

Are You Living in Light of the End?

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Paul. As it has already been said, my name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being on staff here and it is great to see you all this morning. Now, as Paul read that passage, you were probably thinking, wow, that's a lovely topic to think about this morning.

But I would encourage you and say that it is a lovely topic for us to think about this morning. But before we do that, let's pray together. Let's pray. Amen. Loving God and Heavenly Father, we come before you this morning acknowledging that we are weak human beings.

But we come before you the glorious, magnificent God. And we ask that you teach us from your word. Holy Spirit, we ask that you would transform our hearts.

And Jesus, we pray that we would leave here glorifying you in all we do and say. In Jesus' name, Amen. We all love a good, happy ending, don't we?

When you come to the end of a good book or a movie, and you just love it when you know that everything turned out okay. We know how much we like happy endings because if a book or a movie doesn't end the way we want it to, or if it ends on a cliffhanger, we feel disappointed.

[1 : 1 7] Maybe feel a bit short-changed. We might even be looking for the return policy. We love a good, happy ending. But how would it change the way we read a book or watch a movie if we already knew the end?

What if you opened the first page or watched the first movie of, for example, Lord of the Rings? Now, spoiler alert if you haven't watched Lord of the Rings. If you opened that first page or watched that first movie and you knew that in the end, after three books and three movies, Frodo was going to drop the ring into a volcano and end all destruction, you'd probably read it a bit differently, wouldn't you?

So if Frodo got into a battle or in a dangerous situation and he was fearing for his life, you'd have the thought in the back of your mind, well, he's going to be all right in the end.

It doesn't matter. I don't have to worry too much. It wouldn't have the same effect. Knowing the end changes the way you read the book.

If we were to know the end of every story or scenario in this world today, would it change the way we live? If you were to know the end of your own story, would it change the way you live?

[2 : 3 9] As we've been traveling through the book of Joel on Sunday mornings, we've been seeing the story of the Old Testament people of God. They'd rebelled against God and lived in sin. And God sent a locust plague in Joel chapter 1 to bring them back to himself.

And the big message that God is speaking out to his people is, return to me. God is saying, come back into a faithful covenant relationship with me and I will bless you and I will protect you.

Do not continue in your sin, but return to me and repent. That is what God is saying. And this morning in Joel chapter 3, we get an insight into the end of the story.

And the question that I want us to think about this morning is, are you living in light of the end? This morning we get to flick to the very last page of the book that we call Life on Earth and see what that will be like.

Now remember how Joel has been pointing through this whole little book to the future day of the Lord. The day when God will right all wrongs. When God will sit and judge the world.

[3 : 51] And in Joel chapter 3, we're told what the end of this world will look like. And it's all in the context of a valley. In verse 14, the end is described, the final day of the Lord is described as a valley of decision.

And the decision on that final day is made by God. And it will determine whether God is your refuge or whether God is your judge. The language that this passage uses points to the idea that God is a judge who sits on a throne and the whole world is in the dock on trial.

And the verdict will come from this judge. God decides the fate of this world based on their actions and on their response to him. He is the one who presides over this valley of decision.

And this morning we see what God says to the nations and what God says to his people on that final day. So the first thing, what God says to the nations, verses 1 to 16a, what God says to the nations.

In verse 1, you can see that God is speaking about a future day when Judah and Jerusalem will be restored. This is the future event known in the book of Joel as the day of the Lord.

[5 : 12] This event has not yet happened. It is still to come. And on that day, God will gather all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat, which means the valley of God's judgment.

All the nations will stand before God as he sits on his throne and he will judge. God will deliver his verdict on the nations. And the announcement of a trial where God will judge leads to a list of charges that have been committed.

Verses 2 and 3, we see what the nations are being judged for. They're being judged for how they treated God's people. The evidence is brought before the judge.

These nations scattered God's people. They divided up God's promised land and traded them as if they were household ornaments. The crimes that the nations are on trial for have been committed against God's people and therefore they have been committed against God himself.

And in the end of verse 3, do you see how God draws attention to how the nations have treated children? These little ones who are a picture of innocence, the weakest of God's people, the most defenseless of this nation, are being traded for cheap pleasures.

[6 : 42] Little boys are traded for the price of a prostitute. Little girls are being traded for the price of a glass of wine. The nations are putting their own pleasure above the care and needs of children.

And God uses this as an example of their sin. Their complete apathy against God. But why does this matter? Why does it matter that the nations have done this?

This was common practice in that day amongst enemy nations. So why should the people of God be treated any differently? Well the key is in verses 2 and 3, God says the word my five times.

