

God is Good

Joel 2:1-17

Intro

I'm sure that you have heard the following saying...

God is good — All the time — All the time — God is good...

As I have shared before, I believe that this truth — the truth that ***God is good*** — is the fundamental truth in all of reality...

This truth is the bedrock upon which we are to live our brief lives on this unstable planet...

Because it is not enough to simply acknowledge that God exists...

If we are to have a true relationship with the living God then we must ***know Him as He actually is...***

- *And if He is not good* then we cannot have a relationship that is ***based on love*** — we can only have a relationship that is ***based on fear...***

*Thankfully, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that **God is not only good** but that **He is perfectly good in every way...***

- And because God is good — He cannot tolerate evil — He cannot simply let it go...

[ex. When we want justice when evil is committed against us — we cry out for it...]

So, since **God is perfectly good** — and since **everything belongs to Him** — **all evil must be dealt with** — and it will be — in His perfect timing...

And this the subject that what we are confronted with as we continue our brief study of the book of Joel...

As we work our way through **Joel 2:1-17** this morning, we will see that the people of Judah are *in danger of further judgment from God because of the wickedness of their hearts...*

And God's goodness demands that their evil be dealt with...

- With that said, we will also see that God gives the people of Judah a way of escape...

If the people of Judah will repent then the judgment that was prophesied will be turned away and the people will be spared...

- [ex. Nineveh repenting during the days of Jonah...]

Now, as we consider the way of escape offered to sinners, we must remind ourselves that God doesn't just **let sin go...**

- Instead, God offers forgiveness as we repent and turn to Him because God has made **provision for our forgiveness at the cross...**

*And this sheds light on why **repentance is necessary...***

Repentance it is an acknowledgment of the reality of the situation — and acknowledgment that we are sinners who deserve God's righteous judgment...

And the judgment that we deserve is more than we can bear...

If we are to make it through then another must take the judgment for us — **and He has...**

- On the cross, the Lord Jesus fully satisfied the righteous wrath of God by taking the punishment that we deserved...

So, anyone who turns to the Lord Jesus in faith will receive the forgiveness of sins and new life in Him...

- But for all who *continually* and *permanently* refuse the forgiveness that is offered through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, the promise of future judgment remains...

With this as our introduction, we will move into our study of **Joel 2:1-17** — a message I have entitled **God is Good...**

I've divided our passage into two sections...

1) Warning of Judgment (vs 1-11)

2) Call to Repentance (vs 12-17)

Let's move into our first section...

1) Warning of Judgment (vs 1-11)

**1 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
And sound an alarm in My holy mountain!**

Through the prophet Joel, God calls the people of Judah to attention...

- [ex. Emergency Notification System on our phones — “Pay attention! Read this notification!” ...]

The Lord is calling the people of Judah to attention so that He might warn them of the judgment that is coming if they fail to repent...

- [ex. Passengers on a train — heading toward a bridge that is out ahead — warning the people that they must switch tracks...]

Continuing on in vs 1...

**Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble;
For the day of the LORD is coming,
For it is at hand:**

As mentioned last week, **the day of the LORD** may refer *generally to God working in a special way* or it may refer to *the end-time events that will take place shortly before the return of Christ...*

- I believe that **the day of the LORD** referred to here in **Joel 2:1** is a reference to God stepping in and bringing judgment on Judah if they failed to repent...[expand]

*Now, it is interesting to consider our individual attitude toward **the final day of the LORD** — when the Lord returns to establish His righteous reign...*

- If we are walking ***in fellowship with the Lord*** then ***we will DESIRE the day of the LORD***...[expand]
- But if we are ***out of fellowship with the Lord*** then ***we will DREAD the day of the LORD***...[expand]

So, if you are ***desiring the day of the LORD*** then continue moving forward with the Lord...

- If you are ***dreading the day of the LORD*** then it is time to repent and turn to Him for forgiveness...

Now, as we move on in this section, it is important to know that this judgment that God is warning Judah about could still be avoided...

- In contrast, we have Dante's epic poem, ***Inferno***, where the following words are inscribed above the gates of Hell — ***“Abandon all hope, ye who enter here”***...

And what Dante wrote is true...

For those who have passed from this life without turning to the living God for forgiveness, all hope is truly lost...

But that was not the case for the people of Judah...

The Lord God was warning the people of Judah of this coming judgment because there was ***still time to make a change...***

- The crisis could be averted — repentance would turn the tide...

And this is my plea to you today...

If you are living in unrepentant sin, ***please turn from your sin and turn to the Lord*** — judgment can be averted...

- This is the whole reason that the Lord God is warning the people of Judah — because there was still time to repent...

