

(Joel) Come, Let Us Return to the Lord

by David Guzik

God promises restoration to his people, even in the midst of judgment, and ultimately pours out His Spirit on all flesh, marking a new covenant relationship with Him.

Duration: 57:52

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13, Joel 2:21, Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:42-47

Topics: "End Times", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the urgency of making a decision for Jesus Christ. He believes that the end times are near, as evidenced by the current political, economic, and social conditions aligning with biblical prophecies. The preacher also discusses the importance of being filled with the Spirit of God and the role of ministers in equipping the saints for ministry. He references the prophecy of Joel, which speaks of wonders in the heavens and cataclysmic signs that will accompany the great and awesome day of the Lord. The preacher concludes by highlighting God's judgment on those who mistreat His people and the need for repentance.

Transcript

As we begin in Joel chapter 2 tonight, we're going to catch it in the middle of the chapter, starting at verse 21. The book of Joel is a little bit too much for us to take in one night, so we split it up right in the middle of chapter 2. Now, we should remind ourselves of sort of the setting of the prophet Joel. We don't know exactly when he performed his prophetic ministry.

Last week, we offered forth a few speculations. But we do know that he ministered at a time when a tremendous plague of locusts had devastated the land of Judah. Joel focuses his remarks to the southern kingdom of Judah.

He doesn't really make mention of the northern kingdom of Israel at all. But a plague of locusts had come and devastated the land of Judah. Well, in the midst of that, Joel speaks to the nation about the plague of locusts.

There was also a drought that had come upon the land. And so he tries to tell them to see the hand of God in the midst of the plague of the locusts, in the midst of the drought, and to repent before God and to get right with him. Especially because, Joel says, if you think this is bad, there's a worse thing coming along the way.

There's an army coming that will judge the land if you do not repent. Now, towards the end of the section that we looked at last time, God began to give glimmers of hope, the kind of restoration he would build in the land of Judah if they would repent. And now, verse 21 picks up on that theme.

The blessing of restoration that God would give to his repentant people. We read, verse 21, Fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things. Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up and the tree bears its fruit.

The fig tree and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully. And he will cause the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month.

The threshing floor shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil. So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. The crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust.

My great army, which I sent among you, you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied. And praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never be put to shame.

Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God, and there is no other. My people shall never be put to shame. Now put yourself in the sandals of a citizen of the nation of Judah at that time.

There they are in the southern kingdom, and the farmer looks out upon his fields, and is absolutely devastated because of the plague of locusts. We discussed this last week of how complete the devastation locusts can bring. And how his fields are turned just to stubble.

The nice grove of olive trees that he had over across the hill, they're stripped bare. He looks around, and where once there were green stalks of wheat growing up, and beautiful olive trees, now it is just barren. Absolutely barren.

And if that wasn't bad enough, there's been a drought. And so the ground is hard, and there's cracks in it. And he looks up and he says, God, there's nothing for me.

You can't just go and get a job in that culture. You can't go into some factory in Tel Aviv. There's no such thing.

If you don't grow your own food, there's not much you can do. So he looks up to the God of heaven, and he says, what can I do, God? And God says to the prophet Joel, repent. Repent, and I'll restore.

And look at how beautifully God says he'll restore. I mean, he begins with the land. First of all, he says, verse 21, fear not, O land, be glad and rejoice.

It's as if God first speaks to the land, and he says, okay, land, I'm going to bless you, because my people have repented. And then he talks to the beasts of the field. Hey, you cattle, you oxen, you sheep, don't worry about it.

Because the drought and the locust plague has hurt them as well. He goes, don't worry about it, my people have repented. I'm going to restore there as well.

And so in this, all this, Joel looks forward to the restoration that God has promised. And he tells Judah to look forward in faith and to praise God for the restoration he promises. He's trying to increase the faith of his people so that they can praise him for the restoration God will bring to his repentant people even before they see the restoration.

Isn't it a beautiful principle that we need to be able to thank God and have confidence in him even before we can see it with our own eyes? You're able to trust him. And he says, if you notice here, he says the open pasture are springing up and the tree bears its fruit. That's there in verse 22.

You see, with the eye of faith, Joel can already see it happening. All around him are the lush, fruitful pastures and the trees that God has restored after the destruction of the locust. But he sees it with the eye of faith.

He sees the rain coming down, the former rain and the latter rain. You see, in all the destruction that God brought upon the land, it wasn't only the locust. There was also a terrible drought.

And unless God answered with rain from heaven, there was nothing they could do. You see, my friends, they had no irrigation in ancient Israel. If the former rains and the latter rains didn't fall, the former rains fell around seed time.

The latter rains fattened up the grain right before harvest. The former and the latter rains together did a beautiful work in preparing the harvest to be received by the people. God says, oh, I'll restore those.

