

8/16/15

Joel 3

## The God of Decision

*“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, **2** I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, **3** and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.*

***4** “What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily. **5** For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. **6** You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. **7** Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. **8** 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 nation far away, for the Lord has spoken.”*

**9** Proclaim this among the nations:

*Consecrate for war;*

*stir up the mighty men.*

*Let all the men of war draw near;*

*let them come up.*

***10** Beat your plowshares into swords,  
and your pruning hooks into spears;*

*let the weak say, “I am a warrior.”*

***11** Hasten and come,  
all you surrounding nations,  
and gather yourselves there.*

*Bring down your warriors, O Lord.*

***12** Let the nations stir themselves up  
and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;*

*for there I will sit to judge  
all the surrounding nations.*

***13** Put in the sickle,  
for the harvest is ripe.*

*Go in, tread,*

*for the winepress is full.*

*The vats overflow,*

*for their evil is great.*

**14** *Multitudes, multitudes,  
in the valley of decision!  
For the day of the Lord is near  
in the valley of decision.*  
**15** *The sun and the moon are darkened,  
and the stars withdraw their shining.*

**16** *The Lord roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,  
and the heavens and the earth quake.  
But the Lord is a refuge to his people,  
a stronghold to the people of Israel.*

*The Glorious Future of Judah*

**17** *“So you shall know that I am the Lord your God,  
who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.  
And Jerusalem shall be holy,  
and strangers shall never again pass through it.*

**18** *“And in that day  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and the hills shall flow with milk,  
and all the streambeds of Judah  
shall flow with water;  
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord  
and water the Valley of Shittim.*

**19** *“Egypt shall become a desolation  
and Edom a desolate wilderness,  
for the violence done to the people of Judah,  
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.*

**20** *But Judah shall be inhabited forever,  
and Jerusalem to all generations.*

**21** *I will avenge their blood,  
blood I have not avenged,  
for the Lord dwells in Zion.”*

*(Pastor Prays)*

If the Bible is primarily a book about God – and we believe it is – and Joel is a book in the Bible – and it is – then we can be sure that the 72 verses that make up Joel tell us something worth knowing about the God we believe in.

Joel is a prophetic book much like Daniel and Ezekiel and the book of Revelation, the book that pointed to the incarnation of Christ, the birth of the church. This little book points to the apocalyptic final judgment of the living and the dead. But more than looking ahead, this book was written to God’s people to encourage God’s people to hold fast to their convictions in the terrible time of persecution.

As Christian bakers are being forced out of business, and Christian bankers are pressured into compliance, Christian people are having to decide what they *really* believe about God and if that belief is strong enough to stand under the growing pressure.

For example, in last Thursday's "The Briefing" was a story out of McQuady, KY. David Wells, a volunteer prison minister for 13 years was informed last month that he would no longer be permitted to serve the Warren County Juvenile Detention Center in Bowling Green because he refused to sign a document promising not to imply or tell LGBTQ juveniles that they are sinful and should change their behavior. And every volunteer from Pleasant View Baptist Church received the same notification from the State. The State is saying that the only acceptable religion's message is a message that says homosexuality and homosexual relationships and homosexual behaviors are not sinful. The policy goes on to say you can give a scripture reference to the kids for them to look up, but you can't read it out loud and you can't say "sinful."

We live in a world that not only rejects the truth about God, but now seeks to put a lid on the light of truth. Isn't that what Jesus said in John 3:19? "And this is the judgment, the light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than light because their works were evil." We have a decision to make because

## **The Truth About God Calls For a Decision From You**

Let's get right to it.

### **Decide What You Believe About a Judgment**

Do you believe that all people regardless of age, race, or creed will one day be judged by a Holy and Righteous Creator? That you will be held accountable for every idle word or sinful deed? Joel seemed to think that. *I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land,*" It's the Valley of Jehoshaphat with YHWH, the Judge.

Also over in v. 14 –

*Multitudes, multitudes,*

*in the valley of decision!*

*For the day of the Lord is near*

*in the valley of decision.*

*15 The sun and the moon are darkened,*

*and the stars withdraw their shining.*

The Valley of Decision = The Valley of Verdict. A decision has been made.

