

# Joel 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] So, what would you do if you knew that Jesus was going to return tomorrow evening at 6.29pm? 24 hours. Let's say this is the last day before the last day. 24 hours. What would you do?

Well, you'd make sure you would do quiet time, wouldn't you? You wouldn't have a lie in, would you? Would you go to work? Would you go to school? I wonder.

Are there people that you'd like to speak to before the Lord returns at 6.29pm tomorrow? Maybe some person you've been wanting to tell them the gospel, you've been building that relationship with.

For years, maybe, you've never taken courage to tell them, well, you would take courage, wouldn't you, knowing that you'd risk the relationship, I think. What else would you do?

That kind of mentality of 24 hours to go seems to me to be just the kind of mentality that the New Testament encourages us to think about the day of the Lord.

[ 1 : 09 ] I've found the whole of the Bible. That it is that imminent. So the day of the locust, when it's all stripped bare, alas the day, remember that, because the day of the Lord is near, and God has poured out his Spirit upon us, and so we are in the last days.

It is the final event on God's calendar. It is written in his diary, it might not be written in ours when it is, but we are in the last moments before the wonders that he will show.

And Joel 3 is all about that day, so look at verse 1. For behold, in those days and at that time, and then verse 18, and in that day, the day of the Lord.

And what we're going to be speaking about tonight is all future. Now why do we have Joel 3? Is it just to give us information? No, it's not.

It is supposed to be a great motivator. It is supposed to affect us. So by the way, Martin Luther was asked that question. What would you do if you knew for certain Jesus was returning tomorrow?

[ 2 : 23 ] You've got 24 hours, Martin Luther. Do you know what his answer was? I'd flatter a God. That's what he said. That's interesting, isn't it? I think that what he means by that is that it doesn't make any difference at all to the way that I'm living.

Martin Luther was so living with the imminent return of the Lord Jesus, motivating and directing everything that he did, that he was saying it isn't going to change anything that I'm going to do in the next 24 hours. I'm already living as if the final whistle is poised at the lips of the Lord God Almighty. So in the book of Joel, we've been told that the day is coming. But we haven't been told much about that day. What will it be like? Well, Joel 3 lets us in. We've seen that it's vital to be prepared for that day.

That God has gone out of his way to make it possible so that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But what is salvation really all about? Why is it so vital that we have the Spirit to open our mouths and tell people the good news?

Well, Joel 3 takes us through that day. And the first thing to note is it could come at any time because verse 1. For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat.

[ 3 : 40 ] And I will enter into judgment with them there on behalf of my people of my heritage Israel because they've scattered them among the nations and they've divided up my land. In those days, that is these days, at that time, tomorrow, next month, next year, next century, it will happen.

There's no corner in the clock that alerts us to exactly when it will be. But in my practice and in my thinking, I suspect all of us don't expect it to happen soon.

Indeed, I think in practice, we think it's not going to happen at all. But the New Testament is so very clear. The return of the Lord Jesus in those days and at that time, it will come and it will come suddenly.

And the New Testament's favourite illustration of the coming is that of a pregnant woman. So, with a pregnant woman, you know that the birth is coming. With all three of ours, we've had nine months notice, isn't it?

Anna and Froukia, they know the baby is coming. But the problem is you can't predict the exact day for each of them. It's jolly inconvenient, isn't it, that you can't predict the exact day. So Chris Roberts and Emma, they got married, didn't they, on the due date that Ellie was born.

[ 4 : 58 ] So we had to pray that Ellie would come along either the day before or the day after. But we couldn't predict it. Any time. So let me ask you, to be honest for a moment, I'm not going to ask you to publicly say it.

But when you woke up this morning, did you give a moment's thought that the return of Jesus could be today or tomorrow? You didn't, and neither did I. You see, it's the fact that we don't think that it's going to happen any time that it takes away the urgency, isn't it?

