

Mercy in the Old Testament?

by Bill Aumack

Hi, again, you get to hear from me a lot today, sorry. Now we've been talking about the book of Joel. And Pastor did the first two weeks I get to do the third week, which is the best week so pastor gave me the good week, amen. And just in case you missed the first two weeks. Or you are just joining us for the first time today. Or maybe your short term memory is shot. Let me remind you what happened in the first two parts here.

We don't know when Joel was written somewhere 800 to 400 years before Christ is our best guess. A lot of scholars put it about 835BC. We just don't know, we do know it was later because he quotes a lot of other people. You can see on all those scrolls, those are all people that he quotes in his book. So we know it was after a lot of those other things. We also know that Joel was a Bible scholar, because he quotes all of these things. And he kind of assumes that the people who are reading this book are also scholars. And he also doesn't tell us what Israel has done wrong. You know, a lot of times we have this, you know, Israel sins, God threatens them or punishes them and they repent, you know, lather, rinse, repeat right over and over and over again. And this time, we don't know what Israel did. Joel just doesn't say, and he probably doesn't really need to. You know, when you've done something and you knew you weren't supposed to, you knew it. Right? You know it, and Israel knew what they were doing wrong. So he doesn't talk about that too much.

Now, Joel does talk about The Day of the Lord. Remember pastor talked about this. This is the time when God is going to confront evil. Egypt and the plagues is one example of a day of the Lord. But he also talks about at the final time when God will will confront evil at the end of the world. And in chapter one, Joel talks about the swarm of locusts that has come in and ravaged the land. Right? I don't know if you guys remember, in Africa a couple of years ago, this happened, it was a huge swarm that went across to Africa and just destroyed massive amounts of crops. And food is a real hardship on the people, right? There's nothing to eat. And, you know, especially in Bible times, you know, semi trucks full of food didn't come rolling in from the warehouse, right? When the crops were destroyed, you went hungry. So, you know, this was was was a pretty bad thing. And Joel calls for the people to repent, and he leads the people in repentance, and he himself repents.

And then in chapter two, Joel kind of switches, and he talks about the future day of the Lord, when God is going to confront evil. And here the book starts getting a little bit prophetic, because he's talking about Israel's near term future. And he's also talking about the end of time. So we start seeing a little bit of prophecy here in this book. And he talks about another swarm of locusts coming in. But this time, it kind of becomes obvious that he's not just talking about bugs, because he starts using military terminology of beating your plows into spears and swords and your pruning shears into spears and battling and talking about military things. So we believe that he's probably talking about God's army or army that God is using to to act. Okay. And here Joel talks about something very powerful. And he talks about rending your heart. Remember when people would repent in Bible times, what would they do? rip their clothes, rend their clothes, right? And Joel says, don't just rend your clothes, rend your heart. Don't let this just be an outward thing. Let this be an internal thing, really mean what you are doing here and saying, very powerful.

And that's where we get to the topic of today. Mercy in the Old Testament? Because a lot of times we don't think of mercy in the Old Testament, right? When we think of the Old Testament, what do we think of? Right? God's vengeful, and he's just waiting to smite people. It's like he's a kid with, you know, a magnifying glass, tormenting bugs on the ground, you know, and God's just waiting to pour out vengeance on you. It's like, somehow Fire and Brimstone is building up in heaven. And God needs to have a fire sale every once in a while and get rid of some of it. Right? No! I don't think that's how it works. But sometimes that's kind of the way we view it.

In chapter two, Joel quotes, Exodus 34, which is where the Israelites who make the golden calf, right, remember that story. And he says, God is gracious, and compassionate, and slow to anger, and full of love. And somehow, Joel has come to the conclusion that God's love and compassion is greater than his wrath. Now, this is a pretty profound thing to think about. Okay? Because remember, Mercy is different in the Old Testament than it is in the New Testament. And the Old Testament, when you commit a sin, what happens? Something dies, right? You transfer your sin to the animal, the animal pays the price. The wages of sin is death. And I think everybody who lived in the Old Testament understood that in a way, we will never understand that. Today, mercy and grace is easy peasy. Hey, have mercy, grace. Good. Yeah. Right. And we just kind of accepted it. So it was really different for them. But somehow Joel comes to the conclusion that God's mercy is more powerful than his wrath.