These are not just any people God says, but they are my inheritance, my people Israel, my people, my land, my people. What the nations have done against Israel, they have done against God himself.

The sins of the nations are how they treated and dealt with God's people because they bear his name. They are his representatives on earth.

[7 : 58] And what the nations have done against them, they've done against God. Now we get this idea, don't we? Historically, this has been true for years and years, even in medieval Britain.

If you were to attack a soldier or a god of the king, it would be seen as a direct attack on the king himself. And we see this in the New Testament. As Saul on the road to Damascus, Jesus appears to him in Acts chapter 9.

You can look that up later. Jesus appears to Saul and what does he say? Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting my church? No. He says, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?

That's the same idea here. The identity of the church is bound up with its head, Jesus Christ. And Israel's identity is bound up with God.

The people of Israel bear the name of God and the attacks on them are a result of the nation's hatred of God. Their actions reveal their sinful hearts.

[9 : 05] It is all an outward example of their attitude towards God. And in verse 4, God says that he will repay them according to their deeds.

Now some have said that God's judgment and justice is harsh or unjustified. But looking at the charges that he brings against the nations, looking at their actions and the punishment that God deems fit, I don't think that anyone can say God's judgment is harsh.

Because God's judgment is simply him returning on their own heads what they have done to him. He is giving them over to their sin.

The nations that are mentioned in this passage, I think, are representatives of all the enemies of God. And they will be brought before the Lord on that final day and they will be judged.

The nations are called to war, called to gather their armies, called to turn their farming tools into weapons and fight. Now the nations, as they hear this message, they're probably thinking that they're going to go and fight against the Lord himself.

[10 : 17] Have a good old army against army. But they're being called to come to this valley and to listen. Listen to the verdict that will be delivered from the throne as God sits and delivers his verdict on the valley of Jehoshaphat, the valley of God's judgment.

And verse 14, multitudes, multitudes have gathered in the valley of decision, but the decision in question is not theirs to make. It is God who will make the decision concerning their future.

These multitudes have not gathered to make a decision, but they've gathered to hear one. And in verse 15 to 16, you can see the universality of this judgment.

It will not go unnoticed. Everybody will know what is happening. The sun and moon will be darkened as God's verdict rings out across the valley of decision.

The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. The earth will tremble as the voice of the Lord declares his destruction on the nations for their deeds against his people.

[11 : 35] Sabina, my wife, and I just spent four days in the mountains hiking in Austria. And every day there was a thunderstorm and we were unlucky and one day we got caught on the mountainside in this huge thunderstorm.

storm. And as we walked in the rain you could hear every single footstep you made. You could hear all the birds in the trees trying to find that one dry spot that was left.

Every living thing on the mountainside was looking for refuge from this storm. It was loud but there was only one thing that could cover all of that noise and that was the thunder.

As soon as you heard the thunder everything else was drowned out. And as we walked together we were saying how this thunder makes us think about the greatness of God and his might.

Hearing that made us praise God. And that's just normal thunder. But I think the poetic language that Joel is using here is pointing us to see that thunder gets your attention.

[12 : 40] And it's God's thunder so it's not just going to be a little crackling in the sky. This is a thunder which will shake the very foundation of the earth. And hearing such a thunder will either make you fear God or it will comfort you because you know that he is your heavenly father.

The day of the Lord has not happened yet. It is a future event for us today. And so think back to that question we started with. Are you living in light of the end?

The end of the story for the nations for the enemies of God is that they will be judged. God will sit on his throne and deliver his verdict of guilty.

And he will punish them in a just and right way. This has a significant meaning for you this morning if you are here and you are not a Christian. God will gather the whole world before his throne and his verdict will be given and punishment will come on those who have rejected God.

Are you living in light of that end? Take time today to think about what God's verdict will be over your life as you stand today.

[14 : 06] Will you take time to consider how you stand before God? How if you are not you are rejecting God? Think about it. Every person naturally stands guilty before God.

Each of us naturally rejects God. We want to live lives our own way according to what we see fit. But that life will lead us to rejecting God and being given the verdict of guilty on that final day.

And for Christians this morning, God through the prophet Joel is calling Israel to proclaim to the nations that this is the future that awaits them. Do we do that?

Do we proclaim to the world that this is the end that is coming? Do we warn them that one day God will make a decision about their lives? this is part of the message that we've been given to proclaim to the world.

This is the message that they need to hear because God will decide and he can either deliver punishment or he can be a refuge. In this short book of Joel the message that God has been crying out to his people is return to me, repent and I'll take you back.

