

[S] Good morning everyone, I hope you had a good Christmas. Today we are starting a new series on the book of Joel. We actually know very little about the person Joel. As unlike other prophets, where we find out about their previous jobs, where they came from and the kings that were around, Joel only gives to us information about himself in the 1st verse, that he was the son of Pethuel. In case you don't know Joel is located in the OT. It is just after Hosea and just before Amos. It, along with Hosea and Amos and some other books fall into a category called the minor prophets. They are called minor prophets because of their size. Joel for example is only 3 chapters long. And although it is a small book, it deals with a big issue. Joel says that it is worth telling your children about this and your children's children. This is something so big that it needs to be passed down. So what is Joel trying to say? Throughout the book and certainly in this first chapter and a half Joel challenges us with the question, [S]"in the bad times who do we trust in?"

And the bad times that Joel is describing are among the worst. He describes a locust swarm attacking Judah. Now for us here in Urban Australia we may well find it hard to understand what the problem was. I mean when Emily has trouble at home with a pest, she just gets me to go sort it out. But not with a locust swarm. Over the last few sermons we seemed to have introduced zoology to the talks with the chameleon and the black bear so I think it is appropriate if I tell you a little about the locust. [S] The locust is like a grasshopper. They eat mainly vegetable matter. And they can grow up to 15cm. They are capable of flying great distances as unlike grasshoppers they have wings. They can actually travel up to 500km a day. But what makes the locust particularly terrifying is there ability to breed. Take a look at this video which shows a locust swarm in the Congo in Africa. [V] If a locust started laying eggs now at Christmas by the time we reached

Easter it would have 18 million living descendents. The description that Joel gives of what the locusts can do is very similar to the descriptions in modern times. Joel says they destroy the vines and fig trees, stripping the bark and leaving branches white.[S] Here you see a tree before locusts, [S] now after. Joel describes the locusts as an army in verse 6 with teeth like a lion. And this army of locusts affects everyone and everything. From the drunkards in verse 5 to the farmers in verse 11, from the priests and elders in verse 13 to the very animals in verse 18, everyone and everything is affected by the locusts.

And its not just the physical problems that Joel mentions being affected by the plague, in verse 12 Joel talks of the very joy of mankind withering away. Like most problems I am sure you will agree its not just the physical things that are the problem, it is also the mental side of things, the depression of the hardship that really affects us. Here Joel is describing a real problem faced by the people of the day, a problem which can easily be transferred to today. Instead of locusts it could be drought in the outback or a tsunami. And certainly the mental hardships can be seen in many problems we face here even in Sydney, unemployment, abuse, unfortunately the list goes on.

Joel wants to make sure that the people of God will learn a lesson from disaster. So in verse 2 he calls the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to listen. He urges them to tell their children and their children's children. He wants them to pass on what they should do when they are in any times of trouble. This is the message that Joel wants to get across, something that can be passed down. Maybe this is one of the reasons that Joel has no time, or date attached to it, so that it could be passed down from generation to

generation even to today. It something that can have a widespread application for the people of God, not just when people go through locust problems.

[S] So what is the response that Joel calls the people of Judah to have during this time of crisis? What is it that he wants the elders to pass down to their children's children? [S] Firstly he wants them to wake up and realize that there is a problem, [S] secondly to mourn and [S] finally and most importantly he wants them to trust in God.

Firstly he calls the drunkards to wake up. They need to be aware that there is a problem. They should not have their head buried in the sand, or in this case alcohol ignoring the problems around them. It can be the same for us. We get to the point where we accept the way the world is around us. We start falling asleep and not realizing the problems. We are too busy because of work, or maybe we have just desensitized to it. We ignore the homeless, we ignore the starving, we ignore the injustices of the world. Instead we need to wake up and realize that there is a problem.

Having made sure that everyone is aware of the problem, Joel encourages them to weep and later says for people to mourn and despair. There was a problem and they should be sad about it. Everyone from the drinkers of wine to the priests are told to mourn and wail because what is happening is not right. God created a perfect world and because of sin we should be distressed when bad things happen. I have recently been reading an autobiography by a man called Augustine. He describes his mothers funeral and how he felt really guilty about crying at her death because he should be happy that his mother had gone to heaven. But came to realize that it was alright to be sad, because death is wrong.

Death shouldn't have been part of the world. Joel says we are to mourn and wail when bad things happen. Because it is not right. It is alright to be sad about the effects of sin in the world.

