

On the Day of the Lord

Dear Friends,

The Day of the Lord is today.

On September 11th, 2001, tragedy struck in the United States. 2,977 men and women lost their lives in one horrific act of hate. The entire world was shocked and shaken to its core. The outrage at the terrorist attacks of 9/11 still impacts us today. Government agencies were created to combat terrorism in the US. Travel looks quite different now than it did over 20 years ago. Foreign policy was shaped by the events of that one day. One day changed so much. Christians believe another day is coming when everything we experience will be changed dramatically.

The Day of the Lord is described in very colorful details throughout the Old and New Testament. Isaiah is the first prophet who talks about the Day of the Lord. Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Daniel and even Jesus talk about this important day. So, what is this Day of the Lord? What are all these prophets talking about? What does the Day of the Lord teach us about the nature of God and our future? As we read from the Bible today, allow me to suggest some answers to these difficult questions.

Joel is considered one of the minor prophets in the Old Testament. Yet, his short book of only 3 chapters is jam packed with imagery and description of the Day of the Lord. There isn't much known about Joel, who he was, or about his life in general. Scholars guess that the book of Joel was written around the time of Ezekiel and Nehemiah. Joel quotes from several of the other prophets and even pulls scripture and themes from Exodus. This short book exposes the heart of Israel in great detail. The Day of the Lord seems to be one we shouldn't look forward to.

Israel had a heart problem. Every time God punished them and called them to repentance, they would start doing what they needed to. They would sacrifice according to His law and act like a cohesive community. When things started going well, they would slip back to old sins and follow other gods. This cycle is repeated over and over again. The prophets God sent to bring His people back to Him warn that The Day of the Lord will punish Israel severely.

In Joel 1:2-4 we read, **“Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten.”** This passage describes the complete annihilation of the Israelite’s food source. There will be nothing left for anyone to eat. The punishment will be so shocking to God’s people that they will pass down warning to their future generations.

In many ways, COVID 19 has ravaged our world. Wave after wave of this deadly virus has stolen the livelihoods of millions around the world. Governments scramble to get a handle on new cases and new deaths. Communities struggle to provide basic services to all. Families grieve the loss of loved ones. Individuals panic from the loss of personal control. COVID 19 is our swarming locusts. Our lives will never really be the same again. 2020 will be a year that is remembered and talked about for generations to come. How should Christians respond to this global pandemic? We should respond the same way Joel calls the people of Israel to respond: **“Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord” Joel 1:13-14.**

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Repent. Cry out to God. Now is the only time to recognize that God is ultimately in control. Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow is too late! Just as Israel turned from God, so our own hearts are prone to follow after other gods. Mass shootings happen more and more frequently. Racial injustices are the norm for people who don’t have skin like mine. As the greed of major corporations decides our laws, the homeless crisis in our nation thrives. We are growing numb to the pain, numb to the suffering, numb to the crying out of the persecuted! The Church should only have one response. Repent.

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What do I mean by that? I mean Christ's return is imminent. He could come at any moment. When he comes everyone will tremble. Just as Joel says, **“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand—a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them, the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste—nothing escapes them.”** Joel 2:1-3 Are our eyes open to the signs of the Day of the Lord? Are our hearts prepared to respond as God desires? Or are we too numb to the suffering of others to repent and glorify God? The army of the Lord is coming. I want to be in the ranks, not opposing the Son of God. The true repentant heart recognizes the deep need for Christ.

Song: Lord I Need You by Matt Maher

God desires relationship with you. Even in the midst of this suffering, there is still hope. Joel 2:12-13 says, **“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”** When we decide to stop living for ourselves, glorifying ourselves over others, and tear up our hearts for God, we find a gracious God. True humility is clear sight of where we stand before our creator. Pride blinds us. It makes us comfortable and numb to the suffering of others. The easiest sin to commit in America is the sin of pride.

In the United States, the individual is deified. From birth, you and I are taught that our greatest success would be to achieve personal fulfillment. “What is this personal fulfillment,” you ask? It's your career, your car, your house, your bank account, your clothes, your stuff. Right? Success is determined by what YOU have. Every commercial, every ad, every tv show, or media outlet you consume has taught you to think this way. Life is defined by the individual and the quality of life is the fault of the individual, right? Where is God when we glorify, worship and deify the individual? There is a God sized hole in each of our hearts. Our culture does nothing to help us fill that hole. Instead, the Church finds itself chirping along with the rest of our secular society.

I am not immune to the urge to glorify myself. In many ways, I spew out the same lies our society gives us. That habit started very young for me. From the age of 6 through 20, I wrestled with low self-esteem. Children my age and older enjoyed telling me how fat and ugly I was. They were quick to point out my bad skin and girly haircut. I struggled to feel like I fit in with my peers. From an early age, I accepted these lies as truth. To compensate for the depression, I ate food. By age 14, I weighed almost 200 lbs. I filled my God sized hole with food. The scars of those lies run deep. I am not sure if I will fully get rid of them. However, my identity is no longer defined by what I think about myself OR by what others say of me. My God sized hole is filled with God.

Our creator wants to fill you up. Joel 2:26-29 says, **“You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophecy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”** God is the only one able to supply your needs. He is the only one who deserves to receive your praise. He has so much to offer, but are you even going to ask? Don't dare to turn Him away, because the Day of the Lord is today.

As you hear about the suffering and persecution of others in the news or see it yourself on the street corners of your community or experience it in your own life and the lives of your loved ones, recognize that God is coming. He will come when you least expect it. Don't be numb to the suffering of others. Repent, turn to God for help and bring others along with you. Be the light, be the salt, be the blessing in other people's lives. When we shift our hearts from glorifying ourselves to loving God and serving others, amazing things begin to happen. You won't feel shame for not measuring up to what the world says is success. You won't be defined by what others say of you. Instead, God will pour His spirit on you, giving you incredible abilities and intimate experience with God.

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Joel gives us some excellent descriptions of our present times. As Christians, we should be ready and prepared for Christ's return. The persecution and suffering shouldn't surprise us, nor should we be numb to it. By following these three steps we can truly prepare ourselves for the Day of the Lord: the first step to prepare is repentance. The second step is placing God in the right spot on our priority list. The final step is to love others who are suffering around us. This is the Day of the Lord. We see signs of Christ coming soon. Like a plague of locusts, COVID-19 has consumed much of the world we were used to. I believe that God is reminding us of our dependance on Him.

If you have not accepted Jesus as your Lord and savior, I plead with you to accept him today. Jesus Christ is the only one capable of filling your God sized hole. When he returns to bring the faithful with him, I want to be there with you. If you have accepted Jesus but have recently been filling your God sized hole with what the world has to offer, I plead with you to repent. Don't be overcome with the lies Satan uses to draw people away from God. There is freedom from sin only through faith in Christ. Christians are called for so much more than this world. Thank you for the opportunity to share.

Yours in Christ,



Chris Aaron Rice