

The Day of the Lord: Sure Salvation and Dreadful Judgment

Scripture Text: Acts 2:12-21

October 1, 2023 – 6:00 p.m. Evening Service

Faith Presbyterian Church, Tacoma, WA

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The Reading of God's Word

Acts 2:12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”
13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

Acts 2:14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them:
“Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.
15 For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.
16 But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17 “And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams;
18 even on my male servants and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.
19 And I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;
20 the sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.
21 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

This is the Word of the Lord. *Thanks be to God.*

Introduction

I enjoy movies and I enjoy a good book, but there is nothing better than a good story that is unpredictable and also true. And that is what we have here.

Our story begins with “...a mighty rushing wind...[that] filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them...each one was hearing them speak in his own language....” [Acts 2:1-13]

Everyone wanted to know what in the world was going on! Completely in shock, they said to one another, “What does this mean?” In other words, “What is going on? What is happening?!”

The Apostle Peter, standing with the eleven disciples, lifted up voice and took the opportunity to answer the question that everyone was asking: “What does this mean?”

Some mockingly had said that the work of the Holy Spirit in them was simply drunkenness.

Peter is not at all interested in entertaining the mocker’s blasphemous comment. It is as if he dismisses their comment with a flick of the wrist: “these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.” It was only 9:00am!

No, Peter knows they aren’t drunk. Something supernatural is happening, something terrifying and at the same time incredible. Peter is about to open the eyes of the over 3,000 people. He is about to give them the key to understanding what was going on.

The Prophecy of Joel

He says, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words....this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel....” [vv. 14-16]

By saying “*this*,” Peter was referring to everything they had just been witnessing. All that they were seeing had an explanation.

“This,” the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the mighty rushing wind from heaven, the tongues of fire resting on each of them, speaking as the Spirit gave them utterance. All of this was the fulfillment of a prophecy uttered long ago. From the prophet Joel.

So, what is Peter talking about? The book of Joel is probably not your “go-to” book that you turn to as you open your Bibles for daily devotions. So, let me take you down what might seem like a rabbit-trail, in order to give you some context for what transpired in the book of Joel. The backstory to his prophecy. For the better we understand Joel, the better we will understand why Peter quotes his prophecy.

To begin, the prophet Joel centers much of his message around the idea of “Day of the Lord.”

And interestingly, his prophecy opens with a disaster. It is a disaster of an invasion of locusts. Picture enormous swarms of locusts destroying the land – all the crops, vegetation, all the grass. And with that destruction, all their livelihood and food.

Now, probably none of us have ever experienced or even said the words “invasion of locusts.” It is such a foreign idea to us that we probably don’t even get a sense of what is being described here. So let me try to give you a mental image of what we are talking about here with an event that occurred just a few years ago.

In January of 2020, there was in Kenya what reporters described as “a crisis within a crisis.” First, of course, there was COVID. Then within that crisis, Kenya experienced the worst outbreak of locust swarms it had faced in 70 years, absolutely destroying their crops.

At first, the villagers in those cities thought the dark, dense blots in the sky were harmless clouds. “Then came the terrifying realization that the locusts had arrived.” One man commented that there were so many locusts it was like someone had put a huge umbrella over their heads.¹

It was so dark that the sun was blocked out – as if by an umbrella.

A few months later, India faced their own swarms of locusts, their newspapers described the crisis as Swarmageddon. They faced 20 locust swarms that were 10 times the average size. If you don’t know what the average size of a swarm can be or what kind of damage they can do, let me explain.

Apparently, locusts can travel over 80 miles a day. “Their swarms, which can contain as many as 80 million locust adults...eat the same amount of food daily as about 35,000 people.”²

Based on this data, we are talking about over one billion, six hundred million locusts in India destroying the lands and turning crops, trees, and grass into a desert wasteland.

As I went further and further down the path of the swarms of locusts, I watched videos of these things just flying everywhere. I mean these things were huge – they looked larger than dragon flies and they were just crashing into the people and the livestock. The men and women tried without success to keep the locust from settling on their crops, but they couldn’t even clear an area the size of a small bedroom.

Can you imagine seeing so many millions of locusts flying in the sky that the sun turned to darkness? Can you imagine the terrifying sound? That is how the people in Kenya and India described this dreadful crisis, and that is how Joel’s prophecy begins.

