

Deliverance from the Day of the Lord
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We're only gonna work with one question today, one simple, direct question that you should be able to answer clearly, definitively—yes or no. The question is simply this. The question is simply this—have you called upon the Lord for deliverance? And I'm not talking here about that moment when you sit down for the math exam and it all catches up with you, that you haven't studied for three weeks. Neither am I talking about that time when you get the note from the IRS and you discover that there was a mistake in your accounting over the past year. Neither am I counting about that time when you go into the doctor's office and you get the diagnosis. I'm talking about that moment when you actually look forward into the future, to the day of reckoning, and you cry out "Jesus, save me!" Have you ever done that? Have you called upon the Lord for deliverance?

I'm gonna be persistent with that question today, a little bit like the flight attendant that goes around and checks everybody's seat belt to make sure it's clicked. And you may want to stop them and ask, 'When are the refreshments coming?' 'When are we gonna land?' 'Can we use the bathrooms yet?' 'Can you push this person over?' 'Can you quiet that baby?' 'What's gonna be the movies this flight?' I mean, you've got all kinda questions, but all that flight attendant wants to know, and all that flight attendant is looking at, is that seat belt clicked? That's my focus today. You may have many other concerns, many other questions, many other things you'd like to ask about, but my question, my focus is this—have you called upon Jesus when you look ahead to the day of reckoning?

I'm gonna be persistent with that question because I'm absolutely convinced that this flight we're on is not going to make it. This earth we call 'home' is not going to land well. I'm convinced of it. And this is the single most important question you must deal with.

I'm gonna deal with it not just persistently, but I'm gonna deal with it with a promise; and the promise is this, and I'll get it direct from scripture, that

Whoever calls upon the Lord will be delivered.

That's a promise given by the ancient prophet Joel, and I'll encourage you to open your bibles to that little book tucked away in the middle of the Old Testament, the prophet Joel. He was the first of the prophets...he was the first of the prophets to actually see into the future, and to see the end, to see the day of reckoning. He was the first prophet to see that and write about it. That makes him unique among the prophets. All the other prophets will build on what he saw, and they will expand on it as the Lord gave them in the centuries more and more input, more and more clarity to vision. But this was the first prophet to see what he called "the great and awesome day of the Lord."

He saw that day, and he was the first one to begin to write about the vision that he was given, and the insight he was given. It's not a very pretty picture. It's unsettling, in fact. The description he gives is a dark description. As you go through that book, he mentions it in chapter 2 verse 32, but there's other places where he comments on that day. For example, in chapter 1 he will describe the day of the Lord as a 'day that will come as destruction from the Almighty.' He'll go on in chapter 2 and he'll describe the day of the Lord as 'darkness, and a day of gloom.' In chapter 2 a little later he'll call it 'the great and very awesome day of the Lord, who can endure it?' And he asks the question with the implication that no one can. It is an awful day. Not only does he use these kinds of description statements when he describes the day; the flow of the book give a sense of 'this day, that final day of reckoning' is an awful, and awesome, and dark day.

He starts off the book, talking in chapter 1, about a locust hoard that had come upon Israel. And we are talking about a hoard of locusts like nothing you had ever seen, that devoured the land, the crops. And it was just to the point you couldn't even step without stepping on locusts under your feet. And they were devouring everything. I'll give you the description that we have at the very opening of the book so you have a feel of what he was seeing. The prophet Joel starts in verse 2. He says

Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your fathers' days? Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation.

What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten; and what the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten; and what the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

And he describes how the land has gone into mourning and despair because everything is gone; about the thing that you would look up into the sky and you would see these clouds of locusts coming, and you would hear the beating of their wings, and they would just devour everything.

As you often find among the prophets, he calls for repentance. If you go to verse 13, he says

Gird yourselves with sackcloth,

...put on clothes of mourning...

...and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers at the altar! Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the drink offering...

The celebration in the temple is stopped. They're being withheld. "Consecrate a fast," he says.

Proclaim a solemn assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord.

Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty.

It's just this horrible...locust hoard that is just destroying everything! The nation is collapsing. We're not talking simply about the price of oil going up, and the economy sagging. We are talking about a nation being wiped out by a force they cannot stop.