The story is told about a woman who approaches the great commander Napoleon. And Napoleon had sentenced her son to death by hanging for a crime he had committed. And this mother comes before Napoleon and says, I'm pleading for mercy for my son. And Napoleon says, well, but your son committed the crime, not just once, but twice. And she goes, I know, but I'm pleading for mercy for him. And Napoleon said, but he doesn't deserve mercy. She said, Yeah, that's what mercy is. He doesn't deserve mercy. But that's what I'm asking for. And Napoleon said, I will have mercy.

That's what mercy is something you don't deserve, appointed to you, by somebody over you some sovereign power over you, God, or a police officer, a judge, a ruler, whatever it is, when you don't have control over it. And it's given to you see, Mercy is not based on what we do, or on who we are. We're so great. I pay tithes, you know, that's not mercy. Mercy is because of who God is. So Joel, again, leads the people in repentance. And in Joel 2:18. God was filled with passion for his land and took pity on his people. And he said he was going to do three things. Pastor talked about this last week. So we're going to do this quick, He was going to defeat the invaders? He was going to restore the land, and his divine presence was going to be with people and be accessible to everybody. God says, I'm going to chase away the army. I'm going to build your land up and I'm going to dwell in the temple, and I'll be among the people again. This is great news, right? Who wouldn't want this? Right? Kick those stupid Romans out of our land or whoever it is at this time. And let's, let's get back to being restored and better. Now in the very end of Joel chapter 2.

Open your Bibles with me to Joel chapter three, because we're gonna start that right here. But in the very end of Joel, chapter two, God's talking about his filling the temple, being there with the people. And when God's Spirit is with the people, it'll transform them. And then allow the people to be the way they're supposed to be. And I've always wondered if this was talking about what happens to the church in the first century, the book of Acts, when we really seem to live the way we were supposed to. We took care of each other, we sold stuff to help support other people. And I wonder if this is looking forward to that kind of existence.

And now we get to Joel chapter three. And the second part of this has to do with kind of the locusts are the invaders. And Joel is pretty clear that this is like the violent nations that come to invade Israel. Let's look at Joel chapter three, we're gonna go like verses, well, we'll just go for a while here starting in verse one. In those days, and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and I will bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat. Now remember, Jehoshaphat means "the Lord judges". So he's going to take them down to the valley, where the Lord judges, okay. And I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance to my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land, and they cast lots for my people, and they traded boys for prostitutes, and they sold girls for wine to drink. Yuck. Right bad stuffs going on here. Right? Verse Four. Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon, that you and all the regions of Philistia Are you repaying me for something I have done. If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done, for you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks that you might send them far from their homeland. And see I'm going to rouse them out of the places where you sold them. And I will return on your own heads what you have done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans a nation far away. The Lord has spoken.

Sabeans is Mesopotamia. Okay, which is a great distance away. And so what's God saying? I mean, again, it sounds kind of vengeful, doesn't it? I mean, I for an eye, tooth for tooth, you did it to me, I'm going to do it to you. Right. Wow. Now if we go down and I'm going to skip through some of this, starting in verse nine, Proclaim this among the nations prepare for war, arouse the Warriors, Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears, come quickly bring the Warriors, right, so we get this very war mentality in the call to battle. Now let's look at verses 14, verse 14, multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision, the Sun and Moon will be dark, and then the stars will no longer shine. We recognize that right as a prophecy of what happens at the end time. The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from heaven and the earth and the heavens will tremble, and the Lord will be a refuge for his people and a stronghold for the people of Israel. So here, we're talking about what's going to happen to Israel in the near term, God is going to return his people, and pay back the nations that have done evil to his people. But we're also talking about the end of time. Right? And what's going to happen at the end of time, so both things are going on here. And God's saying, there's going to be a time when we're in the valley of decision, and the multitudes are going to be in the valley of decision and I am going to judge them

That's gonna happen right? That's sounds like a fun day. Depends on how you think you're gonna get judged or do you think you're innocent? Maybe I remember going to traffic court once years ago, I thought I was gonna fight this ticket. I was gonna win. Stupid cop didn't deserve to give me this ticket. I get the traffic court, and I'm watching the police officers come in before it starts. And they're talking to the judge and the people in the court. And they're friends with these people. They see them all the time. Right. And the police officer, come on, hey, Judge, how's it going? How's your wife? Yeah, we're gonna see at the party next week. How are your kids doing in school? And I'm like, I'm screwed. Because there is no way the judge is gonna believe me over his friend. Right. Fortunately, my officer didn't show up that day. And I got off. But only because he didn't show I think. Right? Yeah. Right. And so this, this, this judgment sounds horrible, unless you think you're innocent. Right. And God talks about this.

