

"Always Remember"

Joel 3

On Tuesday we awoke to the news of another act of terrorism. This time it was a suicide bomber at a youth concert in Manchester England where at least 22 people were killed and 112 or more were treated for injuries. I read this from a Pastor named Stephen Kneale near Manchester:

"There is something particularly wicked about somebody sitting there creating an explosive device – packing it with metal to inflict as much damage as possible – knowing that they were going to use it primarily against children and teenagers. It is very difficult to think of this without feeling a rage against such heinous sin. The perpetrator has died in the blast, no doubt convinced of his own entrance to paradise for such evil, and many would believe he has, in fact, escaped justice."

But he goes on to point out from Scripture that this young man is not in any paradise nor has he escaped justice for the moment he died he entered the torments of hell. People feel that way sometimes as if they got cheated out of justice. But if we're honest we want revenge rather than justice and the Word of God clearly says,

¹⁹Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

God is a holy and loving and merciful and just God. He is perfect. He will right all the wrongs one day. Until that time we have to remember the promises of His Word of what God says He will do one day.

As we come to the final chapter of Joel this is the subject we are dealing with. God has sent Joel to prophesy to Israel that the locust plague they experienced (ch.1) was a fulfilment of God's Word in Deut. 28. In Deut. 28 God listed the blessings Israel would have in the land if they obeyed Him. But then He also listed how the land would be cursed should Israel continue in rebellion. The rain would stop, the land would dry up and then locust plagues would come. And if they still didn't repent after the locust plague then God would remove them from the land by bringing another nation to attack them and take them away.

However, in ch. 2:12-13 we were reminded God is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and He relents from sending calamity. He wants His people to repent so they do not experience calamity. Israel would not unfortunately repent and the Babylonians would eventually come and take them captive.

God always keeps His promises – which we always have to remember when atrocities happen. How do God's people need to respond when we're struggling with the injustice of the Manchesters in our time? As Joel gives us a glimpse of the end when the atrocities of the nations will only increase (especially against Israel) he shows us how we need to remember 3 things at all times. We always need to remember. .

God Sees the Mistreatment of His People (3:1-8)

Joel assures us God is going to restore His blessings back to Israel once and for all in the last days. But just before that happens He will also deal justly with the nations who have tried to 'wipe them off the face of the earth.'

"In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, ² I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land. ³ They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink. ⁴ "Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. ⁵ For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. ⁶ You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland. ⁷ "See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. ⁸ I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away." The LORD has spoken.

Over their history Israel has experienced more than their share of atrocities at the hands of people who have sought to harm her. And God has seen and still sees it all.

Nothing escapes God's notice (vv.1-6)

Before God restores Israel's blessings in their land He will gather the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat was the name of one of Israel's good kings but there was no valley named after him. Jehoshaphat means 'God will judge'. This valley could be the valley of Megiddo in central Israel where Armageddon takes place or it could be the valley that Jesus creates at His return where we read in Zechariah 14,

A day of the LORD is coming, Jerusalem, when your possessions will be plundered and divided up within your very walls. ² I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city. ³ Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south.

There God will enter judgment with those who mistreated His people Israel. God lists some of things they did:

they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.

³ *They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink.*

⁵ *For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples.*

⁶ *You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.*

God sees all these things and more. He calls Israel 'my people' and their possessions 'my silver and my gold'. He sees how Israel has been robbed over the years, how other nations have divided up their land and how the Philistines sold young men and women for sex and alcohol. They also sold them as slaves to the Greeks. Nothing escapes God's notice and

No one escapes God's justice (vv.7-8)

Like all prophecy there is a mixture of near fulfillment and future fulfillment. Vv. 7-8 would be fulfilled around 340 and 330 BC. The city of Sidon was captured by Artaxerxes III in 345 BC and Tyre was captured by Alexander the Great in 332 BC. God brought the perfect justice on them by having someone else come and sell their young people as slaves to someone else.

God sees it all and will enact perfect justice on those who deserve it. God may use other people, He may use natural calamities – He can use anything He wants since the world is His and He is judge. And then eternal judgment is appropriate too. Because God gives people exactly what they wanted in life, in death. Those who wanted nothing to do with God receive that in the end. God is light but they rejected Him and chose the darkness of sin so Jesus says they will spend eternity in *"the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (Matt. 8:12).