His call to the nation is "Repent! Call a national day of mourning!" And with that call he gives a follow-up warning. And his follow-up warning is this—if you don't repent, it's gonna get worse. Because in chapter 2 he'll go on to describe... He calls for a trumpet of warning, and he says, 'Listen, there's not just locusts coming; there's an invading army coming!' And he describes this army that is gonna come, and they're gonna destroy the land of Israel if they don't repent. The gathering hoard of Assyria, the gathering hoard of Babylon—whatever it was, it's gonna come and it's gonna destroy the land. And he calls that, too, a day of the Lord; and he says, "Repent!" for that army's gonna invade, and it's far worse than the locusts.

But then there's an interesting thing that happens toward the end of chapter 2 and moving into chapter 3. There's a transition. And basically, what he communicates as the book comes towards closure is this—he says, 'First of all, Israel, repent! And if you don't, things'll get worse.' And he closes the book on this note, and it's a strange note. He says, in essence, to Israel, 'Repent, or things'll get worse,' and then he says, 'Even if you do repent, things are gonna get worse for everyone else.' It's a strange twist. But that's the way the book flows. 'Repent, Israel, or it'll get worse. And even if you do repent, it's gonna get worse for everyone else.' What he describes in chapter 3 is a gathering of the nations against God, and he calls it the great and awful day of the Lord—a gathering of the nations in which they'll gather, he says in verses 1 and 2, that they'll gather all the nations, that they'll come down to the valley of, he calls it, Jehoshaphat. And he says,

There I will enter into judgment with them on behalf of My people and My inheritance, Israel.

He describes it later on in that chapter as a time when the nations will rise up against Him, and He will answer, and He will destroy the nations. And that's the great and awful day of the Lord. He calls it, finally, the valley of decision.

We begin to operate from then, and that point of Joel's prophecy, and you begin to put it together with some of the prophecies that follow—we can come up with this kind of definition for the day of the Lord. It's the time of final confrontation between the Lord and all who resist His rule. It's a time...it's not just a single day...it can be pinpointed to a crucial event, but it's a time that will spread out over a period of years in which God will deal with all those who resist His rule. And it's the final time, entering into a great tribulation and culminating in a new heavens and a new earth.

The trigger point, the thing that will escalate it all, is the nations' resistance to God's treatment of Israel—God's choice to bless that little nation that He's stood by for century after century after century. There will come a point in time when the nations will finally rise up and say, "No more for Israel!" And there will be the final valley of decision. Prophets eventually came to call that day Armageddon. It will deal with all those who resist His rule. And I want to underscore the word *'all.'* That final confrontation will be so expansive and so extensive it will deal with both the living and the dead. It will deal with all those who resist or have resisted the rule of our God...those who have resisted as aggressive rebels; like the recent best-seller author produced a book that says, 'God's not good;' or those who have chosen other gods and said 'The God of the Bible is not good. He's not the God to be honored; He's not the God we'll submit to.'

It deals with...it's a day that will deal with all those who in open rebellion resist our God; it will deal with those who are in passive resistance; those who say of the God of the Bible, "Lord, Lord, Lord," but do not do what He has called us to do. They will be dealt with, and their passive resistance will be confronted. It is also a day that will deal with all those willful...willful wandering hearts that have just never found to the point where they can say God is what matters most in their self-absorbed lives. It will be a day of darkness and gloom. It will be a day when all resistance is finally, completely, totally dealt with.

There's only one hope, looking at it, approaching it. It's a hope built in the character and the nature of God. Joel speaks of it in the middle of his...this passage...this chapter or this book...when he is calling the nation of Israel to repentance. And God invites them to repent. And Joel follows up on what God has said. And he says to the people...this is after the locust hoard and before the invading army...Joel says to the people of Israel, he says

Now return to the Lord your God,

...turn to Him! And then he makes this appeal because of the character and the nature of God; he says

Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate,

'...He is a God who has good favor towards us, and He feels for us. Not only that, He is a God that is slow to anger. He's delayed, and He's delayed, and He's delayed, and He's delayed. He is a God who is abounding in lovingkindness, a God whose love does not quit. It will keep going and going and going. And He is a God who relents of evil. In other words, He will pull back from destruction.'

In essence, what Joel says is God is exactly what we see in Jesus, the one who came and died for us, the one who is gracious and compassionate, who is slow to anger, who is abounding in lovingkindness and does pull back. That's the one hope we have—it's the one hope. That's what lies behind the promise. Whoever...doesn't make any difference who it is...whoever calls upon the name of the Lord, actually cries out to Jesus...don't rely upon your friend to do it for you, your mother, your dad, your grandpa, your grandma, your child...*you* call upon the name of the Lord, you call out for Jesus—you'll be delivered. It's the character and the nature of God to respond to the repentant in that way. So the invitation is 'Call out.'