So, not great. Pretty dreadful.

The Day of the Lord

So why does the book of Joel begin with the invasion of devastating locusts?

Well, the plague in Joel’s prophecy was meant to be understood as a call for national repentance and prayer for the Day of the Lord was approaching.

One commentator writes,

“The plague was ... likened to – or perhaps implicitly identified as – an army with Yahweh at their head, accompanied by cosmic signs and the summons to repentance.” See, what we read of in Joel is an extended metaphor. A “metaphor that is highlighting God’s impending future judgments on Israel and the nations.” [Fee, 217-218]

Another notes that the prophets had spoken of that final day “in terms of inescapable darkness and intolerable suffering.” We see this in the images of verse 20 – the sun being turned to darkness, and the moon to blood.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/02/21/world/africa/locusts-kenya-east-africa.html>

² Ibid.

The final day, the day of the Lord, was a dreadful day. A day to be feared. A day of Yahweh descending in judgment. A day of agony and suffering.

The Scriptures make it abundantly clear that God holds all people to his standard of holiness. He judges not only the nations, but the people of Israel and Peter specifically reminds us that judgment begins in the household of God. [1 Peter 4:17]

And it is no wonder that for that reason are commentator said this:

“The clouds of locusts that obscured the sun and devoured the food supply were the heralds of that Day. Yahweh marched with them, the death of his incorrigible people on his mind.”
[Hubbard, 21]

Of course, other prophets also prophesied of the terrifying and dreadful day of the Lord. Listen to just these four – though there are plenty more:

The Day of the Lord According to the Prophets

- Is. 13:9 Behold, the day of the LORD comes,
cruel, with wrath and fierce anger,
to make the land a desolation
and to destroy its sinners from it.
- Jer. 46:10 That day is the day of the Lord GOD of hosts,
a day of vengeance,
to avenge himself on his foes.
The sword shall devour and be sated
and drink its fill of their blood.
- Obad. 15 For the day of the LORD is near upon all the nations.
As you have done, it shall be done to you;
your deeds shall return on your own head.
- Mal. 4:5 “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet
before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes.

Joel’s picture points to God’s judgment - his severe, overwhelming, and complete judgment. By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Joel and the prophets provided a snapshot of that approaching and terrifying day.

Ok, so that was the context for Peter’s quote from Joel. All the Jews would have known about the prophecy of Joel. They would have known what the Day of the Lord was all about.

Talk about heavy!

It was heavy. It was meant to be. What the prophet Joel is showing, is that the terrifying and devastating destruction that was brought through the clouds of locusts is a foreshadowing and foretelling of the eternal destruction of all God's enemies. Absolute devastation and death. Inescapable and intolerable suffering.

Peter Interpreting Joel

So now that we have a better picture of what Joel was talking about, let's go back to our text in Acts.

The scene opens with Peter and the disciples in front of over 3,000 people who are wondering what in the world is going on.

And Peter answers their curiosity by preaching that Joel's prophecy about the Day of the Lord, *was closing in*.

We just went over the fact that the Day of the Lord is that final day of judgment. But there are phrases that aren't part of our every-day language that should be explained before we go any further:

1. ***"The last days"*** – the last days are the final days that come before the Day of the Lord
2. ***"The Day of the Lord"*** – the Day of the Lord is the final day – Judgment Day. (2nd coming.)

In the same way that John the Baptist had to come before Jesus, So, the last days must come before the final "Day of the Lord."

And Peter opens his sermon saying, listen to me. The last days have just begun. Which means that judgment day is right behind it.

Peter isn't performing a party trick to impress the crowds. He isn't showing off his interpretive skills. He is demonstrating that they and *we* are living in the last days.

All New Testament authors agree. Jesus inaugurated the last days and the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit. These last days stretch between the two comings of Christ. [Stott, 55]

Commentators note that Peter deliberately changes the idea of this prophecy from being something *future*, to showing that the coming of the Day of the Lord was *now approaching*.

I encourage you to see it for yourselves in the passage. Look at what Peter does. He modifies the prophecy ever so slightly.

Look down at your text or listen for the difference:

First, Joel 2:28 “‘And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh....”