And Joel sees it all with the eye of faith. And he has this beautiful passage, verse 24, where he looks at the threshing floors and they're full of wheat. And the vats are overflowing with new wine and oil.

And God says it will be fulfilled what he promises in verse 25. Take a look here. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten.

God promises to restore what was taken away in chastisement. Now, you know what? When the locust did their work, it looked complete and final. I mean, that field that was once beautiful, tall, green stalks of wheat.

Just look, it's going to be a beautiful crop this year. Now it's absolutely desolate. The locust did an amazing, destructive work.

And God says, I'm going to restore that. I'll restore the years that the swarming locust have eaten. Don't you think it's interesting how he says it? He doesn't say that he'll restore the crops.

He says he'll restore the years. And in one sense, you say, how can you restore the years? You can't restore time that passes away. The locust didn't eat years.

They ate crops. But I think there's two reasons why God says this. First of all, it is because the time seemed to be wasted.

Can you imagine that poor Israeli farmer? There he is, working hard to cultivate the land, to plant the crops. And it starts growing up, and he's done all the great job. Every day he walks through the fields with a hoe, looking for weeds, anything that might grow up that might damage the crops.

And he's setting up things all around, scarecrows and protective measures, everything he can do. And then in one day, boom, a swarm of locusts comes along. It takes everything.

He says, all my time was wasted. All of it. It's all wasted.

I put forth all this effort, all this work. And God, you allowed it just to be wasted. And God said, no, I won't allow it to be wasted.

I'll restore those years. I think there's another reason why God says, I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. God wants us to gather application from this that's much bigger than locusts in years.

Look back on your life, and do you think that there were wasted years? No, in a sense, maybe they were wasted. But God says, I'll restore those to you. I'll redeem those for you.

I'll bring a beautiful restoration in the midst of them. Now, I say that can be true of the years you lived before you knew Jesus Christ. Maybe you lived them in such wastefulness, in such sin and distraction and foolishness.

God says, I can bring a glorious redemption in those things. But I want you to know, too, that it even counts for the years that right now you're following the Lord. Maybe you're stuck in a backslidden or obstinate state before God.

Yes, at time or tune, I have known Christians to be stubborn and obstinate. Sometimes I look at one in the mirror every morning. And you say, Lord, just stuck in this place, you know, what a waste.

And God says, no, I'll show you that I even have precious things to give to your life in the midst of that time. It's no wasted time. There never needs to be wasted time in the life of a child of God.

Sometimes people talk about God putting them up on the shelf. Well, God has a shelf for a purpose. It's not wasted time.

It's beautiful work that he wants to do in a life at that time. You can't have back your time. But there's a strange and wonderful way in which God can give back to you the wasted blessing, the unripened fruits of the years over which you've mourned.

That fruit, that harvest from wasted years, it can still be yours. How many of us need to get down on knees before God? Maybe this is you tonight before you sleep. God, restore to my life the years that the locusts have eaten.

My own sin, my own foolishness led me astray from you, God. And I see all the damage that it brought into my life. God, it's as if I come and bring to you a huge, tangled ball of string and I lay it down before you and say, untangle it, God.

God says, I'll do it. I'll untangle it. You yield it to me.

You really give that ball of string to me. See, oftentimes what we do, if we want to continue on with that analogy, we want to hold on to that ball of string very tightly in our own hands. And while it's tightly in our own hands, we say, God, untangle it.

Untangle it. Come on, God. Here, here it is.

It's all tangled, God. He says, well, you're not giving it to me. Let go of it and then I'll untangle it.

I'll restore to you the years the locusts have eaten. You think that you're stuck in certain places in your life. That there just can't be any change in it.

That's just the way you are. And that's the excuse you give other people, too. Well, that's just the way I am.

God says, I'll bring restoration. Nothing looks more completely destroyed than a field that the locusts have eaten. God says, I can restore that, too.

Our God is a marvel of restoration. But then there's an ultimate restoration that he wants to bring. Look at it here in verse 28.

It shall come to pass afterward that I shall pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams.

Your young men shall see visions. And also on my menservants and on my maidservants. I will pour out my spirit in those days.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth. Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.

And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in the Mount Zion in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the Lord has said, among the remnant whom the Lord calls. Now, Joel has spoken of a beautiful work of restoration that God would do in restoring the years that the locust has eaten.

But that's not the end of God's work of restoration. As a matter of fact, the work that Joel prophesied here, which I believe the people of Judah saw because it seems that they did repent and God did restore. He's saying, listen, as much as I told you in judgment, you haven't seen anything yet.

So God says, when it comes to my restoration, you haven't seen anything yet. I'm going to bring a greater restoration, a greater outpouring, a greater healing than you ever knew possible. And when will it come? Well, he says right there in verse 28, it shall come to pass afterward.

In the later times, after these things that Joel is talking about, after the restoration Joel spoke of previously in the chapter, there will come a time of ultimate restoration and blessing. And this latter time will be marked by an outpouring of God's spirit on all flesh. Not only selected men and women at selected time for selected duties, but the Holy Spirit of God would be poured out, poured out upon all flesh.

