

Message Series: The Whole Counsel of God, Message 35  
Yesterday, Tomorrow, and Today. The Book of Joel  
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Yesterday, tomorrow, and today; these are words we do not normally think of as belonging to one another. They speak of three distinct periods of time. And yet, upon close examination, we realize they often come together in our lives. One of the reasons history is taught in schools is so we can learn the lessons of the past for the present and the future. Psychologists tell us in order to deal with present emotional issues and make a difference for our future we must first deal with our past. Quite often, even in the Scriptures, we find this yoking together of yesterday, tomorrow, and today.

This is certainly true in the Old Testament book of Joel. It brings to our attention a past event to make us think about a future event and challenge the way we live today. Please open your Bibles to this Old Testament book with me as we consider the message of these **three periods of time...**

## **I. Yesterday**

First, Joel brings yesterday, a past event to our attention.

What is the most tragic event you can think of in your lifetime; an accident, a death, a loss of some other kind? Regardless of age, most of us have experienced tragedy. Life seems filled with it. We spend much of our time preparing for it, adjusting to it, or trying to overcome it, and for the most part we do so successfully. But there are those moments that go far beyond the normal tragedies of life. Tragedy's so devastating they wipe us out, strip us of joy, and the will to live. Such was the case in the land of Judah around 830 B.C. In 1:2, the prophet asks...

The tragedy that had struck the nation was unlike any ever before in their lifetime or even that of their father. When a tragedy of this magnitude strikes, what does a nation do? How do the people respond? I will never forget in the hours and days following the 911 tragedy how our nation felt. Immediately, people started asking, "*Where was God?*" It has always been interesting to me that for many there is no thought of God while things are good, but when things turn bad, really bad, He is the first one people think of.

This was the case with Judah. The people were drifting away from God in their behavior and thinking. They still went through the motions of their religion but it was no longer an essential part of their life and God's place had been filled with other things. Then tragedy struck! First there were locusts and then there was a drought. I have no idea what it is like to experience either of these, but Joel does not leave much to speculation. The locusts were chewing, crawling, swarming, and consuming everything; like a vast army they covered the land, stripped it of everything good, and left it a wasteland. To make matters worst, the locusts were followed by a drought, and any signs of hope that had been left then withered away. The end of verse 12 says it all, "*Joy withered away.*"

What should a nation do? What should we do when tragedy strikes? Joel says, "*Cry!*" Not just for ourselves, or because of what happened, but because of why it happened.

In some ways the people of Judah had it easier than we. As a nation they knew they were God's people. In Deuteronomy 28, God made it clear that if they obeyed Him they would experience blessing, but if they disobeyed they would experience cursing. They could expect tragedies like locusts and famines in order to get their attention and cause them to wake up spiritually. God had not moved but they had and it was time and it was time for them to return. In 1:3, Joel says...

What were they to tell their children? Not just about the locusts and the famine but that God meant business.

According to 1 Corinthians 10:11-12, this incident was written as an example for you and me; it has been passed down from generation to generation to us, and now we too are to remember that God means business! He does what He says He will do and we are not to think just because He is gracious and merciful, and slow to anger and of great kindness that He will allow us to continue to drift away from Him. He will not!

## **II. Tomorrow**

But Joel saw more in the locusts and famine than just an immediate judgment. Based on this tragedy, God enabled him to see a far greater judgment in the future. A judgment unlike anything the world will have ever

seen. It is called, "*the Day of the Lord.*" Jesus said of this day in Matthew 24:21, "*There will be a great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no nor ever shall be.*" Neither Jesus nor Joel are talking about just one day, but a future period of time which will include the antichrist, the seven years Tribulation, the battle of Armageddon, the return of Christ, the millennial reign of Christ, and its closing battle after a thousand years.

Joel is the first to use the phrase, "*the Day of the Lord.*" Look at his description of it in 2:1-11...

Joel starts with the situation then existing in the land after the locust and he uses that to picture for us just how terrible this future day of judgment will be because there was no other way to do it. How do you describe something so terrible that it is worst than anything that ever has or ever will happen? Certainly, it would not be easy. The best Joel could do was to remind them of the worst they had ever experienced. The best we can do even now is recall the worst thing we have ever experienced or heard of, and remind ourselves that the Day of the Lord will be even more terrible.

Joel wanted the people of his day to know four things: (1) that the Day of the lord was coming; (2) that in God's timetable it was immediate; (3) that it was a great and terrible day; and (4) that very few would endure it. That's a frightening thought isn't it! In 2 Thessalonians 2, the Apostle Paul wrote the Christians of Thessalonica to comfort them because they were literally shook to their foundation. Someone told them the Day of the Lord had begun and they had not escaped it. Well, it hadn't and it still hasn't. But just like the people of Joel's day, you and I need to understand it is coming, that in God's timetable it will be soon, that it is a very terrible time, and that very few will survive it.

### **III. Today**

But Joel's purpose in describing this for his people and the purpose of this revelation for us is not simply to give us information about the future. More than anything else, it is meant to challenge us in the present. In 2:12-13, Joel says to the people of Judah...

What Joel was saying was since God means business the time to get right with Him is not in the future, but now! Don't tear your garments as a shallow outward show of repentance; tear your heart open to God now!

In Acts 2, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood and quoted Joel 2:28-32...

What was Peter saying? Basically three things: (1) we're not drunk, what you see happening is the pouring out of the Spirit like Joel talked about; (2) there is a day of judgment coming in which God will no longer put up with our sins, stubbornness, and rejection of Him; and (3) now is the time to call on the Lord and be saved. Of course, many did.

In chapter 3, Joel takes us into the future when the nations of the world will be gathered together in the valley of Jehoshaphat for the Battle of Armageddon. Look at 3:12-14...

In that day, when the nations are gathered together, it will be a day of decision, but it will not be our day of decision, and for those in that valley it will be too late. The only decision to be made will be God's, and it will be for judgment. I've talked with so many who want to wait until a later time, but our day of decision is now. 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "*Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.*" Some will mock such a proposal saying, "*If Joel was talking about it in 830 B.C., and we're still talking about it today, that's all it is then, talk. If it hasn't happened yet, it won't!*" But look at 2 Peter 3:3-10...

It's been a long time since Joel's prophecy concerning the Day of the Lord, but Peter says that doesn't mean it won't happen, it will. If there's any delay, it is for two reasons: (1) that others might be saved, and (2) that we who know the Lord will prepare ourselves for Him.

Would one of those describe you?