new land now the problem doesn't lie with god does it what is god like when he's gracious and compassionate slow to anger abounding in love and he relents from sin to calamity it's like the father in jesus story of the prodigal son in 15 who is standing and watching and waiting and wanting his son to return from the far country who wants his people to return from their sin and remember what I might says god and turn but you cannot presume on god look at verse 14 who knows whether you will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him a grain offering for the lord your god and that is so many people's problem isn't it in churches like this that they presume on god they think they can take god for a ride yeah I accept that jesus died on the cross I can be forgiven jesus died to take my sins the way I know it but it doesn't matter really what I do we're obviously not as crass as that but do we plan sins in our heart certain of future forgiveness I'll be okay because well that's just what god does isn't it well joel says doesn't it if in verse 14 who knows never presume on the holy god who takes sin so seriously that only the life of his son could deal with it and so turn tonight turn whether you call yourself a christian or not turn who is to repent verse 16 blow the trumpet consecrate a fast call a song assembly gather the people consecrate the congregation assemble the elders gather the children even nursing infants let the bridegroom leave his chamber and the bride her chamber that's how everyone is it call the mothers breastfeeding in the creche get the couple out of the honeymoon suite we need everyone to turn we need to repent why are they to repent well look at what the priest says when they lead them in verse 17 between the vestibule and the altar let the priest the minister to the lord weep make not your heritage a reproach a byword among the nations why should they say among the peoples where is your god that turn back to god so that his reputation is not tarnished in other words for the sake of the lord's glory because when his people use him like a forgiveness slot machine when they use him like a convenient addition to their lives it makes a mockery of god's name amongst those who don't follow him but when god's people turn to him with broken hearts and when god's people make him their great desire their soul

purpose their chief delight when they treasure jesus above everything else it makes people wonder what a great god they must have and so jesus begins his first sermon in mark 1 15 and he says the time has come the kingdom of god is near repent and believe the good news and that is the call of jesus to us all isn't it to repent and believe the good news not once daily return to me says jesus don't bother ripping your shirt or ratcheting up your church attendance don't come sucking up to me come to me with a heart that is broken by your sin come to me recognizing how shabbily you've treated god how disgracefully you've treated other people can repent and believe the good news because the lord is so gracious and he's so compassionate and he's so slow to anger and he's abounding in love and that he's not yet come as he's promised here with his armies of judgment but rather he has come first in the person of his son born humbly to live perfectly and die sacrificially in agony in our place so that when we return to god we find that his arms are already outstretched on the cross to welcome us in and so tonight

[29 : 01] I come I hope with the authority of god to say come to jesus tonight if you've never come to him come to him now and god says to you i am coming in judgment come to me now before it is too late and if you doubt that there's a too late there is going to be a too late to look back in history and see what i've done and be sure that it is nothing compared to what i have promised i will do in the future come to me i am slow to anger i'm abounding in love and faithfulness and it's not just a message for them out there it's not just a message for you tonight if you are not a christian it is actually a message for those of us who come here week by week it's a message for those of us who think we're part of god's people we often think don't we that repentant believer that's something we did in the past but joel is writing to june are the people of god to the church and this message of coming judgment is a message for all those who think as long as we say jesus died for me it doesn't matter how we live and it's a warning for those of us who maybe come to church week by week but we've long stopped coming to the lord jesus and it's a warning to those of us who are treating jesus like a spiritual first aid kit who's there to help us in time of need rather than the rightful king of every part of our lives and we want to glorify him in everything that we do it's a warning to those who even shed tears but continue to plan sin secretly to repent and believe it's not only the way that we start to follow jesus it is the whole shape of our christian life isn't it again and again and again rend your hearts not your garments return to the lord your god for he is gracious and compassionate and slow to anger and abounding in love and he relents from sending calamity and who knows he may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing there is dreadful judgment to come please please do not presume on the living god be broken by your sin and be living for your seat if you don't let us pray any