The Old Testament has a rich record of the work of the Holy Spirit, but he was not poured out upon all flesh until the new covenant came. Under the old covenant, the Holy Spirit was never poured out upon all flesh. You see, instead, under the old covenant, certain men were filled with the spirit at certain times and only for certain duties.

When you take out your concordance or your Bible search program on your computer and just look up how the phrase, they were filled with the spirit or the spirit came upon them. Look at how that phrase is used in the Old Testament. It's not a very big list.

You've got Joseph. You've got the craftsmen who built the temple. They are the tabernacle.

They were filled with the spirit of God. Joshua was filled with the spirit of God. The Judge Othniel was filled with the spirit of God.

The Judge Gideon, the Judge Jephthah, the Judge Samson. Saul was filled with the spirit of God. David was filled with the spirit of God.

Although we're not told, we suppose that the prophets, most of them, but I mean, it's a short list, folks. It's not a lot of people. It's not a lot of situation.

In that setting, God said, well, here's a man or here's a woman. They have a specific duty to do. I'm going to give them a specific outpouring of the spirit so that they can do that job.

But now it's a completely different situation in the promise that Joel gives. Here, Joel looks forward to the glorious new covenant when the spirit of God would be poured out on all flesh. Why look at it there, even your sons and your daughters, even your old men and even your young men would be filled with the spirit of God.

I don't think the emphasis is on sons and daughters or old men and young men. Although for many of us, we'd say, well, that's glorious enough. Lord, fill my sons, fill my daughters with your Holy Spirit.

But no, the real emphasis is on your. God says your sons and daughters, your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see vision.

It's going to happen for everybody. It's going to happen for all who call upon the name of the Lord. Now, you know when this was fulfilled, don't you? This was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the disciples gathered in the upper room in Jerusalem.

They were waiting for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit that Jesus promised would come. And when that outpouring of the Holy Spirit came, there were 120 followers of Jesus gathered together in an upper room. And as the Holy Spirit fell upon them, an absolutely unique manifestation of tongues of fire appearing to rest upon each head.

Then they began to speak and to praise God in other tongues, languages that they had never heard before. They began to declare the great works of God. They didn't know these languages.

They didn't even know what they themselves were saying. But God was granting to them a glorious release of the spirit, giving them a vocabulary to worship God and to exalt him and to praise him that went beyond their own intellect, but was a deep level of spiritual communication with God. And as they began to do this with happiness and joy, 120 people together, well, Jerusalem was crowded at the time because of the Feast of Pentecost.

And so a crowd quickly gathered because of the commotion. They had never heard anything like this before. And those who heard the disciples speak in these miraculous languages, they began to mock them, which doesn't surprise us.

You pulse and pulse as to exactly what would happen. The unbeliever comes and sees the church all speaking in tongues. He's going to think, well, they're mad.

And that's exactly what happened on the day of Pentecost. But Peter stood up and boldly set them straight because the mockers said that they were drunk. And Peter says, no, no, not at all.

They're not drunk at all. This is a fulfillment of Joel's great prophecy of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Maybe we should turn back to there.

Keep your finger here in the book of Joel, but turn back to Acts chapter two. I said turn back to Acts chapter two. I probably should have said turn forward because we're in the New Testament now, right after the Gospels.

We find the book of Acts. Let's start at verse one of chapter two. Now, when the day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing, mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues as a fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance.

Now, there were men dwelling in Jerusalem, Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together and were confused because everyone heard them speak in their own languages. They were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, Look, are we not all who speak these Galileans? And how is it that we hear each in our own language which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs.

We hear them, and look at what they said, speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God. So they were all amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, Whatever could this mean? Others, mocking, said, They're full of new wine. But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, Let this be known to you and heed my words, for these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day.

But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. It shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. And then he continues with that glorious prophecy.

You see, at first, any Jew listening to Peter at that day, declaring that these men were filled with the Holy Spirit, he would scoff. He said, A hundred and twenty followers of a crucified man being filled with the Holy Spirit? That's nonsense. We know from the Old Testament how people are filled with the Spirit.

Why, it's a king here and a prophet there and maybe a craftsman over there. You've never had a time where a hundred and twenty people at one time were all filled with the Holy Spirit? You're crazy, Peter. No, no, they would say God only pours out His Spirit on special people for special occasions.

He doesn't do it on common folk like these people. That Peter uses the prophecy of Joel to show them, you know what, things are different now. Now the Holy Spirit is being poured out upon all who will call upon His name.

Now the Holy Spirit is poured out on common folk who believe and receive. And God is offering a new covenant relationship with him. And the new covenant has as a vital part of it the outpouring of the Spirit to those who receive it by faith.