Then, Peter modifies it to say in our passage:

Acts 2:17 “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh....”

As the original audience listened to his words, I imagine that they could have heard a pin drop. Maybe even some gasps as they came to the realization that what he was saying was true.

Because the people there were seeing the same thing Peter was seeing. They knew the prophecy, and they had all just witnessed the prophecy come true before their very eyes with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit in abundance on people.

There was Jesus’ supernatural birth and miraculous activity. We read of Jesus’ miracles, his resurrection and ascension. Most clearly, we see it in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost and the miraculous events recorded in Acts. [Peterson, 143] And the Holy Spirit dwelling with his children, and we see people from every nation, every age, every demographic, speaking the good news of the gospel.

This was the moment that the prophecies of old said would signal the *beginning of the end*. The beginning of the last days.

Why All the Warnings?

So, what does this all mean? Have you ever thought about *why* Scripture includes these warnings of dreadful judgment? Why does God tell us that he is going to come and judge the earth?

When I was a kid back in the 80’s, there was a commercial on TV that showed a man holding an egg. He said, “Is there anyone out there who still isn’t clear about what doing drugs does? Okay last time.” He said, “this is your brain” (as he held up an egg) then he pointed to a hot frying pan and said, “this is drugs” and then he cracked the egg into the piping hot frying pan and said, “this is your brain on drugs....any questions?”³

To be honest, I did have a lot of questions. It was confusing to me as a kid, but as confusing as it was, I knew that drugs were dangerous, and the commercial honestly made me terrified of even thinking about drugs. Did it work? Well, I never did drugs, so I suppose it did.

What was the Partnership for a Drug Free America trying to do? It was spending tons of money putting out ads to warn people of the dangers of drugs by depicting the horror of what drugs could do to your brain. The idea behind it was that if people could imagine what could happen to their brain if they did drugs, then maybe they wouldn’t do drugs.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GOENVyIxPI> “Brain on Drugs”

And in an eternally more serious way, that is what is happening in Peter's message. That is what God is doing. God is revealing the dreadful consequences of sin. He is sending out warnings to the wicked that if they continue in their sin, they will face the horror of God's judgment.

See, God is being patient with them and giving them an opportunity to repent and change.

Jonah is a helpful case study in this regard. Think back with me.

Jonah went to Nineveh calling out, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" [Jonah 3:4-5] Now, Nineveh was known to be incredibly evil. It was known for its perverse violence. So why does God give them a warning?

God, in his patience, was offering Nineveh an opportunity to repent.

And that is exactly what happened, isn't it? In chapter three we see something interesting:

6 The word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he issued a proclamation and published through Nineveh, "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, 8 but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and let them call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knows? God may turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, so that we may not perish."

See, God sent Jonah to Nineveh so that Nineveh would repent from their wickedness. So that they would turn from evil and from violence.

That was the reason very reason God was sending prophets.

Jonah 3:10 When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

2 Peter 3:9 teaches us that the "The Lord is ...patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." [2 Peter 3:9]

In the same way, Peter's message isn't just to strike fear into the people. He is preaching the message of the prophet Joel. A message of repentance, that all who turn from their evil ways and call upon the Lord shall be saved.

In fact, not to get too much into the text that Pastor White will preach on next week, but if we take a quick glance at a few verses in the next section, we see that the result of Peter's message is the same as that of the people of Nineveh. Because of God's patience and kindness and because they heeded his message of judgment, the people repented and called upon the name of the Lord. Peter's message had its intended end.

Peter and Joel's Message Speaks to Us

In the same way, through the preaching of the word and the work of the Holy Spirit, God calls men and women everywhere to repentance. Not only the unbelieving, but the whole world. For judgment begins in the household of God. [1 Peter 4:17]

Through these two men, God is warning us - men and women everywhere that the Day of the Lord is coming soon. Any who continue to live in sin, and ignore the warnings placed forth in this book, will be judged accordingly.

The Westminster Confession of Faith reminds us that on the day of the Last Judgment, not only all apostate angels will be judged, but so will all people who have lived upon earth. They will appear before the judgment seat of Christ to give an "account of their thoughts, words, and deeds; and to receive according to what they have done in the body, whether good or evil." [Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 33.1]

The righteous will then go into everlasting life, and receive the fullness of joy and refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord;

But the wicked who reject God, and who do not obey the gospel of Jesus, will be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. [WCF 33.2]

And as dreadful as this is, this is a message that is full of mercy and grace, for it is a warning. In the same way that Jonah warned sinful Nineveh to repent, God is calling you today, to repent.

