

If you have a Bible, why don't you go ahead and open it up to the book of Joel. It is found right after Daniel and Hosea. Joel is one of the minor prophets. We call them minor because they are smaller books than Isaiah and Ezekiel. But they have also had a minor place in the White American church. We do not typically read and study the minor prophets. And part of that reason is because they are hard to understand and feel so removed from us.

One thing that might help us to rightly approach the prophets is to remember their role. They did not just speak for God and tell the future. They served much like God's referees. They came to speak whenever Israel had been breaking God's commands and they had to proclaim the penalty. Joel is no different in this respect.

The primary theme of Joel and is this idea of the Day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is a moment and time when God moves decisively and supernaturally in the world. And we will see in this book that it is not just a single day. It is a devastating day to come, it is also a day of deliverance and salvation in the future. It is the day of Pentecost when the Spirit is poured down. It is the eschatological end times day. And in our passage this morning it is a day of judgment that has already come.

This morning we will look at Joel chapter 1. And we will see how we are to respond to the judgment of God. Not how are we to prepare for one in the future. But after God has shown up. After His wrath and devastation has come, what is Israel to do? How should they respond? And how we should respond when this day comes to us?

Stand as you are able for the reading of God's Word in Joel 1.

I. The right response to judgment is proclamation (v. 1-4)

Before we get too far we need to talk about the setting of this book. This is especially helpful for the minor prophets. Because most Christians haven't heard sermons on the minor prophets. We don't spend a lot of our time studying them. If we are honest, many of us may have never read the book before. It can feel like getting dropped in the middle of a labyrinth with no way out.

All we know about the book is in verse 1, **"The word of the Lord came to Joel, the son of Pethuel."**

That really is it.

We know that Joel is a prophet of God.

We don't know anything about his profession before God came to him.

Remember I said the day of the Lord will have many meanings throughout the book.

So even the timing and date of the book is ambiguous.

This book could have been written pre-exile before Israel has been removed from the land and is a warning of what is to come.

It could be in the middle of exile when there are only a few left and the land has already been devastated.

It could be after exile when there are only a few people left in the land.

And it is ambiguous because it does not seem to refer to a particular judgment.

There are not any kings mentioned at all.

Whether Israelite or the kings other nations.

It does appear like the temple is rebuilt because it refers to sacrifices.

And Joel does not mention any specific sins Israel is committing.

That might sound unhelpful.

But I think this is all intentional.

We are not meant to know exactly when this book takes place.

Because we do not need to know when it took place.

Because this book is applicable to all of Israel's history.

And it is applicable to us.

The timelessness of Joel can actually help us to understand it better.

Let's look closer at what is happening.

Verse 2, **"hear this; you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?"**

Joel is asking everyone to pay attention.

Starting with the elders and leaders in the nation.

Down to every single person who has lived there.
He asks them to think if something so devastating has ever happened?
If they have ever faced judgment and punishment like this before?

After all, Israel has been judged plenty of times for their sinfulness.
They have been attacked and invaded by enemies countless times.
The book of Judges alone counts numerous times they are invaded.
They have even faced bad harvests and famines over and over.
But there is something different about this one.
This judgment appears to be especially hard on Israel.
It is certainly the worst judgment to come in their day.
And it is worse than anything that happened in the last generations.
It is worse than anyone can remember.

Let's actually skip ahead to verse 4 to see what the judgment was.
Verse 4, **"What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what
the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten."**

Israel faced an unimaginable swarm of locusts.
And we get it in poetic and long detail.
They were repeatedly battered by locust swarms.
One wave after another.

The point of these is that the wrath and judgment of God is inescapable.
Some think they may have survived one, but the next state comes.
Six different swarms keep coming.
Each one is worse than the last.
Until nothing is left at all.

This is significant because locust swarms were not terribly uncommon for Israel.
They would often have a burst of locusts come and eat crops.
But typically they would come and go quickly.
They would not last long.

But this one will.

And once they think they are safe from the cutting locusts, swarming ones eat.

Then whatever is left is eating by the hopping locusts.