That it can happen any time, it takes away the urgency. Let me illustrate that. My mother's sister was a high-mpt-m, and she became very, very unwell very quickly. She had a stroke. And she professed faith with my mother in the 1950s, but she'd fallen away very, very quickly.

And I went to see her. It was about a year before I came here to be the minister. She'd had a massive stroke. As soon as you went into the ward, you knew death was near. I prayed with her. And we knew that she didn't have long left. Six weeks later, I sat in her funeral. I'll never, ever forget the feeling. The feeling of anger with myself, that I will not allow this to happen again.

[ 6 : 09 ] Where I didn't share the gospel properly with her. What happened there? Well, the event of her being ill clarified my thinking. Her being so unwell crystallized my mind.

It made it absolutely abundantly clear. She was about to die, and I had to take action. But for most of the people that we work with, or the friends we've got at home, or the members of our family, most of them, who, still like my aunt, could die very soon, we don't have those crystallizing moments, do we?

When you go to the hospice to see someone, and you know that you're seeing them possibly for the last time, and boldness comes, isn't it? Can I talk to you about the Lord Jesus? But chapter 3 could happen at any time.

Well, what is going to happen? Well, there is going to be the judgment of the nations. Look at this. There's a number of things. First of all, there is the inevitability of the judgment. So in verse 2, There is the inevitability of it.

God is going to do it. God says, I will gather. And when God is determined to do something, God always does it. So not only is there inevitability of this judgment, there is the inescapability of this judgment.

[ 7 : 31 ] Here is one appointment that everyone will keep. I don't know about you, but people not showing up is one of the kind of bugbears of my life.

You see it sometimes when you're in a restaurant where a man, I mean it's a man, isn't it? Well, no, that's very in fact. A man or a woman, they're in the restaurant and they're on their own, and they're obviously waiting for someone.

And the waiter comes and says, do you want a drink? And they say, well, I'm waiting for someone, I'll let tap water. So they have one glass of tap water, and then another, and then another.

And then after about three quarters of an hour, or an hour of them frantically texting on their phone, they slope off, don't they leave the restaurant. There'll be no standing God up.

There'll be no truants. There'll be no absentees on this day. Notice the inevitability and the inescapability of the judgment. Notice the universality of it.

[ 8 : 31 ] Look at verse 2. I will gather all the nations. Saudi Arabia will do that. Iraq will be there. Just as the message of chapter 2 and verse 32 is for all, so the judgment is for all as well, outside of Christ.

All gather before God. That is, every non-Christian you know will be there on that day. He will front up. He will front up. And you may know, you probably do, that Jesus picks up the language of Joel chapter 3, and many commentators think that in Matthew 25, when Jesus picks up the language, he's using specifically this language of Joel 3.

So, keep a finger in Joel 3, and turn to Matthew chapter 25. Matthew 25. Matthew 25, verse 31.

It's on page 831. Matthew 25, verse 31. When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne, and before him will be gathered all the nations, Joel

3.

And he will separate people one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. That's the same language of Joel chapter 3, verse 2.

[ 9 : 53 ] All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the sheep from the goats. Jesus returns. That is the day of the Lord, the Son of Man, and all the nations will be gathered before him, and he will judge.

Now, let me ask you, do you really believe that? Or whether we think this judgment is just for the really bad, isn't it? That is to fall into relativism.

Isn't it? It is all those who are outside of Christ who will be there. We are all relativists, for some degree. I was an expert in school at failing maths.

When I was in school, occasionally in high school, I failed by huge amounts my maths exam. But at other times, I only just failed. So proud of myself. My father would remind me, it doesn't matter though, does it?

You failed. We relativize. We relativize the gospel.

[ 10 : 57 ] Do you believe in the universality of judgment? All the nations will be there. Don't relativize it. Just as the offer is for everyone, so is the judgment for everyone, if we are outside of Christ.

Notice what the judgment is for, in Joel chapter 3. In verse 2, notice, there is a because in the middle of verse 2, isn't there? Why is there going to be this great judgment?