You who have been a Christian all your life. You who are living in sin. You who have rejected Christ. You must repent of your sin.

And with God's warning comes God's patience. For he wants to lead us to repentance. At the same time, Scripture warns us that we cannot "presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience" [Romans 2:4-5]

God warns us of this day of judgment because it is certain, it will be come to pass. And because it is meant to deter all men from sin. [WCF 33:3]

God's kindness is that he gives mankind repeated opportunities to turn from sin. He gave Israel and he gives his church today the opportunities to turn from sin.

Yet sadly enough, as Paul says, some, "because of your hard and impenitent heart ... are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." [Romans 2:4-5]

So how are we to respond? How do we not store up wrath?

Our Response

A newly released show depicts the life of a woman who after browsing her streaming service, finds a show that is all about her, but is available to the whole world. She suddenly realizes that every moment of her day, every glance, every text, every comment, and every action she thought was hidden, is now being replayed for the world to see on this popular streaming service. She had neglected to read the fine print and had signed away the rights to her life and that major streaming company had all the rights to use her life as a show.

Brothers and Sisters, this is not far from the truth. Scripture teaches that on the day of judgment we will give account for every careless word we have spoken, for by our words we will be justified, and by our words we will be condemned. Think of all the ways we excuse sin.

And if we think about it. These verses can feel paralyzing in some ways.

Who of us could possibly stand in a judgment like this? Who of us would not be totally humiliated to watch our lives being played back for the world to see?

How would you fare if just today or this week was replayed? The moments you mistreated a family member. A son, a daughter, a spouse, or a parent? How have you been impatient or angry today?

Think of the words you have said. The gossip, the exaggerations or lies. The judgment you expressed.

Picture on the big screen a 5-minute clip of the last time you yelled or fought with someone. Right here on a huge screen with surround sound, all the rest of us sitting here seeing you for who you really are. How all that you do revolves around your comforts, your desires, your goals.

What if we could see inside your head and we could all see the pride and self-centeredness. The evil thoughts that cross your mind. What if we could browse through your mind and all that you have done?

Brothers and Sisters, none of us. No one here would volunteer to have us watch their video. This is a terrifying thought.

The thought that we will be judged by our thoughts and words and actions?! We are in trouble. God is calling us to repentance. And we must repent from our sins!

But the key part of repentance isn't you doing it alone. Note what Joel says in his prophecy.

He doesn't say, and when you are done. When you have sufficiently repented, you will be saved. You will never get there.

Rather, he said, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

God is telling you that you cannot be righteous. Yes, you must seek righteousness. You must obey. You will be judged.

And yet, even still, God in his mercy says, “everyone who calls upon the Lord” will be saved.

At the end of the day, our sure salvation from dreadful judgment comes not from within us, but from Jesus Christ who has conquered death and sin. It is his righteousness.

You cannot do it alone. You are not enough. You need Jesus’ righteousness.

So, respond as Peter’s audience did. Cut to the heart, convicted of their sins, know that you are headed to dreadful judgment if you do not repent and believe. Call upon Jesus. Call upon Jehovah, then you will know your salvation is sure.

Gordon Fee in his notes on Joel writes that yes, there will be dreadful judgment for some. *But* “for those who call upon the name of the Lord, there is the promise of a sure and certain salvation. The promise of a new age of the Spirit and a glorious future for God’s people. Joel ends with a picture of God’s extraordinary blessings on his forgiven, purified people.” [Fee, 218]

Conclusion

As we conclude, I plead with you to hear the words of Peter and Joel, moved by the Holy Spirit to call you to repentance - for the last days are here. Turn from your sin.

The day of the Lord – the day of judgment is near. The dreadful day of the Lord is coming. And for many it will be dreadful, but for those who repent, for those who repent – calling upon the name of the Lord – they will be saved.

For all who call upon Jesus, will be saved and will receive the fullness of joy and refreshing that come from the presence of the Lord for life everlasting, Amen.

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