And this is the heart of God for sinful people — that they might turn to Him in repentance and be forgiven...

Ezekiel 33:11 (NKJV)

... 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die, O house of Israel?'

Continuing on in Joel 2 we see that the potential judgment will be...

**2 A day of darkness and gloominess,
A day of clouds and thick darkness,
Like the morning clouds spread over the mountains.**

This is an ominous picture — it is a scene of impending doom...

**A people come, great and strong,
The like of whom has never been;
Nor will there ever be any such after them,
Even for many successive generations.**

This army that will come against the people of Judah is too strong for them — Judah has no hope against them...

**3 A fire devours before them,
And behind them a flame burns;
The land is like the Garden of Eden before them,
And behind them a desolate wilderness;
Surely nothing shall escape them.**

This is a picture of the utter destruction that will be brought by this army — it will be complete devastation...

I believe that this is also a picture of the final judgment of Hell...

You see, for those who refuse to enter into relationship with the God who created them, the loss will be complete...

- No good thing that they enjoyed in this life will remain — no good memory — no good feeling of any sort...

Whatever was in their life that was **like the Garden of Eden** — even if it was only for a moment — will be left **a desolate wilderness**...

- And all this will come to pass because they will have cut themselves off from the **only source of good — God Himself**...

You see, ***not only is God good — He is the source of all good***
— there is ***no good apart from Him...***

- Every single good thing that you and I have ever experienced in this life — from the smallest good to the greatest good — has been from Him...

James puts it this way in...

James 1:17 (NKJV)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

- With this in mind, we must understand that when a person ***continually*** and ***finally*** rejects God they ***permanently sever all ties to the good — all good will be lost to them forever...***

Because there is absolutely no goodness apart from God Himself...

Now, as we move on in Joel 2 the fearsome army is further described...

**4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses;
And like swift steeds, so they run.**

**5 With a noise like chariots
Over mountaintops they leap,
Like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble,
Like a strong people set in battle array.**

**6 Before them the people writhe in pain;
All faces are drained of color.**

**7 They run like mighty men,
They climb the wall like men of war;
Every one marches in formation,
And they do not break ranks.**

**8 They do not push one another;
Every one marches in his own column.
Though they lunge between the weapons,
They are not cut down.**

**9 They run to and fro in the city,
They run on the wall;
They climb into the houses,
They enter at the windows like a thief.**

**10 The earth quakes before them,
The heavens tremble;
The sun and moon grow dark,
And the stars diminish their brightness.**

With these words, the prophet Joel makes it clear that Judah has no hope of defeating this army — they are much too strong...

As we consider vs 11 we see something very interesting...

**11 The LORD gives voice before His army,
For His camp is very great;
For strong is the One who executes His word.
For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible;
Who can endure it?**

This verse makes it abundantly clear that the fearsome army would be ***sent by the Lord as a weapon of His judgment...***

And this is something that we see throughout the Scriptures...

[ex. Book of Judges — Israel being taken captive by the Assyrians — Judah being taken captive to the Babylonians, etc...]

VITAL POINT — Unrepentant sin leads to judgment...

And while it is true that unrepentant sin leads to judgment — ***the good news is that our sin doesn't have to remain unrepented of...***

It is this theme that we will consider as we move into our second and final section...

2) Call to Repentance (vs 12-17)

**12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD,
"Turn to Me with all your heart,**

In light of the potential judgment, the Lord calls on the people of Judah ***to repent — to turn to Him...***

- At this point, it is helpful to remind ourselves that ***we sin because we view our sin as a good thing...***

Unfortunately, because we are sinful and flawed — ***we view the wrong things as good...***

But when we **repent** — when we turn from our sin and turn toward God then we are turning from what is evil to what is truly good...

C.S Lewis — *The Weight of Glory*

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.”

- [expand — the true good that God offers us is infinitely better than the false good that we seek in our sinfulness...]

Now, we also see in **Joel 2:12** that God calls on the people not only to *turn from their sin* and *turn to Him* but He calls on them to **turn to Him with all their heart...**

In other words, God is not interested in a section of our heart — He wants the whole thing — and the Lord Jesus made this clear in...

Matthew 22:36-38 (NKJV)

36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.'

38 This is the first and great commandment.”

The reality is that we have **infinite desires** and we can never be satisfied with the **finite** — so we can only find true satisfaction in the **infinite God**...[expand]

As we continue on in vs 12, the Lord reveals what true repentance should look like...

**"Turn to Me with all your heart,
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."**

This reminds us that a true turning to the Lord involves both ***emotion*** and ***action***...