Well, it is absolutely fascinating, isn't it? Because of how they have treated God's people. Doesn't that really strike you as strange? Wouldn't you think that the judgment will be on the basis of how people have treated God?

That's not what it says. Here it is on the basis of how they have treated his people. The people of God. Now, actually, as I've thought about that, that shouldn't surprise us at all, should it? Because God is so identified with his people.

In the Old Testament, Israel and Judah, and in the New Testament, the church. It's very clear that to persecute God's people is to persecute God himself. And so Jesus' commentary on this passage in Matthew 25 is, the goats are separated away from the sheep to everlasting darkness.

[ 12 : 09 ] Now, why is that? Well, because of the way they treat God's people. Isn't it? In Matthew 25. For as much as you didn't clothe, or feed, or care, so and to these brothers, to the least of these brothers of mine, there's no doubt in Matthew 25, the brothers of mine in Matthew 25 are their disciples.

They are not the world. It's how you've treated God's people. And the most striking example is, do you remember Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus? Jesus takes hold of him and says what? He says, Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? I thought Paul was persecuting the church. What that teaches us is this, to persecute the church is to persecute Jesus.

Why is that? Well, because we are united with Christ, aren't we? What is the church? The church is the body of Christ. And so to persecute the church, to ignore the church, is to persecute and to ignore Christ.

How do you think people show their rebellion against God? How do you think people show their rebellion against God? Well, they don't love his people. The corollary is true as well, as in the opposite is true.

[ 13 : 30 ] If you love God, you will love his people. And you can't claim that you love God and not love his people, according to John. But rebellion against God is always seen in a failure to treat God's people as they should.

So ask our brothers and sisters in northern Pakistan or in so many other places in the world. And they will tell you that the way people are reacting to the living God is demonstrated in the way that they treat God's people.

So when you ask your colleague at work, and you've invited them eight times to church, they just laugh after the point.

And the way that they treat you is the way that they treat the living God. Or the young man who's asked countless other moms, do you fancy coming to this Bible study that we have?

Or do you fancy coming to the carol service? And the way they react to you when they say no is in fact a response to the living God. And so they are not just saying no to you.

[ 14 : 40 ] They are saying no to God. In other words, to reject God's word. To reject God's people is to reject the living God himself.

Now in verse 4 to 8, we get a specific illustration of this. It's a kind of judgment case study. Look at verse 4. What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the regions and the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you're paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily. God is saying, as you treated my people so, so you're paying me back somehow.

And what reason have you got to do it? The answer is implicit. They've got no reason. But how do they do it? Verse 5. For you have taken my silver and my gold and I've carried my rich treasures into your temples.

You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. These nations have given God's people, Judah and Jerusalem, a hard time.

[ 15 : 42 ] They fought against God by fighting against God's people. And what will the living God do? Verses 7 and 8. For behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you've sold them and I will return your payment on your own head.

And I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah and they will sell them to the Sabaeans through an ancient faraway for the Lord has spoken. That is covenantal, covenantal judgment language.

What is saying is this, what you have done will be done to you. What you've done will be done to you. In other words, the judgment will be fair. It will be proportional.

And when God brings judgment on those who have mistreated his people, he doesn't bring it in an arbitrary way. In verse 9-16, that follows, doesn't it, how awful this day will be for the nations.

Separatist 9, proclaim this among the nations, consecrate for war, stir up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw, let them come up. And they're all together, all the things they can use as weapons.

[ 16 : 43 ] You'll know that when God is speaking of that peace that he is going to bring to his people, he often talks about swords being turned into plowshares.

But you notice in verse 10 it's the other way round. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am a warrior.

Hasten and call all you surrounding nations, gather yourselves there, bring down your warriors, O Lord, let the nations stir themselves up, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

They come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, they come to the valley of decision, and there they will meet with the Lord God Almighty. And he will sit in judgment on them, and judge them, he will. Look at verse 14.

Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. Decision is going to be made at the end of verse 15. The sun and moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

[ 17 : 50 ] What do we know? That darkness is always a symbol of it in the Bible. It's a symbol of God's judgment. The plagues, the crops, it's a symbol of God's judgment. And then verse 15, the lion roars from Zion. Can you imagine the Lord roaring?

We were in Belfast Zoo last year, and pretty awful place, really. But the lion roared.

Ali found it relatively amusing. Claire and Noah ran out of the hell. It's an incredible thing to hear a lion roar. Imagine the Lord roaring.

Verse 16, and he uttered his voice from Jerusalem and all the heavens and the earth quake. It's the language of a massive military defeat. Maybe it did happen at some point for the people of Tyre and Sidon and Philistia. But what it's doing is foreshadowing what the Lord Jesus will do when he enters into judgment against all the nations.

Our nation. The New Testament uses different kind of language, doesn't it? It uses language of weeping and pain and outer darkness and gnashing of teeth and separation from God and fire.

[ 18 : 58 ] It is awful, isn't it? Nobody takes pleasure in it. It's almost too awful to get our brains around. Why does God now, well he issues this invitation, doesn't he?

Chapter 2 and verse 32. He says in his grace and his mercy, chapter 2 and verse 32. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Shall be saved. Why does God want people to be saved? He says, for the day of the Lord is near. And it is at hand. We were at someone's house last Saturday and for a barbecue and they had a swimming pool in their garden.

Noah was playing by the side of the swimming pool. He was told by his mother to move away and guess what happened. Noah falls into the swimming pool. At the deep end, I race gallantly over, jump in fully clothed and grab him.

Well, I was pretty relieved and so was he. But I read an account this week of somebody who had fallen into the deep end of a swimming pool in Pontedoway in South Wales, near where I'm from.

[ 20 : 09 ] They were eight years old. Somebody pushed them in. And this person, 45 years on, said she remembered the absolute terror of realising she was drowning. A bronze lifeguard, didn't know they existed in South Wales, saw the girl, dived in and rescued her.

She wrote, 45 years on, there is no greater experience than being rescued from drowning, than being pulled out of the water and being rescued.

There is no greater experience than being rescued from drowning. I want to disagree from this passage. I want to say there is no greater experience than being rescued from judgment.

There will be nothing better. Because there's been nothing more awful than being left to face it. Do you remember Thunderbirds?

They rolled them when I was on. It's kind of funny little puppets. It's good. Watch it on YouTube.

And there was Thunderbirds and the international rescue. Well, here is an international rescue, isn't it?

[ 21 : 19 ] This judgment is going to be international, but alongside the rescue will be international. And we must see the salvation for God's people. Because rescue, salvation, it is from something, but it's also for something.

It's very important. It is from something. We saw that in Adam's sermons in Exodus, didn't we? It is from slavery in Egypt, but it is to slavery to God. It is from something, but it is for something.

And you see in verse 16, there is a glorious but, isn't there? But the Lord. But is a contrast word, it's a contrast to the judgment, it's a hinge on which the chapter turns.

But the Lord is a refuge to his people, stronghold to the people of Israel. Isn't that terrific? That if you have trusted, if you have called on the name of the Lord and you have been saved, it is terrific to know that in all the insecurities of this world, in all the turbulence of life, in all the uncertainty of life in London, isn't it good to know that there is a place which is a refuge?

It is the idea of utter security and this place of refuge, can you see it at the end of verse 16, is a person. It is a person. It is the Lord.

[ 22 : 39 ] The Lord himself is the refuge. And if you've turned to the Lord, he is your refuge. And you're hiding in him.

And then verse 17, so you shall know. So you shall know, you can be sure of the future. You will know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.

And Jerusalem shall be holy and strangers will never again pass through it. Now in verses 17 to 21, what you see here is the restoration of things, of how things were in the Garden of Eden.