The hatred for God and His people will only intensify in the last days. In vv.9-13 we read,

⁹ *Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack.* ¹⁰ *Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am strong!"* ¹¹ *Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down your warriors, LORD!* ¹² *"Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.* ¹³ *Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow— so great is their wickedness!"*

And yet God says 'Let them come'! Why? We always need to remember . . .

God Uses the Enemy's Hatred for His Purpose **(3:9-13)**

The satanic led armies of the nations who join together in Israel to once and for all wipe Israel off the face of the map' are actually playing into God's hands. When Jesus returns they will all be there making judgment much easier for Jesus. God uses their hatred to join forces and bring them together where He can show the world through the return of Jesus Christ that God is in charge!

Listen again to Revelation 19

¹¹ I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. ¹² His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³ He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴ The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. ¹⁵ Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

¹⁹ Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰ But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹ The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

God is in control. God is on His throne. Listen to Psalm 2,

¹ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? ² The kings of the earth rise up and the rulers band together against the LORD and against his anointed, saying, ³ "Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles." ⁴ The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. ⁵ He rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ⁶ "I have installed my king on Zion, my holy mountain."

Here in Joel, God uses the images of harvesting grain [cutting off and removing] and treading the winepress (crushing and destroying) - images that are picked up in Revelation too – of their judgment. 'For the harvest is ripe, for the wine press is full, for their wickedness is great.' It may be hard to remember this at the time when evil men seem to succeed in their plans but God is working and He is patiently allowing their hatred to grow so that with one blow, Jesus will destroy them all.

And then comes Israel's restoration and Jesus' Millennial reign in their own land. And so we always need to remember . . .

God Fulfils Every Promise for All His People **(3:14-21)**

Joel reminds Israel that in spite of their sin at the time, it doesn't mean God will not fulfil His future promises to them in their own land. Whenever this happens it presumes that Israel will have had a massive return to their land. Many have come back since 1948 when Israel became their own state. Only 44% of the world's Jews live in Israel. 40% are in the USA and the rest are scattered around the world. What will bring them back? Daniel 9 tells us the antichrist during the last 7 years will desecrate the temple at the 3 ½ year point. That means a temple will be rebuilt by then. When Israel rebuilds their temple (under false pretenses) it will no doubt bring many Jews back to their land. And this is also how God gathers their enemies together. And then His future promises will begin to be fulfilled first,

By removing the wicked (v.14)

¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision.

Is not talking about the need for people to make a decision for Jesus – this has nothing to do with evangelism. The context is judgment at the battle of Armageddon. The word 'decision' means verdict. God has already rendered His decision, 'they are guilty' of denying Jesus and believing in God. God will remove the wicked

With the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.15-17)

Here are those verses again that Jesus quotes Himself will happen at His return;

¹⁵ The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. ¹⁶ The LORD will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble. But the LORD will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel. ¹⁷ "Then you will know that I, the LORD your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.

The Lord roaring from Zion is Jesus returning to the Mount of Olives and while the enemies will tremble, the people of Israel and those Gentiles still alive who believe in Jesus and see Him return will shout for joy because He is a refuge for His people and a stronghold for Israel.

While we may have a hard time seeing it with our eyes we have to live by and believe in faith and remember that God

Will restore the land to Israel (vv.18-21)

¹⁸ "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias. ¹⁹ But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood. ²⁰ Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations. ²¹ Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged? No, I will not." The LORD dwells in Zion!

This is why we need to have some knowledge of prophecy; when we experience calamities now. When the wicked seem to temporarily succeed and wreak havoc in the world, we always need to remember what God's Word says about their future judgment, Jesus' return and His future promises to bless Israel and His church. The world has seen its fair share of bad people over the years but they all eventually die and God's justice is perfect. The ones around today won't last. 2 Peter 3:9 reminds us

"God is slow in patience as some count slowness because He is not willing that any should perish but all come to repentance."

God hasn't sent Jesus back yet because He is waiting for more people to repent of their sins and turn their hearts toward Him through His Son Jesus Christ. Even here in Joel, Joel said

that God was gracious and compassionate, slow in anger and abounding in love and He relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.

That's what God always wants to see, people responding to calamities by coming to faith or returning to God.

The book of Joel began with cursings and ends with blessing. It began with ruin and ended in restoration. It began with failure and ended with fulfilment. It began with lament and ended with the Lord. The present will one day become the future. What we see now will not always be. There is a great future awaiting us. God will avenge the enemies of His people. God does see all the ways His people are mistreated. He has been, is and always will be Lord. Let's keep trusting God when the present is hard when we know the future will be great.

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