- There is both the ***emotion of remorse*** (weeping & mourning) and the ***actions of repentance*** (fasting in this case)...

As we move into vs 13, Joel exhorts the people...

13 So rend your heart, and not your garments;

- [explain — practice of tearing garment as a sign of mourning...]

God doesn't seem interested in clothes that are torn for Him — ***He wants hearts that are broken for Him...***

This is what David wrote in...

Psalm 51:17 (NKJV)

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit,

A broken and a contrite heart—

These, O God, You will not despise.

This reminds us that we have a choice — *we can rend our hearts before the Lord — we can offer our broken hearts to the Lord — or we can harden our hearts against the Lord...*

And we know the choice we should make...

Hebrews 3:7-8 (NKJV)

**7 Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:
"Today, if you will hear His voice,
8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness..."**

Let's continue on in Joel 2:13...

Return to the LORD your God,

The people of Judah had ***departed from the Lord*** and it was time for them to ***return to the Lord...***

- [expand — The Prodigal Son returning home...]

REMINDER — When we are living in unrepentant sin, we are the ones in need of change...[expand]

- [ex. People continuing in sin wanting God to change His ways and do things their way...]

*As we move on in vs 13 the people of Judah are reminded of **why** they should return to the Lord — they should return because **He is good...***

**Return to the LORD your God,
For He is gracious and merciful,**

gracious — *word is used only of the Lord — speaks of the fact that God is full of grace in a way that is unique to Him...*

- If you are in need of grace — *and who isn't* — then go to Him — and you will find that He is gracious in a way that no one else is...

merciful — *this is also a word that is used only of the Lord — it means full of compassion — this word indicates a merciful and forgiving character and attitude...*

- If you are in need of mercy — *and who isn't* — then go to Him — and you will find that He is merciful in a way that no one else is...

Next we read that the Lord is...

Slow to anger, and of great kindness;

slow to anger — *God is patient — God is longsuffering...*

- [ex. Father of the Prodigal patiently awaiting the return of His son...]

of great kindness — *this phrase speaks of God's faithful love which is the foundation of His character...*

At the end of vs 13 we read...

And He relents from doing harm.

- In other words, God would rather *forgive the sinner* than *judge the sinner*...[c.f. Ezekiel quote...]

But the sinner must repent and seek that forgiveness from the Lord...

**14 Who knows if He will turn and relent,
And leave a blessing behind Him—
A grain offering and a drink offering
For the LORD your God?**

Joel exhorts the people to repent — perhaps it is not too late and God will relent of His judgment and restore blessing to the land...

In vs 15-16, Joel calls the entire nation of Judah to repentance...

**15 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
Consecrate a fast,
Call a sacred assembly;
16 Gather the people,
Sanctify the congregation,
Assemble the elders,
Gather the children and nursing babes;
Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber,
And the bride from her dressing room.**

Each and every person in Judah is called to participate in repentance — they are all in this together — no one is exempted...

- And this is the reality for ***each and every person*** on planet earth — all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and all are in need of repentance...

*Wonderfully, when we repent we find that our **good God** is ready to forgive...*

1 John 1:9 (NKJV)

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Now to the final verse of our study...

17 Let the priests, who minister to the LORD,

This is a reminder that the priests' ***first priority was serving the Lord*** — and once the Lord was their primary focus then they could rightly serve the people...

- [ex. Love God then Love Others to live rightly...]

Continuing on in Joel 2:17...

**Let the priests, who minister to the LORD,
Weep between the porch and the altar;
Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD,
And do not give Your heritage to reproach,
That the nations should rule over them.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"**

The big idea here is that the priests were to ***intercede for the people of Judah by crying out for God's mercy on the people...***

*And there is tremendous application for **you** and for **me** as we intercede for others...*

1 Peter 2:9-10 (NKJV)

9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

As born-again believers we are a royal priesthood — we have received ***the mercy of God...***

- But we are *not to hoard that mercy* — we are to *intercede for others that they might receive that mercy as well...*

And our desire is that they too might become part of the royal priesthood and in turn share God's mercy with others...

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our study and before we move into our time of communion I will remind you of **Romans 2:4** where Paul writes *that it is the goodness of God that leads us to repentance...*

- We have established that ***because God is good, He must judge sin...***

Even so, God gives every human being a choice...

- [expand — we can be judged for our sins or the Lord Jesus can be judged for our sins...]

[Move into introducing communion — this is what we celebrate — the Lord Jesus paid for our sins on the cross that we might be saved and enter into fellowship with our good God...]

Matthew 26:26-28 (NKJV)

26 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

27 Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."

28 For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."