Until it is all gone.

It reminds me of Amos 5:19, **"It will be as though a man fled from a lion only to meet a bear, as those he entered his house and rested his hadn't on the wall only to have a snake bite him."**

A guy escapes a lion to run into a bear, barely gets home then gets bit by a snake.

That is what happens to Israel.

Except it is just locusts one after another.

There is also the idea that they are now facing the plagues that hit Egypt.

What God once did to their enemies, He now does to their own people.

The reality is that this is a supernatural judgment.

This is not a natural phenomenon.

This is not bad luck.

This is the judgment of God.

And they need to remember this.

They need to acknowledge and remember what this is.

Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 describe the curses and consequences of disobedience.

One of those consequences are locusts.

They should have been familiar with the book and recognize what this meant.

God is judging them for their sin.

This is not climate change or natural phenomenon.

This is God.

And how should they respond to this judgment?

Verse 3, **"Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation."**

Why should they tell their children?

For the same reason they were commanded to tell their children of the miracles of God's deliverance.

They need to know and understand what God does.

There is judgment.

God is merciful.

He shows the grace and does not always destroy them.

But He will punish sin.

And this time He did devastatingly so.

There are some who are just known as fire and brimstone preachers.

All they do is preach hell and judgment.

Rob told us about some of them last week.

We don't want to be that.

But we are not meant to ignore God's judgment either.

We are to proclaim it.

We are to teach our children about it.

We are to remind ourselves and others that we do serve a God who judges.

What does all this have to do with us?

We should respond to the judgment of God by proclaiming it.

I don't think this means we need to rush and explain every calamity as God's judgment.

We saw pastors do this with 9/11.

I see plenty of pastors do this after elections don't go the way they like.

Don't do that.

We do not want to guess or proclaim that each horrible event is the judgment of God, because we don't know that for sure.

We are not prophets.

And you don't need to try and guess if Revelation is being fulfilled now.

But we also do not want to go so far to say it is definitively not God's judgment.

Because it could be.
Covid may have been the judgment of God on the world.
Or it was just a result of sin.
We don't know.
We shouldn't presume.

But we have plenty of examples of the judgment of God we can point to.
And we should be warning and telling people that it is coming.
Especially the church of God.
Because this warning is not directed towards the pagans.
It is not directed towards other nations.
It is directed to the children of Israel.

And so we need to tell ourselves.
1 Peter told us that judgment begins in the house of God.
And the judgment of God looks fierce.

It is not about warning the unbelievers.
It is about warning and reminding ourselves.
Most of us believe our country is filled with rampant sin.
Sexual sin, racism, hatred, divisiveness, you name it.
The church is responsible for part of this.
Do we think God will only judge the nation and not His people?
We need to remind ourselves.
Sometimes God fiercely judges His people.
And we deserve it.

So we need to tell each other.
This is not about standing out on the street with signs.
Don't let me see you on the highway with a sign that says the Day of the Lord is coming and you tell me you were just trying to apply this passage.
I think you have missed it.
We as the people of God need to remember His judgment.
Because this judgment in Joel 1 is not on the world.

It is on the nation of Israel.

It is on God's people.

We need to remember that God has and will judge His people.

So proclaim this judgment.

Do not forget or ignore it.

Judgment is not just what God will do to sinners when Jesus returns.

God will judge us.

And the day of the Lord can be a terrible day.

You might notice too it does not say what has earned this judgment.

Joel does not specify their idolatry or sin.

I again this is intentional.

Because this is true for us no matter what our sins are.

Whether it is the greed of the church in the Middle Ages.

Whether it is the hypocrisy of the American church in the 50's.

Whether it is the political obsession of the church in our day or the embracement of the sexual values of the world.

We are deserving of judgment.

And so we should be careful.

And the proclaiming of God's judgment should make us want to live differently.

II. We should respond to judgment with lament (v. 8-12).

Lament is a Christian practice we are generally unfamiliar with.

Because lamenting is not complaining.

Lamenting is not just weeping about things.

