

CCH Sermon 16th June 2019 Joel 3

V16. PRAY.

▲ If you ever want to know what to do in a shark attack, [this](#) is your book. Bear Grylls has written the ultimate survival guide for any situation. It contains advice for any crisis, be it a bear attack, nuclear fallout or avalanche. Who knew... apparently if an aggressive shark is circling you, swim towards it confidently, it will hopefully turn away scared at the last minute! I'm not sure I want to try it!

But more seriously. What does **God** say we are to do in a crisis? It's a very relevant question, because though we don't face shark attacks very often, each of us from time to time in life will find ourselves in a personal, local or even national crisis. The most common are probably family or relationship breakdowns, or a financial or health crisis. But occasionally they can be war, epidemics, natural disaster.

Well hundreds of years BC the people of God faced the crisis of a massive locust plague. And at that time God spoke through Joel. We could recap his message to them and to us in four phrases (some of them we have used in the series, some are new)...

1) **TAKE STOCK**. Joel calls the people to mourn the situation that has come on the land because of their sin and selfishness. That's the first stage. Take stock. Maybe part of the reason for this crisis is your fault. Well own up to it and look your wrongdoing in the face.

2) **TAKE HEED**. 5 times in this book Joel refers us to the "Day of the Lord". He says, if you think the locusts are bad, just wait for the day when God brings ultimate judgement to planet earth. The day when Jesus returns. Be warned and Take Heed! God is just and there will be a day of punishment, of which our disasters are just a foretaste. Jesus teaches there is a hell, as well as a heaven, and therefore...

3) **TAKE ACTION**. We are to return to the Lord. Not just with empty words, but with our hearts, coming back to the Lord who is gracious and compassionate, turning from wrongdoing, and turning to the God who can restore and forgive.

Those sum up weeks 1 & 2. Last week we saw that as the people pray to God, the book changes tune at 2:18 from judgement to hope, with what we could sum up as...

4) **TAKE COURAGE**. Wonderfully for God's repentant people, God promises 4 things....

Last week we saw he promises **A) Restoration** an end to all the devastation (that may begin in this life, but it will certainly happen in the new heaven that he is preparing for all who trust Jesus).

We also saw that with the coming of the Holy Spirit, starting at Pentecost he promises **B) Renewal**, a time when all of God's people will communicate effectively for God to believers and unbelievers. Not adding to the Bible, but powerfully communicating its message to believers and unbelievers as his messengers. Pentecost is also proof that we are in the last stage of history, with Jesus returning soon.

Well [today](#) we will see two more promises for God's repentant people. One is still a blessing but it's more sobering, and the other is more positive. In chapter 3 God promises **C) Retribution** and he promises **D) Relationship**.

[You can pick up that diagram from the welcomers on the way out].

So let's **take courage** as we look at these things in chapter 3 today. If we are turning back to the Lord, 1) we can have confidence that all the wrong done against us will be judged, and 2) we can look forward to a safe future with God.

1) Retribution. The Lord promises vengeance on his enemies (v1-16)

▲ I wonder if anyone remembers those bumper stickers from the 80s. "My other car is a ferrari", or "Baby on Board"- rather dangerous, because you had to drive really close to read them.

Well there was an Italian [version](#) "You toucha my car, I smasha your face". Not very subtle, and usually stuck on an old rust bucket with a few bumps already. But the sentiment was clear. "This is MY car. I love it. Don't think you can touch it and not offend me".

Well God has the same sentiment with his people. "These are MY people, I love them. Don't think you can touch them and not offend me". There will be retribution. It's **PAYBACK** language.

V1-2 God is going to repay the enemies who have mistreated his people. What have they done? First, Scattered God's people. God is gathering his people in rescue, and these nations are working against that. So on the day when he restores his people, he will meet the other nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat- the valley of judgement. It's picture language for a decisive battle, because when two opponents meet in a valley only one will win- there's no escape.

V3 is horrendous. People are precious. They should never be trafficked- bought and sold. There are some great projects today working to "Stop the Traffik", and I've put two links on the "dig deeper" handout on the door and on our website.

What is horrible about v3 is that with the roll of the dice some of God's people were bought and sold just to buy prostitutes or alcohol. Like what we are seeing coming out of the charity commission's Oxfam report it's utterly unacceptable.

Well this had happened to God's people, and he will not stand it, just as Jesus said whatever you did to the least of his people you did to him. So even those nations who had sent God's people rightly into captivity for *their* own sin, would have payback time v4-8.

And from PAYBACK language, now in verses 9-16 God uses very strong **WAR** language. V9. V10- that's a reversal of what happens in Isaiah 2 and Micah 4, when agricultural equipment gets turned into weaponry. We could say "turn your tractors into tanks".

God is going to declare war on his enemies, and they are going to be utterly annihilated. It's a good thing the battle scene isn't explicit.

Revelation 14 picks up v13's analogy of a winepress. 'The grapes of wrath'. Except there what flows out of the winepress is not wine but blood, because the people are being judged by God. It's horrific imagery, and it's supposed to be. V14-16a. It's a Decisive battle._

I wonder what you make of this very sobering judgement language?

Maybe you say, well this is the Old Testament. "*We all know the OT God is a God of wrath and the NT God is a god of love*". Well not so fast. All Scripture is God breathed- so all of this is still God's word which still applies. And Old Testament AND new speak consistently about both God's holy hatred of evil, and at the same time, his wonderful grace and mercy. Like a stick of rock, from start to finish the Bible proclaims the same message of rescue through judgement. Jesus proclaimed the bad news of hell as well as the good news of heaven, and so should we.