And the third part here, we're gonna come back, we'll talk a little bit more about that. But in the third part, the last part of the chapter, Joel 3:17, to 21. This is covering how God's gonna restore the land and

renew us. Joel uses promises from Ezekiel and Zachariah. On and on, it goes. So let's read this together. It says, Then you will know that I the LORD your God dwell in Zion, my holy hill, and Jerusalem will be holy, never again will foreigners invade her. In that day, the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk and honey, and the Ravens of Judah will run with water and a fountain will flow out of the house out of the Lord's house. And we'll water the Valley of acacias and Egypt will be desolate Edom, a desert waste because of the violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood. Judah will be inhabited forever. And Jerusalem through all the generations. Shall I leave innocent blood on avenged? No, I will not. The Lord dwells in Zion.

Okay. Now look at that in verse 13. In the end of verse 13, it says, a fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and the Water the valley of acacias right? Before God said, I will be in my temple. And my presence will be in the people, but you had to go to the temple to experience God's presence. And now he says, it's not just you have to come to the temple, it's going to flow out of the house of the Lord and water, the valley. God's presence is going to be everywhere, not just in the temple. Okay. Very important. And so we kind of end with God's mercy and grace, bringing justice and renewal. And we overlooked this book so many times, because we tend to think that this is a you know, it's just gloom and doom and punishment, and lather, rinse, repeat, right? How many times does Israel go astray in the Old Testament? And it's like an uncountable number, right? You know, something like the national debt, you know, it's a number that's too big to comprehend. Right? And when we just think this happens over and over and over again, but what if we looked at that a different way?

Let's take, for example, a small child who's maybe like one and a half, two years old, right? Just getting mobile, walking around the house, learning the rules of the house, right. And you know, what a little kids doing, right? I want to touch, I want to feel, I want to grab, and there's certain things in the house you can't touch. Right? And mom or dad says Don't touch. Don't touch, don't touch, you know, 55,000 times don't touch, don't touch. And one day that kid, you know, mom says Don't touch and he looks at mom and he goes (touches it). Right. And what's mom do? Mom applies some discipline right? Now. Do we call that mother vengeful? No, she had mercy. She told him 55,000 times not to do it. But eventually, eventually the day of judgment comes right? Eventually, it comes. And we don't say that Mother is vengeful, or how horrible she is, in fact, we applaud her and say, Hey, she applied some discipline the kids gonna learn now, right? Maybe there are some kids that take more discipline than others.

And if we look through the Old Testament, we can see this happen over and over again. Let's take the story of the flood Noah, we know that story, right. And the Bible says that people thought only evil all the time. But Noah finds grace in the eyes of the Lord. And God says, Noah build an ark. And right there, we see God's grace. And we can look at that as God's judgment on the evil. But it's God's grace. Because God could have chosen to deal with this, and a whole bunch of different ways. Right? God could have just whisked Noah off the Earth, put him in heaven, destroyed the earth and put Noah back. And the people on the earth would have gotten no warning. God could have said, Hey, Noah, check your backyard. There's an ark out there with animals in it, y'all to get in there. It's gonna rain tomorrow. Right? And the people on earth would have gotten no warning. God could have made it so Noah's farm floated. I don't know, God could have done a lot of different things that would have given the people no warning. But instead, he told Noah to build an ark and it took him over 100 years. And that was 100 years of mercy to people who only thought evil all the time. And the Genesis story doesn't tell us that Noah preached to them. But 2 Peter does. And says Noah is a preacher of righteousness for 100 years. That's mercy. That's mercy. Right? Egypt in the 10 plagues, we can look at that as God's justice. Or we

can look at that as God trying to be merciful, I'm telling you, right, that's when mom starts counting, right? gonna count to three. Right, and God starts counting. He didn't have to go all the way to the 10th plague. God was trying to show them mercy, right. God send Jonah to Nineveh to warn them. We could go on and on and on. And nearly every single story in the Bible in the Old Testament that we would look at, we could see God's mercy if we were looking for mercy instead of vengeance.