Joel is a sample truth of a larger truth that gives us the very reason behind the coming of Christ. Jesus didn't come primarily as an example to follow or a teacher to learn from, He came as a Redeemer to believe in. We love to quote John 3:16, and we should, but let's read it in context. John 3:16-18: "For God so loved the world that He gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Followed by verse 17: "For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him" and verse 18: "Whoever believes in

him is not condemned but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.”

Those are the words of Jesus that say – in our natural state of being – we are condemned and the only hope of escaping this condemnation is faith in Christ. No one is morally neutral. We are either sinners condemned to Hell or sinners made saints by faith in Jesus Christ. All of us here must decide what we believe about the God of the Bible who punishes sin but saves sinners at the cross of Jesus.

The truth about God calls for a decision from you. Decide what you believe about God’s judgment.

The truth about God demands another decision.

### **Decide What You Believe About Human Life**

Part of the judgment on the nature surrounding God’s people stemmed from their treatment of human life. You have to read verses 2 and 3 together – especially verse 3. *"I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, 3 and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.*

You hear allusions to a slave industry that a conquering nation would impose on the subjects. V. 3 speaks of selling a child for a fling with a prostitute or a little girl traded for a bottle of wine that was quickly consumed. Few things call for God’s wrath more than inhumanity, and followers of Christ have always believed this.

Since the days of the Roman Coliseum, it's Christians who value life, minister to the sick, build hospitals and orphanages. It's Christians who stand against sex trade and slavery. We hate pornography because it objectifies women, destroys marriages and defiles human dignity. Our view of the *Imago Dei* – Image of God -- in humans drives us to speak out against the abortion industry and the ghoulish practices of Planned Parenthood.

Our view of human life drives volunteers to create a clothes closet to keep people warm, a food pantry to keep people fed, Hearts and Hammers to keep people sheltered. The dignity of the human being drives us to share the Gospel of Jesus so that people might come to faith in Christ and know the joy of being a child of God.

But if you don’t believe those things about human life, that each person is made in the image of God, then there is no real reason to protect life and seek good and share sacrificially. At the core of the Gospel is the belief in a holy God who created man. Man fell into sin and lives in sin. Man needs a Savior. That Savior is Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, fulfilling all the law, died in the place of sinners, redeeming them. God raised Him from the dead and the creed says, now he sits at the right hand of God the Father and He will come to judge the living and the dead. And if this is the truth about God, it demands a decision from you.

Decide what you believe about judgment. Decide what you believe about human life...

## Decide What You Believe About God's Grace

Believe it or not, tucked into the prophesy of cataclysmic judgment is a picture of tremendous love and grace in the midst of the Old Testament. Justice there is New Testament Grace. To see that we need to read v. 14, 15 & 16 together as a unit.

*Multitudes, multitudes,  
in the valley of decision!  
For the day of the Lord is near  
in the valley of decision.*

*15 The sun and the moon are darkened,  
and the stars withdraw their shining.*

*16 The Lord roars from Zion,  
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,  
and the heavens and the earth quake.  
But the Lord is a refuge to his people,  
a stronghold to the people of Israel.*

v. 14. This is mobs and mobs of people under a verdict of condemnation with no hope of redemption. God's verdict on the vast majority of mankind. It's the Old Testament version of a New Testament truth that only a few will be saved.

Isn't that what Jesus was saying in Matthew 7:13-14 when he said, "Enter by the narrow gate for the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction. And those who enter into it are many. V. 14 says "For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few." But there is hope for those who turn from their sin and turn to Christ.

In the midst of God's anger at sin, you see it in v. 16. The first part is wrath but notice God's attitude toward people. V. 16 says, "*But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.*"

Two words in particular describe what God is to his people: words that are worth considering and remembering. When the two words are put together, the Lord is like a cave to run into out of the storm; He is a shelter from the scorching sun. He is protection from danger. The Lord is a safe place in a dangerous world. He is a friend of sinners and rest for the weary. He is a Good Shepherd and a loving father and a very present help in the time of trouble.

Jesus says if you've known me, you know the Father. In John 14:6 Jesus said "*I am the way and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me.*" And today we can know God the Father through Jesus the Son.

The truth about God calls for a decision from you.

Will this be the day you stop running from God and by faith in what Christ has done on the cross, turn to him?

What will you decide?

*(Pastor Prays)*