Do you remember how things were in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1 and 2? Adam and Eve, they lived in a perfect place, with perfect relationships, as God's people. And God dwelt amongst them. So much that we're told that in the Garden of the Cool of the Day, the Lord walked through the Garden. And of course, all of that is lost, as in Genesis chapter 3, in judgment comes.

[ 23 : 43 ] But here is a promise that it will be restored. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy hill, my holy mountain. And here is Joel using Old Testament language that is going to be picked up in Revelation 21.

When the new Jerusalem will come out of heaven, and God will dwell amongst his people. You see it in Revelation chapter 20, verse 3.

God will dwell amongst his people. Now, God dwells amongst us tonight, doesn't he? We mustn't forget that. God dwells amongst us tonight by his Spirit. But one day is coming when he will dwell amongst us, and we will see him face to face.

That's good, isn't it? The blessing of having God amongst us. The blessing of being in a secure and wonderful place, just like the Garden of Eden. So look at the end of verse 17.

And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers will never again pass through it. And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine.

[ 24 : 50 ] I don't know whether you like sweet wine. What's that pink stuff? That's sweet wine. I don't particularly like it. I like red wine. Now it's picture language.

Don't get caught up on whether you like sweet wine or what kind of wine you like. It's a picture of fulfillment, alright? Wine is always a picture of joy and fullness. That's why we drink wine and communion, not grape juice, alright?

It's a picture of fullness. Dripping with wine is all the time in the language of a land that is plentiful. Hills will flow with milk, run the ravines of Judah, the stream beds, shall flow with water.

And a fountain will come up and it'll water the valley of Shittin. It's a picture language of the promised land. Of God abundantly providing. It does not sound good. And only God's people will be there.

We will be secure. The end of verse 17. And strangers will never again pass through it. Don't misunderstand that. There will be people from every tribe and tongue and nation.

[ 25 : 51 ] Language will be there. The whole of the world, people from all parts of the world will be there. But we won't be invaded from anyone outside this place anymore. Because they will be dealt with.

And verse 19, Egypt will become a desolation, an Edom, a desolate wilderness. Two places in the Old Testament again and again stand as the enemies of God's people. Well, they'll be done away with.

And notice why they'll be done away with. Verse 19. For the violence thunder of the people of Judah because they have shed innocent blood in the land. But Judah shall be inhabited forever and Jerusalem to all generations for all eternity.

Here is a place where Judah will be inhabited forever. And verse 21, the footnote is the right translation. Can you see that? There's a little writing at the bottom of the page. Their blood guilt. I will avenge their blood guilt.

which I have not pardoned. In other words, the basis on which people will be there is entirely because God will have dealt with sin.

[ 26 : 57 ] And our blood guilt will be pardoned. In other words, we are there. You and I will be there not because of anything we've done. It won't because you're a good person.

It won't because you're a better person than the other people. It's not that on the scale of goodness, you're okay. It's not that. It's not because we deserve it. It's not because we've earned it. It's not because we merit it.

But because God has in the death of the Son of the Lord Jesus Christ dealt with our sin and guilt.

So we who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ can be there. And so as we leave three weeks in the book of Joel, what I want to say to you is go away with Joel 1 verse 2 ringing in your ears.

Hear this. Hear this. You elders. Give you all inhabitants of the land.

Such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers. Tell your children about it. And let your children tell their children and their children to another generation. Don't forget this.

[ 28 : 03 ] God's past judgment is a shadow of his future judgment. And in between those two things he calls us to ongoing repentance.

And he grants us his spirit so that we will call others to that repentance. So that they also might call on the name of the Lord and be spared this terrifying judgment and enter into this glorious new creation.

Remember. And tell it to your children. And tell it to your children's children. And tell it to your children's children's children. And in fact tell it to the world. Because this is the message that God has given us for this time and for the rest of time.

That judgment is coming. But all who came on Paul on the name of the Lord will be saved. And they will be saved for eternity. Let's pray. Let's pray.

Thank you.