Doug talked about Micah 6:8. love mercy. We should be looking for God's mercy first. Okay, a couple quick texts. I want to just go through you guys know these texts.

Hebrews 13:6 says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever. If God is merciful in the New Testament, what does that mean about the Old Testament? He was merciful, right? Psalms 33:11 says, but the plans of the Lord stand firm forever in the purposes of his heart through all generations. If God stands firm forever. Forever is a long time. Okay. I heard forever wants to described this way. I'm sorry. This is going to make your head hurt. Imagine a steel ball bearing the size of the Earth floating in space was pretty big ball bearing. Every 1 million years a mosquito comes along and ricochets off that that was around a million years later, tink. By the time he had worn that ball bearing down to nothing, forever just begun. You'll be up tonight thinking about that. Sorry. Forever is a long time and the Lord's promises stand firm forever. So what does that mean to us?

Number one, we can count on God to be merciful, just as he's always been. God is not some evil mean God in the Old Testament, and some lovey dovey God in the New Testament. It's the same God. It's the same God. And this is the most amazing, crazy, unbelievable, ridiculous news you can imagine. We can count on God, to be merciful. And sometimes we just take it for granted. I'm going to be talking to pastor, we should do a whole series on mercy. We could do a whole six week series just on mercy. We just take it for granted so much. Every day, wouldn't you get up God's mercies are granted to you new. That's just mind blowing. Right? And, you know, if you think, you're struggled with something, and just can't getting rid of it, just struggling with it. It's just too hard. I've asked for forgiveness. I don't know how many times. God has enough grace and mercy for that. Right? Maybe you've done some horrible things that you think God couldn't be merciful about that. But he does, he has enough grace for that. There isn't anything, you can say or do that God doesn't have enough grace for Amen.

The second thing we can learn from this is we can count on God to eventually bring a reckoning against evil. The day of the Lord is going to come. Now, when we talk to our non Christian friends, we need to be careful about how much we talk about that because Christianity in the past, in some places still today, we spend too much time on this. And this is going to happen. It's true. But telling somebody to turn or they're going to burn doesn't work very well. Nobody wants to hear that. Right. So cover it when it's appropriate. Let's start with God's mercy. We all want mercy. Right? I mean, who wants a turn or burn approach or mercy? Who wants mercy? Some of you didn't raise your hands. Who wants mercy? Amen. We all want mercy, right? We all want mercy.

Reflection, Have you accepted God's mercy and made a decision to be a Christ follower. Maybe you've been coming to this church a long time, and you've never actually made that decision. Maybe it's your first time hearing this either here with us or online. And you've never made that decision. Make that decision today. Don't wait. There's a card in the pew in front of you take that out, write down on that you made a decision, drop it in the offering or hand it to me your pastor. We want to pray with you and talk with you. Maybe you made that decision, you got a Christ follower for like 50 years now. You got it

nailed. remake that decision today. Right? Every day, we need to make that decision that I want to take God's mercy. And I want to accept that.

Because we don't know when the day of the Lord is coming. But it could happen to any of us at any time. Right? life hangs from a tender thread. And if that thread ends for you one day, it's your day of the Lord. Right. So, you know, I want to encourage us to that, you know, if you want to be a Christ follower or take out a card, let us know. We'd like to help you and be with you on that journey. If you want to renew that, take out a card and let us know. We want to be with you on that.

And our challenge this week is look for opportunities to be merciful. Look for times to be unfair as Douglas would say, for people who didn't deserve it. That Yahoo that's writing a check in front of you in the grocery line for two items. Be merciful, Be merciful, just as God has been merciful to you. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, help us to understand the full impact of your mercy. Help us to really lower except that and understand what that means and understand how awesome that is and how much we need to tell our friends and family about that. Be with us now this upcoming week. Help us to be merciful. Help us to show that mercy that other people help us to be just a little bit more like you. Be with us now. In Jesus name. Amen.