[15 : 31] The message that Jesus preached in the New Testament is repent and believe because the kingdom of God is at hand. That is the message we have to proclaim to the world. Are we living in light of the end?

Are we proclaiming that there is an end and it is coming? We don't know when but it is coming. But there is still time to repent and turn to God even now.

the second thing that this passage says is what God says to his people verses 16b to verse 21 what God says to his people.

Now the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for his people Israel. That is an amazing truth. In their day of calamity, in their times of suffering, in their needs, when the world is shaking and the enemies seem to be prevailing against them, God calls them to look to the end and see that he will be their ultimate refuge.

He will be their shelter. He will guard them and protect them from judgment. On that final day there will be only one place to hide. There will be only one place of refuge and that is in the Lord God himself.

[16 : 56] And the promise that once God's decision is made and the nations are being judged, the promise to the people of God is that they will know him and that they will dwell with him in Zion.

You see that in the end of verse 17. Now the language of Zion is referring to what we call the new creation, the time where God will dwell with his people forever.

There will be no more sin, no more pain, no more suffering, no more enemies of God. God and his people will dwell in perfect harmony. For all those who put their trust in God, he will be your final refuge.

Doesn't that give you courage as you suffer in this world which hates God? Imagine the relief that the people of Israel must feel.

Maybe they still remember the hunger pains from the locust plague in Joel chapter 1. They still remember the destruction so vividly. But now the God who loves them, who called them out, has promised them complete restoration and peace.

[18 : 12] God dwells with his people and what does the end of verse 17 say? Jerusalem will be holy. God will be made holy.

God recreates this broken and corrupt world and makes it completely new. God's people will also be transformed and we will be made holy.

God isn't just saying I'm going to give you a nice place for my people to hang out for the rest of their lives. I'm not just going to set them up for life but God is saying that humanity's ultimate problem of sin and separation from God will be eradicated.

God's people will be holy and perfect. This holiness will never be achieved on this side of Jesus' return. But once he returns and gathers his people to himself, they will dwell with God.

It's an amazing truth. The language points us to Revelation chapter 21 where I'll read a few verses. You can look it up later on. Revelation 21 says this, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth.

[19 : 25] For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. There was no longer any sea. I saw a holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people and he will dwell with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain for the old order of things had passed away.

Breathtaking. God is the one who will make this new place holy. How? Because he himself will dwell there.

A holy people will live holy lives, living in a holy place because it is the very dwelling place of the most holy God. Nothing unclean will enter this new Jerusalem or Zion.

[20 : 36] Jerusalem. This place is not for anything or anyone who has not been made holy by God, but only for those who have been made holy by believing in him.

Only those who have accepted Jesus Christ and been forgiven through his sacrificial death on the cross will be able to dwell with God. The only way to heaven is through Jesus, the Son of God who died, meaning that undeserving sinners like you and like me, can be made right with God.

And this holiness leads to satisfaction in verse 18. This new place in the presence of God is a picture of abundance.

Nobody is lacking, but God will provide and you see that in the poetic language that's used. The mountains will drip new wine, the hills will flow with milk, the ravines will run with water.

This is such a contrast to the devastation that was caused by the locust plague in Joel chapter 1. God will restore all things and his blessings will be abundant.

[21 : 53] Now this isn't the kind of false satisfaction that our world offers and loves today. Today people find fleeting satisfaction in jobs, in houses, in relationships, in money, and the list goes on and on and on.

But the minute those things are taken away, people feel empty. People feel lacking. But on that final day, God, people will be made right with God.

There is no greater satisfaction than for your creator, the God who knows you, the God who loves you, the God who saves you, and who truly knows what you need.

He will satisfy your very soul. That longing you feel when a loved one dies. That feeling of disappointment when someone lets you down.

That anger as you work and work and work but your boss doesn't notice and doesn't reward. God will be gone. The satisfaction that this covenant-keeping God promises his people is completely out of this world.

[23 : 08] We can't even begin to imagine what it is like. But it will be glorious. And that is what the end looks like for God's people. And all of this abundance finds its root in God himself.

All of this blessing, all of this holiness and satisfaction, all of this perfection and purity is rooted in God. The faithful, covenant-keeping God who is a refuge for his people.

God will dwell with his people. They will be holy and they will be satisfied and they will be different. Verses 19 to 21. They describe the contrast between those who are the people of God and those who aren't.

Egypt will be desolate. Edom, a desert place. There will be no life. They will be destroyed. These cities are mentioned as representatives of all the enemies of God and that is the end that awaits those who reject God.