By the way, there's something else wonderful about this sermon of Peter's that I should mention. It also shows us that by his quotation of the prophet Joel and by his explanation of it, that there is never any disparity between the work of the Spirit and the work of the Word of God. You know, when Peter was filled with the Spirit of God in the midst of these miraculous signs and wonders as he had never experienced before, what did he do? He said, let's open up our Bibles to the book of Joel, chapter 2. He had a Bible study.

And you know what he did with that Bible study? He wasn't only speaking to the crowd. I believe as well he was speaking to his own 120 fellow disciples. They needed to understand from the Scriptures what was going on.

I'm sure when Peter shared it, well, that's right, Peter, this is it. We had the experience, but we didn't know what it meant. This is it.

This is the fulfillment. So Peter brilliantly taught the 120 disciples and he called the lost to salvation and thousands made a commitment to Jesus Christ on that day. You know what else is glorious about this message of Peter and how he quoted Joel on this day? It's how faithful Peter was to the Scriptures.

Peter's application was exactly the same as the application of the prophet Joel. Let's remember the context of what Joel says. This isn't just an isolated remark that he makes in the midst of his prophecy.

It has a flow coming all through the book. Remember what Joel said in chapter 2, verses 12 through 13. He said, now therefore says the Lord, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning, so rend your heart and not your garments.

Return to the Lord your God. That's the setting. That's the context of Joel's message.

Now look at what Peter says and how he applies this text from Joel. He says, Acts chapter 2, verse 38, repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. You see, Joel's statement was made in the context of a call to repentance and Peter said, well, this is the context.

Let's bring in the call for repentance as well. It was a beautiful, faithful exposition of the scriptures. You see, it's so precious back in Joel, how it says there in verse 28, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see visions.

Also on my men servants, not my maid servants. I will pour out my spirit in those days. You see, in this latter time, all the servants of the Lord are filled with his spirit in this unique and powerful way.

Under the new covenant, every believer can receive the full measure of the spirit and be used in a special and wonderful way. Many years ago, I had the privilege of traveling to the nation of Bulgaria and I was there with a team of pastors and they split us up and sent us all over the country to different churches. I was privileged to go to a fairly large Pentecostal church in a city called Yombo and there was about a thousand members to this church, which is exceedingly huge for a church in that area of the world.

And so there I was speaking and the pastor was a very wonderful man, a very kind man. And he says, well, we've got a guest. Of course, he was saying this in Bulgarian, but the translator clued me in on what he was saying.

He said, we've got a guest from America and he's not anybody famous like Billy Graham or he mentioned a few other famous names, but he's here to share the word for us also. And so I came up and I told the people, you know, I am not Billy Graham and I don't even know Billy Graham, but I'm filled with the same Holy Spirit that Billy Graham is filled with. Well, that's true of every believer, isn't it? We're all filled with the same Spirit of God.

It's not just a thing for a few isolated individuals. It's not like God has a few special favorites around that receive the Holy Spirit. And the rest of us, we just kind of have to schlep along the best we can.

No, it's not like that at all. No, no, it's an outpouring for everybody on the men servants, not the maidservants. But you see, let's remember why the infilling of the Holy Spirit comes.

Why? It's not just to grant to us a marvelous experience. That's not even the point of it at all. It's to do the work of representing Jesus Christ, transforming our lives, reaching a lost world.

And so that means if every person, if all the men servants and the maidservants are filled with the Spirit of God, then every one of them have a part in that duty, don't they? Well, you weren't filled with the Spirit of God for nothing. Just for your own jollies there, now were you. You were filled with it to do the work of the Lord.

As Jesus said, you'll be filled with power on high that you may be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and in the uttermost parts of the earth. You see, to be a witness of Jesus Christ. Sometimes the common churchgoer simply wants a building to worship in, a nice service that isn't too offensive, and a good sermon.

And after that, he sort of thinks, OK, now leave me alone. But that isn't New Covenant Christianity. That's not why you were filled with the Spirit of God.

New Covenant Christianity sees the work of the ministry belonging to the people, not to the clergy, to the menservants and the maidservants. It's right there in verse 29. Now, some people have taken this idea and run too far with it.

They've taken this wonderful principle, which you might call the priesthood of all believers. And they say, well, you know, we're all filled with the Spirit of God and the pastor isn't any more filled than I am or anybody else, so we don't need clergy, we don't need ministers. We don't have any room or any need for offices of any kind in the church.

Well, first of all, this ignores the clear teaching of Scripture, which tells us that the work of the ministry belongs to the people of God, but the work of equipping the saints for the work of ministry belongs to God-appointed offices. It is because the ministry belongs to all Christians that God has appointed offices and ministries to equip every saint to fulfill their role. And you know, Acts chapter 2 describes a wonderful fulfillment of that ideal.

Again, turn back there. Acts chapter 2. Look at how it works when the Spirit of God is equipping every person. When the menservants and the maidservants filled with the Spirit of God are ministering in this

beautiful, vital way.