There is a significant different between complaining and lamenting.

Christians are not to complain.

But we are to lament.

Complaining is accusing God of doing something wrong.

Lamenting is wishing God would have done something different.

Lament acknowledges that God was right.

Complaining says God was wrong.
Complaining is an accusation that God is not in control and not good.
Lament is an act of hope and faith.

Lament is an act of faith.
Lament is sorrow directed towards the Savior.
And the way we should respond to suffering and judgment is lament.
We don't just complain.
We do not just whine.
We don't just shrug and say "that's life."
We lament and weep towards God.

Verse 5, **"awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth."**

The first people who are called to lament is the drunks and drinkers.
That sounds a little strange and might not be who you would first think of.
Because Joel tells them that all the wine has run out.
There is no more alcohol in the land.
Nothing more to satisfy them.

Remember though, this is poetic language.
I don't think this is only speaking towards the drunks and sinners.
Because in the prophets, wine is often symbolic of wealth and plenty.
Wine is the enjoyment and beauty of a land.
But Israel will not have any more wine.

Verse 6, **"For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness."**

The reason is because they will have been attacked.
This seems to not be an attack of locusts.
This is another nation.
People who could not be counted.
They have the teeth of fierce lions.

God once promised Abraham his descendants would be beyond count.
Now it is their enemies who are beyond count.
They are being cursed because of their sin.

Verse 7, **"it has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white."**

We get a dramatic expression of how they have destroyed vineyards.
The fig trees are stripped and destroyed.
They pull off all the bark so it will die slowly.
There is absolutely nothing left and no hope.

Verse 8, **"Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth."**

This would be the lamenting of a young bride.
An engaged woman who never got married because her fiancé was killed.
That is the image Joel paints.
That is the despair and lament they are to have.
What should have been a day of joy is only a day of suffering and pain.

Verse 9, **"the grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD."**

They don't have enough grain or wine to make the required daily offerings.
This is a theological disaster and crisis.
This is evidence that God has rejected and judged them.
He will not even give them the opportunity to make sacrifices.
He is so sick of their improper and half hearted ones that He takes everything away.
They are supposed to make these offerings every day, but now they can't.
All the priests and ministers can do is lament and weep.

Verse 10, **"The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes."**

He describes the land again.

All of the fields are wiped out and ruined.

The ground itself is mourning and weeping.

The rocks are crying out not to glorify God, but to lament because of the destruction.

All of the grain and harvest is ruined.

The wine has gone away.

The oil used to bring light is gone.

Literal darkness is coming to the land.

Verse 11, **"Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished."**

The harvest is their hope.

It is the pay day.

It is what they work for all year long.

The hope is the harvest is enough to provide for the year to come.

It seems like they had a good harvest.

But it has now all perished and disappeared.

This is devastating news.

They are watching the paychecks and their provisions disappear.

Verse 12, **"The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man."**

It is not just the fruit trees going away.

It is the fact that their happiness has gone.

My children devour fruit.

They eat so much fruit it blows my mind.

They get sad when we don't have as much fruit as they are used to.

They would really hate being in Israel right now.

Because there is no fruit anywhere.
All of the fruit trees have dried up.
There is no backup plan for food.

This is how they should respond to all of this lack.
This is how they should respond to the judgment.
They should respond with lamenting.

Verse 13, **"Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar."**

They are to take off their priestly robes.
They are to take off all the garments they usually wear.
The garments with bright colors and many stones.
All the things that are filled with dignity and mark them so that down the street people can see that is the priest.
They are to take all of that off and to just wear black and sackcloth.
To put on the clothes of lament.

"Go in, pass the right in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because the grain and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God."

I grew up going to church in Nebraska.
And in Nebraska they are serious about the Huskers, the main college team.
So serious that on Sunday's if the Husker's lost, a group of men would come to worship wearing black.
That is basically what Joel says here.
They are to come lead worship wearing black.
Not because of a football game, but because of the national mourning.

They do not have enough to make offerings.
But they should come and gather.
And instead of offerings, they can mourn and lament.

