

*YouVersion events/ Stand for the reading of the Word*

**Joel 1:1–12** “The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

*An Invasion of Locusts*

[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? [3] Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.

[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.

[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. [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. [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.

[8] Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. [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. [10] The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.

[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. [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.” (ESV)

Growing up I would often hear of how God was judging other people. It was often through natural events. The blizzard covering New York was a result of their debauchery. The failure of a company was God’s discipline for endorsing sin. And California, well if anything happened in California it was God’s discipline!

It was far too easy to see every event or tragedy as the hand of God spanking humanity - and in some cases it probably was. But I noticed that it was never judgment when our river flooded, or a storm left us without power for weeks. It was likely a “spiritual attack” but discipline on us (in the church and family) was never an option.

Maybe it formed a warped view of how God worked through normal life. And it certainly didn't help with the question of 'why does God let bad things happen to good people?'

Why do storms come, why does the earth quake, why are we weighed down by struggles and how can God use a pandemic for his purposes?

Joel answers this, in a way, and stirs us to face circumstances with an expectant joy in the paradise to come on the other end of the question.

**The soul of the church is awakened by the patience and provision of God.**

Who was Joel? We don't really know. The son of Pethuel... some have suggested he could have been prophesying after the exile, maybe even from Jerusalem. Around 586 BC... We don't know. And that's okay. Because what we do know from Joel is worth the mystery of who he was.

This prophet answers the experienced hardship of God's people, an invasion of locusts that have devastated life as they know it, with a warning that highlights the purposes of God and invites us to a sense of urgency in life.

He does it through a brief reflection of their situation, exhortation and comparison with what is to come.

What Joel reveals of God is energizing news.

**God is patient.**

To the question of why? Why are we suffering under the ruin of locusts? God answers that Judah is being disciplined for drifting away from God, for idolatry. We will see this a lot in the Minor Prophets - in all the prophets really - they stand as a corrective and warning to those meant to be the global expression of God's reign but have gone astray.

But like any event that shakes us, that seems to be too much, this is meant to hint at something greater. This is what we learn from Joel, God is at work even when he can't be seen or understood, his purpose unfolding, and event after event, all of life is supposed to uncover our need for God, and he is patient with us while we learn it.

"God sent locusts, a drought and the prophet Joel to Judah in order to wake them up to the impending judgment. The good news for Judah was that there was a way to avoid destruction of the day of the Lord - radical repentance." A. Selvaggio

God says through the prophet that if you keep driving down this road you will experience a horrible end - you will wish the locusts could come back.

But it is not a story of doom and gloom, Joel tells us that God in his perfect holiness could bring this judgment now, but in his patience, it is in the distance, so you might be rescued from it.

"There is a sense in which catastrophe doesn't introduce anything new into our lives. It simply exposes the moral or spiritual reality that already exists but has been hidden beneath business as usual. Then, suddenly, there it is before us: a moral universe in which our accumulated decisions - on what we say and do, on how we treat others, on whether or not we will obey God's commands - are set in the stark light of God's judgment." Eugene Peterson

The nations can prepare for war but they can't withstand the purpose of God. Wrath for sin, disregard, and active hatred of God and his way will be judged and met.

In light of the day of the Lord, in light of his patience with you, repent.

**Joel 1:13–14** “Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

[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.” (ESV)

**Joel 2:12–14** “Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; [13] and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. [14] Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God?” (ESV)

God is so gracious, all of life is to point it out, that we can sober up and return to him and he is patient in waiting for us.

In my house when the counting starts you know you have until 3 to do what you have been told, to turn away from the disobedience and turn to obedience!

The Apostle Peter says in his letters to the church that the day of the Lord is coming which should leave us eager to repent, but we shouldn't count the delay as either failure of the purpose of God or extra time for sin.

**2 Peter 3:9** “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.” (ESV)

We experience life, difficult events unfold that we would lean in and rely on the Lord - turning from our sin and self-sovereignty and trusting his way.

"It may take significant prayer and discernment to know whether our trials are for our discipline or for our development, but we can always be sure that the sovereign Lord is accomplishing his good purposes, not only in the world at large but in our life..." GTB

Joel says God is patient. But he also gives, he welcomes, he restores and transforms.