Acts chapter 2, beginning at verse 42. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

Now all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people, and the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved. You can't read that without saying, Yes, Lord, that's how it should be.

Well, friends, it happens when the people are filled with the Spirit of God and when they say, I was filled with the Spirit of God for a reason. And with the God-appointed offices and ministers that God has given to the church when they're doing the job of equipping the saints to represent that ministry. So it's a beautiful, beautiful ideal set before us.

And that's not all that Joel speaks about. If you go back to Joel chapter 2 in verse 30, he also says, And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood.

You see, this time of great outpouring of the Spirit of God will culminate with the cataclysmic signs in the heavens of the great and awesome day of the Lord, as the prophet Joel calls it. You see, on the day of Pentecost, this prophecy from Joel was fulfilled, but not finished. It was fulfilled, but not consummated.

Peter rightly saw that this was a remarkable outpouring of the Spirit of God given freely upon all who believe and receive, as was promised under the new covenant. But the prophecy of Joel was also especially appropriate because the day of Pentecost had ushered in the last days. You see, now history moves along the edge of the consummation of all things, not rushing towards it as a distant point.

Let me explain to you again that little figure of speech. Many Christians sort of conceive as this time when Jesus Christ will rule and reign on earth as being somewhere off in the distant, as if it's a distant point off in the future. And history's been moving on a timeline towards that point ever since.

And on the day of Pentecost, well, that was 2,000 years ago on the timeline. And sometime in the future, that point is there, and we're moving towards it. I think that's the wrong way to visualize it.

I think the way to visualize it is history moving upon a line. Yes, it's moving upon that area. You see the line moving down in the timeline of history, all the way moving down up until the day of Pentecost.

Jesus ascends to heaven and sends the Holy Spirit down to the church, and then the timeline stops. And you know where it stops? It stops right on the brink. Right on the brink, as if it were the edge of a table.

And on the other side of that brink is the consummation of all things and the return of Jesus Christ in glory. And now that it's stopped right there, what does it do? Well, it starts moving along the edge. And yes, it's traveling on.

Time is traveling on. But it's on the edge. It's on the brink.

And at any moment, it can come. And that's what God has been doing for the last 2,000 years, and running it upon the brink. And we see now that we're teetering on the very, very corner of that brink, don't we? At any moment, Jesus Christ can come.

You see, this is a beautiful, beautiful promise given in the midst of all of this, as you noticed. Verse 32, Joel chapter 2. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. This is another glorious promise associated with the time Joel said shall come to pass afterward.

In this time of poured-out Spirit of God, salvation will no longer be a matter of association with national Israel. You won't have to become a citizen of Israel, so to speak, to become a child of God. No, instead, whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved, no matter what nation they come from.

This is a broad call, isn't it? Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Whoever. Whoever.

Well, that means you, and it means you, and it means everybody here. Everybody's included in the whoever. You ever wish sometimes that the Bible was more specific? You wish your name was written down in the Bible? You wish you could open up right here, and I would open it up, and there it says, and it says that if David Guzik calls on the name of the Lord, he shall be saved.

And I'd say, oh, that's so comforting, Lord. Oh, thank you, God. You've made it so clear to me.

That's for me. That's a promise for me. But then I'd instantly start thinking, well, now wait a minute here.

You see, I typed in my name on an Internet search, and I noticed I'm not the only David Guzik in the United States. Why, there's one who lives back east, and he runs triathlons, and he finishes pretty good in those. And there's another one who lives in the Midwest, and he's a chemist because he's winning some kind of award.

And there's another one still who's an author of some other kinds of books. There might be a dozen David Guzikis just in the United States just now. How do I know this is for me? Maybe it's for one of the other David Guzikis.

And God forbid, if your last name is Smith or Jones or something like that, then what do you do with it then? Well, you see, God says, I'm not going to make it come to that. When the scripture says, whoever, you can't shut yourself out of that. You belong to whoever.

It doesn't matter. You're one of the whoever. You call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved.

But what do you have to do? Well, there's an answer. You have to call unto God. That means prayer.

Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Well, you have to talk to God. You have to ask Him to save you.

It's not going to happen any other way. You have to come and humbly ask Him to bring His salvation to you. If you come to God in that sincere prayer of your heart, He will answer.

You know, you cannot perish praying. Nobody has ever perished praying. That would be an absolutely new thing in all of the universe.

If somebody were to perish, go to hell praying, a praying soul in hell is an utter impossibility. Can a man call upon God and be rejected by God? It can't happen. Whosoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

God won't change. He's promised that this is how it is. God would have to change His character entirely if He were to let a poor sinner call upon His name and refuse to hear Him.

No. Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. But then again, it's a call to come to the true God, isn't it? Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

See, my friends, you have to come to the Lord God, the covenant God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Coming to a false God, a God of your own imagination, it'll do you no good. The God of your own opinion does not exist.