And actually if you think about it, judgement is good news. It is a good thing that God takes justice seriously. It's a horrendous thing when those who perpetrate evil against others get away with it. But they won't. Because God is going to judge every deed that has happened. Injustices won't fade with time, or get forgotten. They aren't cancelled away when people die.

Sarah will soon be travelling to South Korea for her "muskathlon" to raise money and awareness of the persecuted church in North Korea. Do you know that over there the first thing parents must teach children to say is "Thank you Father Kim Il- Sung"? Do you know that if you just own a Bible in North Korea you can go to labour camp and never come out? Believing that Jesus the Highest power and not the Kim family can bring persecution even death. So actually isn't it good news that God will judge those who oppose his people?

And if you have been abused or subject to injustice, you will be glad that God sees with absolute clarity, and he will bring judgement. Those who think they can trample on the poor or the vulnerable and get away with it will get their comeuppance. The Lord promises vengeance. All wrongs will be righted

But I suppose that if we are all honest, we are all a mixture of both victim and perpetrator. We have been sinned against, but we have also sinned against others. Have we always treated those near us, or under us with complete integrity?

It's another reminder from Joel to make sure we are on the right side. To turn from our sin to Jesus. To put things right. None of us will be saved because we have lived innocent lives. We will be saved because (2:32), we call on the Lord Jesus for mercy, which he loves to give.

So yes, Take courage. Perhaps in the coming years we too will be persecuted far more than we are for our faith and for our beliefs. We must never retaliate, but should we lose freedoms, preference, jobs, even face being ostracised or imprisoned for Christ, we know it will not be forgotten by the Lord.

These are sobering words, but for those who have turned from sin to receive Jesus' free rescue they help us take courage.

1) The Lord promises Retribution (vengeance on his enemies).

Well we move now from the dark valley to the bright mountain. From the sobering news, to the wonderful news.

2) The Lord promises relationship (Safety for his people).

Look at the turnaround that begins halfway through verse 16.

V16b.

We've had horrendous language of judgement, and none of us should read of judgement without **trembling**. And none of us should read of judgement coming on others without **tears** in our eyes.

BUT... As so often is the case in the Bible, alongside the dark, (the valley), there is also the light (the sunshine on the hill).

And so let's now go up to Jerusalem, up in the mountains. Not a place in the middle East, but ultimately to the New Jerusalem, heaven!

V17

It's a picture of safety isn't it? God's city Jerusalem being a refuge, stronghold, with no more invasions, but best of all the place where God lives.

And the book of revelation picks up this language speaking of the new Jerusalem coming down to us that we will be part of.

No more suffering, no more sadness, no more sickness, no more separation. No more locusts. No more cancer. No more injustice. No more debt. No more broken families. No more wheelchairs. No more divorce. No more homelessness. No more abuse. No more trafficking. No more dictators. No more fear that if you say something Christian in the office, you may get into trouble.

The picture in verse 18 is one of complete abundance. V18.

What a picture of plenty and complete restoration, after the picture of ruin that we saw after the locusts in chapter 1. And I suppose that when Jesus turned gallons of water into the quality and quantity finest wine, it was the beginning of these prophecies being fulfilled.

God will bless his people with abundance. Heaven is not going to be boring. Disembodied spirits floating around on clouds in nighties. It's going to be a physical new creation. A beautiful place with a beautiful banquet with the finest food and wine, but without all the normal problems that come from overeating and overdrinking! In fact, Communion is a tiny foretaste of that banquet that we look forward to.

Then there's a recap of some of the judgement on the nations v19. (shocking that the Nile valley- one of the most fertile places is now desolate).

And then there's the promise of security & justice v19-20a.

But the book ends with the note of presence. A safe home with God.

V21b: the Lord dwells in Zion.

The best thing about heaven is that God will be there.

Don't miss that in verse 16 and v17 also.

- The Lord will be a refuge for his people
- I the Lord your god dwell in Zion.
- The Lord dwells in Zion.

The Bible begins with a marriage and ends with a marriage.

It's the story of God wooing his unholy people and entering into a relationship with them. In his pure grace he wants to be with us. He wants to live with us. He loves us.

▲ When I was around 10 I had a friend who stayed for the holidays and he brought his two Beatles tapes. We listened to them over and over again. And I noticed that nearly every song was about relationships.

- All my loving
- Eight days a week, I love you
- Michelle, ma belle
- I once knew a girl, or should I say she once knew me
- Help I need somebody.

Being in love- relationships. Now as a 10 year old boy I wasn't very interested in that. But as I grew up, I discovered that actually we all want to be loved. We all love relationships. And how sad and lonely we would be without parents, children, brothers, sisters, friends, husbands, wives, buddies.

Do you know God wants to take us home with us and live with us!

Revelation 21, *"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"*.

God is preparing a wonderful future for his people. A marriage relationship. A perfect relationship.

- What wonderful good news for anyone struggling with a *break up*. God's love is never going to end.
- What wonderful news for anyone struggling with *bereavement*. God's love is never going to go away.

- What wonderful news for anyone struggling with *singleness*. God's love is real. We will not miss out, even if we feel we are missing out now. We're never alone, and we won't be in eternity.

"We belong to the day, to the day that is to come. Strong as a mighty rock, our refuge in the coming wrath, the heart of the bride belongs to Jesus"

So **take courage**. That's the take home message today.

Take Stock, Take Heed, Take Action.

As you take bread and wine today do that.

But then **take courage**.

Hear these promises that are yours in Jesus Christ.

Jesus took the curses for our sin on himself so that we might look forward to dwelling with him, by the Spirit now, and in person at the banquet table of heaven soon.

Let's pray.