**The soul of the church is awakened by the patience and provision of God.**

**God provides.**

The fruit of repentance is supernatural life.

**Joel 2:18–19** “Then the LORD became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. [19] The LORD answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.” (ESV)

**Joel 2:28–32** “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. [29] Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

[30] “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. [31] The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. [32] And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.” (ESV)

What a gift this is, the available satisfaction in God, the restoration, the awesome empowerment. All of it is made real because God has **provided himself** to us!

Jesus, fully God and fully man, lives in our place, and the place of Judah, fully committed, obedient to the Father. He meets the wrath for sin, all of it, for us, quenching it forever.

God has **provided forgiveness**. As he is taking on the punishment we deserve, he gives forgiveness.

**Luke 23:34** “And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (ESV)

Stunningly, this is even to those that don't fully understand the sin they are in, the totality of their idolatry and ways their hearts have been corrupted.

Instead of asking “why God let's bad things happen to good people” the question now becomes, “why does God let good things happen to bad people?”

Because he is loving, merciful and gracious... and he provides.

We can respond to the patience of God in repentance because of Jesus.

"We should be eager to repent because we know that God stands ready to show us mercy and pardon our sin because of the work of Jesus." Selvaggio

We can live empowered and awakened because of Jesus! With Spirit Power! **He has provided his Spirit.**

When the crowds thought the church was drunk in Acts 2, Peter preaches and says, nah, this is fulfilling what Joel prophesied.

The wonder has come in Christ. Grace and mercy have a name and a face. God can be known, trusted and followed because he provides.

"Both the judgment and the promise remind us of our desperate need for God's help. The judgment that our sins deserve is far worse than a plague of locusts. The promise of the Spirit reminds us that the help we need is nothing less than supernatural. Through the ministry of Jesus, the requirements of judgment and of supernatural provision have both been met." GTB

And it keeps carrying us - as we live all of life as repentance - when difficult things happen we can rest in him. Because we have tasted of his provision and it rolls on to a beautiful future that can only be experienced with him.

It moves the church to call others to repentance and real life. It stirs an urgency in us, because the day is still coming, and those that repent and trust in Jesus for salvation - "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" - these will experience life and eternity with him.

So we live as citizens of heaven with resolute confidence in our King. Our patient, merciful, gracious King.

Each day we are one closer - and with each day we get new nudges to life, come what may.

**Joel 3:16–18** "The LORD roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth quake. But the LORD is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

[17] "So you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain. And Jerusalem shall be holy, and strangers shall never again pass through it.

[18] "And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD and water the Valley of Shittim." (ESV)

Jesus restores Eden. In him, the new has dawned even as the old age of sin and death continues. One day, he will come again and bring even this old age to a close, and Eden will be restored perfectly, forever, for his people.

While there is still time, return to the Lord, he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. He proves it by giving himself to and for you. Come and receive, that he would pour out his Spirit afresh on you, to declare his wonders, his goodness.

He knows what we need before we ask, he holds us. He takes good care of us and longs to call others his own. Maybe we will be who he uses to tell them!

Let's not waste our days in endless pondering of circumstance and dramatic events, hear of the gravity of the day of the Lord, and rejoice in Christ, that your place is secure in repentance. That hope is yours in Jesus.

### **The soul of the church is awakened by the patience and provision of God.**

Oscar Wilde wrote a number of children's stories and in one in particular I wonder if he didn't have some of the imagery of Joel in mind.

*The Selfish Giant: The story begins by describing a Giant's garden, a beautiful and vibrant place where children would play every day after school...*

*...takes down the walls*

*The Giant wanted to know who had done it so he could slay them, but the child answered "No! These are but the wounds of love." "Who are you?" said the Giant, and a strange awe fell on him, and he knelt before the little child.*

*The child smiled and said, "You let me play once in your garden. Today you shall come with me to my garden in paradise..."*

As we take down the walls of our hearts in repentance, Jesus brings wonderful life and fruitfulness. He has been patient with us and provided himself for us.

The garden is open - let's invite others to play!