He's a figment of your imagination, and He cannot save you. You have to come to the God of the Bible, the God who's perfectly revealed to us by the person of Jesus Christ. Charles Spurgeon said these memorable words.

He said, The pity of it is that most people in these days worship a God of their own invention. They do not make an image of clay or of gold, but they construct a deity in their minds according to their own thoughts. They proudly judge as to what God ought to be, and they will not receive God as He really is.

What is this but a God-making as gross as that which is performed by the heathen? What can be more wicked than to attempt to imagine a better God than the one true and living God? As the deity of your fancy has no existence, I would not recommend you to trust in Him. You've got to trust in the God who's there, the real God. But also, friends, it's a call to come to God intelligently.

He says, Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Do you know what the Bible means when it expresses the name of the Lord, or the name of anybody? It's speaking about the character and the nature of God. You see, by that one word, name, we understand the character of the Lord, the person of Him, His tremendous nature.

And the more that you know about the Lord our God, the more you'll call upon Him. The more you know of His power, the more you'll call upon His power to help you. The more you know of His mercy, the more you'll call upon His mercy.

The more you know His wisdom, and that He knows your difficulties, and that He loves you, then you will call upon Him all the more. Finally, might I say that this is also a certain promise. Do you see it right there? Whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

It's an absolute certainty. You call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be saved. Could you imagine what would happen if someone who called upon the name of the Lord, in fulfillment of the Scripture, and God did not save him, it would be to his everlasting dishonor.

God would stop being God. And think of any person being able to say in hell, I trusted in the Savior's help. I rested myself on God, but I'm lost.

It can't happen. Heaven itself would be darkened. The crown of jewels in God's own head would lose their luster if that could be the case.

It can't be. You trust in the Lord God Almighty. You call upon the name of the Lord and you shall be saved.

Let's take a look now at chapter 3. For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there on account of my people, my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. They've also divided up my land.

They've cast lots for my people, have given a boy in exchange for a harlot and sold a girl for wine that they may drink. And Joel's prophecy still concerns the time period connected with it shall come to pass afterward that he mentioned back in chapter 2, verse 28. This is the broad period of the last days initiated by the ascension of Jesus and the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost.

And he says, in that time, under this new covenant, I will bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem. Now again, we could say that this had a small kind of fulfillment when the captives came back from the Babylonian captivity. But the real coming back from captivity is prophesied in the end times when God will restore Israel.

As Paul says, all Israel shall be saved and they will welcome Jesus as a coming Messiah, saying, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. And in that very end times, God says He's going to gather the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Do you know what the valley of Jehoshaphat is? Where it is? Well, nobody knows where it is.

Because there is no valley of Jehoshaphat. It's a picture. Geographically speaking, there was never a valley in Israel called the valley of Jehoshaphat.

But when you understand what Jehoshaphat means, the Lord judges. That's the valley that He's bringing them to. The valley of judgment.

Friends, I believe that this is nothing, nothing other than describing the great place of God's judgment known as the battle of Armageddon. It's a judgment of all nations. Let's remember that Joel was written at a time when a terrible plague of locusts brought the judgment of God upon the people of God.

In a time like that, it's easy for the people of God to think, man, Lord, you're being kind of tough on us. What about the heathen? What about the nations that reject you? What about the pagans, God? God says, don't worry, I'm going to deal with them. Let me tell you how I'm going to deal with them.

He says, I will enter into judgment with them there on account of my people. That's what he says right there in verse 2. You see, it's very interesting that God's complaint among the nations or against the nations is that they have mistreated His people. Now, primarily, this has in view the way that the nations treat Israel.

But it also extends to the way that the nations treat the church. Friends, when God's people are mistreated, God takes it personally and He'll avenge it. Look at how cheaply they treated the people of God.

Verse 3, they've cast lots for my people and given a boy in exchange for a harlot. Well, they buy and sell the people of God like slaves and shamefully mistreat them. Friends, it's bad enough for man to regard any human life as cheap.

It's worse to regard the people of God as cheap. And God remembers it and He will repay. I mean, look at it here in verse 4. He says, Indeed, what have you to do with me, O Tyre and Sidon and all the coasts of Philistia? Will you retaliate against me? But if you retaliate against me, swiftly and speedily I will return your retaliation upon your own head, because you have taken my silver and my gold and have carried into your temples my prized possessions, also the people of Judah and the people of Jerusalem.

You have sold to the Greeks that you may remove them far from their borders. Behold, I will raise them out of the place to which you have sold them and will return your retaliation upon your own head. I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a people far off, for the Lord has spoken.

I love the tenor of what God says there. Did you see it there in verse 4? What have you to do with me, O Tyre and Sidon? Will you retaliate against me? I hate to put it in a way, I hope this doesn't sound offensive to anybody here, but it's pretty much as if God's saying, What, you want some of this? You want to retaliate against me? You want to come after me? Well then come on, God says. He's virtually challenging the nations to come against him or his people.