Verse 14, **"Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD."**

They should come together for a solemn assembly.

Not one filled with awesome moving worship music.

Not one with an encouraging sermon that everyone needs right now to lift them up.

No this needs to be sober and serious.

And they are to come hungry.

The whole people and nation needs too fast together.

They are already starving, but now they need to withhold food from themselves for a spiritual purpose.

Because more than food, their nation needs God.

They need salvation and redemption.

Ultimately, this is what lament is.

Lamenting is sorrowful prayer.

It is sorrow facing God.

The way we should always respond is lament.

Weep, wail, cry, but do all of that towards God.

We should do this not just by ourselves, but as a community.

All of us should lament.

III. [Repent] The right response to judgment is repentance (v. 13-20).

This is what we see the prophet himself do.

Because true lament and repentance always go together.

And there appears to be a shift in verse 15.

No longer is he just declaring what other people need to do.

He starts to talk about himself.

Especially in verse 19.

Verse 15, **"Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes."**

Notice something this tells us about the day of the LORD.

We have just heard about the fierce judgment of the day of the LORD.

Yet it seems like another is coming close.

It is a warning that this judgment is just foreshadowing one to come.

Verse 16, **"Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?"**

The land is experiencing famine.

They do not have enough food.

It has been cut off from them.

He also sees that the house of God is not a happy place.

There is no joy in worship.

There is no gladness when people come to worship.

It is a somber and dead place.

It is like the ruined and closed churches you might pass by in a ghost town.

Verse 17, **"The seed shrivels under the clods, the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up."**

He keeps going on about the destruction.

The ground itself is not just desolate.

The seeds themselves are shriveling.

The storehouses and granaries are wasting away.

The places where people would store grain are just being torn down.

Because they are so unnecessary.

Verse 18, **"How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer."**

The beasts are confused.

They don't have a lot of theological acumen.

The beasts do not understand why God is doing this.

But they are also feeling the weight.

They are groaning and lamenting.
The herd itself is confused.
They are running around and cannot find a pasture to feed at.
Even the animals of the land are suffering.

Verse 19, **"To you, O LORD, I call."**

This here is the key for the last part.
The prophet Joel is calling out for the Lord.
He is not waiting to see how the people will respond.
He is not waiting to see if the priests will do the right thing.
He will call out to the Lord for deliverance now.
He will repent.

And we see this often with the prophets.
They are the only ones to respond to God.
Isaiah was the only one who listened to the voice of God.
Jeremiah was trapped in a pit when God's judgment came.
Daniel repented on behalf of his nation even though he was righteous.
So Joel calls on the Lord.

"For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field."

He calls because of the judgment.
Because of the fire of God that has fallen on the people.
The fire is a little ambiguous.
There could have also been a literal fire that came through Israel.
He could be using a metaphor to describe the locusts.
or this could just be another way to refer to God's judgment.
I don't think it matters.
Because all of them are describing God's judgment.

Verse 20, **"Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness."**

He returns to the beasts again.
How all of the water has disappeared.
Fire has consumed it.
There is not place to eat and no place to drink.
All they can do is turn to God.

The way to respond to this day though, ultimately is repentance and turning to God.

"the day of the Lord is near"

It is near.
We will all face the judgment of God sometime.
Whether it is an a day like the one Joel faced.
Or it will be the day when we come to stand before the throne of God.
And the only way to escape judgment.
The only way to be free is through repentance in Christ.

We have to turn away from our sins.
We have to turn aside from the paths we walk down.
And we need to turn ourselves to Jesus.
We need to ask Him for salvation.
We need to cling to Him for eternal life.
Because Jesus endured the complete judgment of God on the cross for our sakes.
Everything we should have had to face, He took for us.
So repent of your sins knowing that no punishment awaits you.
If you come to Jesus Christ in faith.

CONCLUSION:

1. How should we respond to God's judgment? By proclaiming it, lamenting it, and repenting from our sins.
2. All of us need to do at least one of these if not all of them. Because the Day of the Lord is near. Turn to Christ that you may escape.