Finally, towards the end of the chapter he tells the people to focus on God. In this time of trouble the people are told to cry out to the Lord, to declare a fast and call an assembly so they could focus on God. Joel himself adds his cry in verse 19, to you O lord I call. Who do we trust in times of trouble? Do you trust God, do you pray to him when you are in times of hardship? When a family member dies? When you are out of work? Or do you look to other things to trust in. I think its sad the number of people who trust in money to get them through times of trouble. I know at times I have fallen into that trap. A few years ago I was working hard and putting my money into shares so that I wouldn't have to worry about the future. Or that is what I told myself. But really it was so I could trust in my money rather than God. I knew that I wanted to go to college eventually but I want to be comfortable while doing it, I wanted to make sure I could trust in my money while I was there. But then the recent financial crisis happened and I lost a lot of money and initially I was distraught, how could I look after myself and Emily now, so I quickly realized that it was the money I was trusting in and not God. I have now learnt that it is in God I should trust. I learnt that I need to trust God for all my needs, I need to trust that God will look after us. I have friends who have studied at college with no money, but they trust in God. Every time they look like they were going to go without, God provided. I used to go to America occasionally for my job and when I am in a different country I always like looking at the difference in the money they have, here is an American \$1 note [S] Do you know what it says on the back of their currency? I actually think it is quite

ironic. Do you know what is says on the back of the almighty \$ which represent what many people put their trust in. [S] On the back of the \$ note it says “In God we trust”.

Now, what I am saying may connect with you, and if it does I pray that you will realize that money is not the answer, that you need to put your trust in God. However, maybe money is not a problem for you, you know that you don’t trust money, but maybe there is still something else that you trust in before God. When the average person is asked what do they trust in, the answer is often not money, and unfortunately not God. The answer is often family and friends. I know for myself I put my trust in my family. If I am in trouble I know I can turn to them for help. But should that be our first response to Who do we trust in? I think we need to realize that God is to be our ultimate source of trust. There is nothing wrong with trusting family but we need to trust God first and foremost.

And I think the reason for this can be seen in the final part of chapter 1 and the first half of chapter 2. In verse 15 Joel says for the Day of the Lord is near, it will come like destruction from the almighty. The day of the Lord is a term that in OT times often referred to the day when judgment would come. And in the NT times and now we more often call it judgment day. Let me read some of chapter to you which describes the day of the Lord. [S]

Joe 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-
Joe 2:2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

Joe 2:3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste-- nothing escapes them.

Joe 2:10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

Joe 2:11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

You may be thinking why this sudden change, why has he suddenly switched from locusts to this. Well, as bad as the locusts were, they were just a taste of what this horrible army would be like. As bad as the locusts were, they end up just being the example which Joel uses to remind the people of the great judgment day of the Lord. For the rest of the book its not the locusts that Joel wants to focus on, it's the final judgment day. And that day is so terrible that the locusts pale in comparison, so that Joel concludes, Who can endure it?

And that is why, ultimately we can't just put our trust in our family and friends. They may be able to help us with some problems, but they can't help us with the biggest problem, the final judgment, where God will come to judge us for what we have done. That is why ultimately we need to trust in God. Only he can save us from his judgment only he can save us from death. That is why we celebrated Christmas so joyfully 3 days ago, because through Jesus we can trust in God that he will save us from Judgment.

So what are ways we can practically show our trust in God? [S] We should pray. Just as Joel does at the end of the chapter, we should call out to God. Praying is one of the best ways to show our trust in God. In praying we show our dependence on God to help us. This year I have really been reminded of that at college. When someone used to come to me with a problem or a concern I would try to help them the best I could doing anything in my power to help them, but when I came to friends at college and described something I was having problems with they would always say lets pray about it. I think it reflects a great attitude of trust in God and something I have tried to start doing more. So when you have your own disaster or are helping a friend through theirs, rather than first trying to solve the problem yourself, remember to trust God and pray.

And when you pray remember this from [S] Philippians 4.

6Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

[S] I want to leave you thinking about these 3 questions. [S] Are you awake? Are you aware of the problem of sin in this world and in your life. [S] Secondly, Are you mourning? Are you sad when you see the affects of sin on this world and in your life? [S] And finally and most importantly are you praying and trusting God in your life? In your disasters and for the final judgment is God the source of your trust? In God we trust.