And he says, You come against me, I'm going to return your retaliation upon your own head. It's amazingly logical. It's almost disturbingly logical.

Understand that judgment is about the only aspect of God's great plan of the ages that is plainly logical. The grace and mercy of God is not plainly logical. You can't figure it out.

The high standing, the destiny of the believer in Jesus, that's not plainly logical. The salvation by grace through faith, that's not plainly logical. But judgment, God simply giving to those who reject him what they deserve, that's logical.

That's about as plain as logic as you can get. It's as if God says to the wicked, You rejected the saving logic of heaven, so I'll give you the plain logic of earth. You're going to receive just what you deserve before the holy court of heaven.

That's it. So you retaliate against me? I'll return your retaliation upon your own head. I'll sell your sons and daughters into the hand of the people of Judah.

The nations treated God's people with contempt, and they had no sense of their worth, therefore God will repay them with the retaliation they put upon his people. He vowed to return the retaliation upon their head. You know, it's amazing what happens to those people who persecute God's people.

You see the great empires of the world that have arisen against the Jewish people, and you see how God has crushed them and humbled them. One interesting commentator, John Trapp, details the horrors that befell the ten emperors of the Roman Empire, who were especially vigilant in persecuting Christians. He had Nero.

He lost 30,000 of his subjects by pestilence. He had his armies utterly defeated in Britain. He suffered a revolution in Armenia, and was so hated by the senators of Rome that they forced him to kill himself.

The emperor Domitian was butchered by his own soldiers. Trajan died of a foul disease. Severus died miserably on a military campaign in Britain.

Maximus was cut in pieces together with his own son. Decius died as an exile in a far country. Valerian was whipped to death by the king of Persia, who captured him.

Aurelian was killed by his own soldiers. Diocletian poisoned himself, and Maximus hanged himself. These are the Roman emperors who raised their hands against the people of God.

God says, you come against me, I'll come against you. Friends, you know how it is when somebody comes and steps on your little toe. On the one hand you think, it's just my little toe, who cares? But you know what? Somebody steps on your little toe, your head feels it, doesn't it? You step on the smallest toe of the body of Christ, and the head enthroned in heaven feels it.

And he'll react. Paul found this out on the road to Damascus. Jesus Christ cut him short with a voice from heaven and said, Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? You, Saul says, I thought it was those Christians I was out to get.

And Jesus says, exactly. They are my body. You touch them, you touch me.

So God will gather them for a war of judgment. Verse 9. Proclaim this among the nations. Prepare for war.

Wake up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near. Let them come up.

Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, I am strong. Assemble and come, you nations, and gather all around.

Cause your mighty ones to go down there, O Lord. You see, again, you've got to get the tenor of this. God is saying, you want some of this to the nations.

He's saying, come, bring it on. God's saying, bring it on. That's exactly what it is.

Verse 9. Proclaim this among the nations. God's saying, okay, nations, prepare for war. Well, you better wake up your mighty men.

Let them come up. And God says, beat your plowshares into swords. Now, again, friends, this isn't beating swords into plowshares.

This isn't saying, let's take all our weapons of war and make them instruments of agriculture. No, quite the opposite. God says, you better take that plowshare and make a sword out of it.

You better be as well-armed as you can. You're coming to fight against God, mister. You better take every weapon you can, every piece of armor you can find.

You're going to need it all. And you weak people, look at it there. In verse 10.

Let the weak say, I am strong. Now, we like to sing that, you know, in a noble sense. Well, in the Joel, the prophet Joel, that's not in a good way at all.

This is man trying to strengthen himself in a battle against God. Well, you're weak, you better strengthen yourself. This is God you're fighting with.

Nevertheless, the most positive attitude in the world can't work when you fight against God. You know, there's a Broadway play titled, Your Arms are Too Short to Box with God. That's exactly what the nations

are going to find out.

They're going to learn it the hard way. Verse 12. Let the nations be wakened and come to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations.

Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, go down, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.

You see, though the nations will come against God and His Messiah with every weapon and the most positive frame of mind at the battle of Armageddon, it is all for nothing. They'll be plucked and crushed like ripe grapes or crushed in judgment. You know, Psalm 2 beautifully expresses the folly of the nations and the triumph of the Lord.

Let me read this to you. Psalm 2, verses 1-6. Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His anointed, saying, Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us.

He who sits in the heavens shall laugh. The Lord shall hold them in derision. Then He shall speak to them in His wrath and distress them with His deep displeasure.

Yet I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion. There's nothing you can do about it, God says. My king, my Messiah, He's coming back and He's taking over planet earth and you can try to shoot Him out of the sky with cruise missiles all you want.

It's not going to work. Verse 14. It's as if God is looking over the scene of the battle of Armageddon.