The enemies of God are contrasted with this picture of perfection that the people of God will enjoy. Nations will be judged based on their dealings with the people of God and they will be destroyed and left empty but Judah, on the other hand, will be inhabited forever.

[24 : 34] Jerusalem, through all generations. Again, this is prophetic and poetic language for the new creation where God will dwell with his people. This is not speaking about the actual city of Jerusalem but it refers to the new Jerusalem that we see in Revelation chapter 21.

God's message to his people is that he will be their refuge. An old hymn speaks about God as a refuge with these words. Rock of ages cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Let the water and the blood from thy wounded side which flowed be of sin the double cure. Save from wrath and make me pure. And the promise that ends this book of Joel is marvelous.

God dwells in Zion. That is what the end looks like for the people of God. And as we draw to a close this morning, let me ask again, are you living in light of the end?

Maybe you've never heard this before. But this is the end that the Bible says is coming. This is the end that Jesus said was coming and this is the end that deep down we all long for.

[25 : 56] We want justice to be given. We want the wrong things of this world to be made right. But in that cry for justice, we cannot forget where we stand.

The end that Joel foretells is the end that is still to come. God will either be your judge or your refuge.

Who will he be for you on that day? Allow me to be direct this morning. Where do you stand with God? Where do you stand with God?

There is always a response to the message of God. There is either a hunger to know more or there is a hatred and a rejection of that message.

And as we are gathered here this morning, are you rejecting God or is he your refuge? This is not a decision you should take lightly. Nor is it a matter that you should put off for the future me.

[27 : 01] There is no time to lose. We do not know when Jesus will come back. But when he does, God will sit and judge the world. There will be no more time to reconsider your stance before God. This morning, will you look to God for your refuge?

Or will you continue to reject? Or maybe you are here and you are a Christian. Are you looking forward and living in light of that final day?

See, these are not just some pleasant ideas that God spoke to his people to keep them going, to spur them on. This is the reality that awaits you as a child of God.

This is the end that is awaiting you. The God who knows you, who created you, who loves you, who saves you, will dwell with you. Isn't that glorious news?

Isn't that news that we can all get excited about? Isn't that the reality reality that we want other people to join in with and be a part of? Joel 3 sets out the end of the story of this world, but the beginning of the story of eternity.

[28 : 15] For Christians, that is an eternity spent with God. For those who reject God, it is an eternity of judgment. judgment. Do we think about this as we sit having dinner with our friends?

If this is the glorious future that we look forward to, what is holding us back from declaring it to the world? If this is the severity of judgment that we know is coming, what is holding us back from telling people and warning them?

Now, I ask myself these questions just as much as I ask you because I am just as nervous when it comes to sharing the gospel with somebody. But if we have such good news to share, we'd be selfish to keep it to ourselves.

And if we know that this is the severity of judgment that is coming, then we need to warn people. Penn Jillette, a famous American magician, comedian, and outspoken atheist, says that he doesn't respect people who do not proselytize.

And I'll quote him. He says this, how much do you have to hate someone not to proselytize? How much do you have to hate someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that?

[29 : 38] I mean, if I believe beyond the shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming at you and you didn't believe it, and that truck was bearing in on you, there is a certain point where I just tackle you.

And this is more important than that. This is the future that the Bible teaches. This is the future that awaits all people, and this is the future that we have to proclaim to the world.

As a Christian this morning, look at that glorious promise at the end of verse 21 and know that that is your future. As a child of God, you will live together with God in the new Jerusalem, in the new heavens and new earth.

All sin, gone. All impurity, gone. All pain, gone. Your future is holy, pure, everlasting, satisfaction and peace with God.

These are the two ends that await every single human being in this world. world. A valley of decision or a tower of refuge. Can you stand in a few moments as we sing this song and say and sing these words knowing that they are true for you?

[31 : 00] It is well with my soul. Can you stand and sing my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more.

Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord. Oh my soul. If you cannot say that, take time today to think about how you stand before God.

Let's pray together. Just in the silence of your own hearts for a minute or so let's think about how we stand before God.

Think about how we are living in light of the end. Is God your refuge this morning or will you be standing in the valley of decision?

If you'd like to speak about anything that has been said this morning or sung or read feel free to grab anyone who's been up front. I'll be standing at the door as you leave.

[32 : 22] We'd love to pray for you and to speak with you. Heavenly Father we thank you so much that you tell the world who you are through your word.

Lord we thank you that you offer us the opportunity to find our refuge in you on that final day. Lord we acknowledge the cost that that was for your son Jesus Christ.

And Lord with all our hearts we thank you. In his name. Amen.