And He says, Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon will grow dark and the stars will diminish their brightness. The Lord will also roar from Zion and utter His voice from Jerusalem.

The heavens and earth will shake, but the Lord will be a shelter for His people and the strength of the children of Israel. So you shall know that I am the Lord your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain. Then Jerusalem shall be holy and no alien shall pass through her ever again.

Joel looks out upon the valley of Jehoshaphat, that place of God's judgment, at the battle of Armageddon and he sees multitudes facing their eternal fate. It's a valley of decision. And those who fight against the Lord and His Messiah are in the wrong place in the valley of decision.

It's going to be ultimately fulfilled at the battle of Armageddon. Now this phrase, multitudes in the valley of decision, it's been used by countless evangelistic meetings as a wonderful, catchy phrase. You know, you need to make a decision for Christ and there's multitudes in the valley of decision.

And make your decision for Christ. And it's a wonderful thing to say that you must decide either for or against Jesus. But friends, Joel's contest is exactly the opposite of that.

This isn't the valley of man's decision. This is the valley of God's decision. It's God who does the deciding, not man.

It's a valley of judgment. Let me lay it on the line. You need to decide for Jesus Christ right here and now so that you never end up in that valley of decision.

Because in that valley of decision, the victims of the day of Armageddon, I came to a sobering thought upon that very subject this week. I thought about how I really believe that the end times are here. When you take a look at the political scene, the economic scene, the social and cultural scene, it's all just as the Bible described that it would be in the last days.

Friends, I'm the first one to say that Jesus may tarry. He may, in mercy, give the world another hundred years. But if he does, he's going to have to recreate conditions just like they are today because the stage is set.

God only needs to send out the players at the right time. That's all that remains. The stage is set, though.

And I thought, since we are near the time, since the battle of Armageddon could only be seven or ten years away, people you know, perhaps somebody in this room or the child of someone in this room could actually be at that time and place when the nations gather to make war against the Lord and his anointed in a futile attempt to keep Jesus Christ off this earth. Would to God that not a single person here or a single person we know would end up in that valley of decision, rather that they would decide for Jesus Christ right now and escape those things, as Jesus said, we should pray to count ourselves worthy to escape that time upon the earth. The time when the heavens and the earth will shake.

Well, Joel just can't leave us there with the heaviness of the day of Armageddon. He has to leave us with hope. So look at it here in verse 18.

It will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk, and all the brooks of Judah shall be flooded with water. A fountain shall flow from the house of the Lord and water the valley of Acacias. Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom a desolate wilderness because of violence against the people of Judah, for they have shed innocent blood in their land.

But Judah shall abide forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation, for I will acquit them of blood guilt whom I have not acquitted, for the Lord dwells in Zion. Yes, in the millennial kingdom established after the glorious triumphant return from Jesus, Ezekiel described it, Zechariah described it, that from the very house of the Lord on top of Mount Zion in Jerusalem will flow forth a glorious river and half of it will split forth and go forth toward the Mediterranean Sea and the other half will spread out toward the Dead Sea. It will be a beautiful, life-giving river all around.

And Joel saw that river too. He says it's going to embrace every memory of drought, every memory of dryness. It will all be gone.

And Judah shall abide forever, he says. Why? Look at the last line. For the Lord dwells in Zion.

Friends, just as sure as God's judgment is upon the wicked, so is His mercy upon those who trust in Him. You call upon the name of the Lord, you shall be saved, because the Lord dwells in Zion. And this prophecy of Joel, which began back in the first chapter, with the desperate plague of locusts, it ends with the promise of restoration and redemption.

Friends, this last line, it's the last promise, but it's not the least. The Lord dwells in Zion. It's very much like the end to the book of Ezekiel, which says, the Lord is there, Yehovah Shammah.

Here, Joel uses a very similar construction, saying the Lord dwells in Zion, speaking of the continued presence of the Lord God among His people. With you called upon the name of the Lord, He will answer

you. He will not let you fall.

And if the heavens seem like they're made of brass, and your prayer seems to keep bouncing back, then call out all the more. Call out with all the more vigor, and God will hear you, and answer gloriously from heaven. Let's pray right now together.

Lord, You told us to call upon You, and we would be delivered, we would be saved. So Father, right now, I pray on behalf of this wonderful congregation, and we agree with one voice saying, Lord, pour out Your Spirit upon us. Bring us to this place of repentance, and confession before You, and calling upon Your name.

You who are the true God, not a figment of our imagination, but the Lord God who reigns in heaven, send forth Your Spirit upon us, and fill us. And Lord, we thank You for every joyful, lighter than air experience that we feel from the filling of Your Spirit, but that's not why we seek it. We seek it to be Your ministers, Your witnesses to the ends of the earth.

Thank You, Lord God, for Your work, and this glorious word to us given by the prophet Joel. Do Your work in us and among us, we pray. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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