The question that comes when we see that, and we think about it and we ponder it, and we wonder, "Should I do that? Is that something that I should do? What will happen if I do?" That's the natural question. What's gonna change? If I look to that great and final day of reckoning and I recognize the sort of day it will be, and I cry out and I say "Jesus, save me!" how then do I live today? How should that affect my day today? Do I build a bomb shelter? Do I hide in the woods? Do I begin to carry a sign up and down the street telling everybody to repent? What do I do?

Answer: you wait. You wait, number one, with confidence. You wait with confidence in uncertainty. That sounds kinda strange. But you wait, confident that you will be delivered on that day; that you will be saved; that God's promise will hold true for you. You called out to Jesus, and you'll be saved. You wait with that confidence, but you wait in uncertainty because you do not know when that day will be, whether it'll be this generation, the next generation, the one after that, our grandchildren's grandchildren's generation—we don't know what generation it will be. But we live in confidence in that uncertainty that when that day arrives, we will be saved. Try to describe it, 'cause it's kind of an odd...odd thing. You wait with confidence while life is so uncertain, and you get about doing the things that need to be done; and it's kind of an odd way to live.

The only way I can describe it is to compare it...and I've done this before, so it may be sound familiar to you, but it reminds me of the years we spent with my daughter on the transplant list. The doctors had come to us and they'd told us that 'She's gonna die.' She didn't look it. She looked healthy, she felt healthy. Everything looked great. But they said, 'She's gonna die within five years. We don't know if it'll be one, two, three, four, but probably at least by five years she's gonna be dead unless she gets on a transplant list. And that's the number one thing you've gotta do right now is get her name on the list.'

And so we scrambled, we hustled, we believed 'em even though she looked healthy, she acted healthy. We got her onto that list. Once we got her on that list it was...wait. Carried a little beeper everywhere she went. But we carried on life as normal. It was odd, because we were waiting for things to get worse before they would ever get better. In fact, we knew she wouldn't be high enough up on the transplant list until she was very, very close to death. And so we kept waiting for her to get worse and worse, because that would put her higher up the list, and we'd be sooner for a transplant, maybe, if there was one available.

So it was a real odd feeling. You're we're waiting for her to get worse to get better, but at the same time you want her to last as long as she can. So you're doing everything you can to keep her alive, functioning, and going about life in normal ways—go to school, play basketball. Now, it made it difficult when we had to make plans about "What do we do about college? What do we do about career?" And there's confusion, but at the same time, we knew what to do today—keep her healthy, do the next thing that needs to be done, and wait.

That's the way it is for us as Christians. We know there's a final day, and things are gonna get much, much, much worse before they ever finally get better. We have to go through the great and final day of the Lord. We're confident—our name's on the list. We've called out to Jesus. And what we do now is, with confidence we do what needs to be done in life. We carry on. We try to keep things going as long and as well as we can—until that day arrives. It's a different feel, it's a different way to approach life, but that's the only way to approach it. Because that's the way things are. There is a final and great day of the Lord.

Something interesting about it...and this is kind of the thing that Joel saw, that very few ever saw. In fact, he was one of the few to actually speak of it, something that makes these days of waiting unusual. In Joel chapter 2 he speaks of a time just before the day of the Lord, just before the great and final day of the Lord—he speaks of a time that'll come after this, after Israel has gone through its history, he says there's gonna be a time after this

"I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind"

"I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind." And he describes it. And when he does that he's not referring to every individual. He's referring to every sort of person—man, woman, child, old man, slave, servant, master, owner—all sorts of people will receive the Spirit of God. In Old Testament times there were only a few that had the Spirit of God come upon them to sustain them and to prepare them for...and carry them through difficult times. But he's sayin' just before the day of the Lord the Spirit of God is gonna be poured out on all God's people—young and old, wise and foolish, strong and weak, near and far—they're all gonna receive the Spirit.

And you know what? That's happened! That's happened. After Christ's death on the cross and the day of Pentecost, the Spirit of God came upon God's people. We're told they began to prophecy; they began to speak in tongues. And people were around in Jerusalem in that day, and they said, 'What is happening to these people? What is going on?' And Peter stood in the crowd, the very first sermon delivered by one of the apostles to a crowd, and he looked at these people, these Christians that were speaking under the power of the Holy Spirit, and he looked at them and he said, 'This is what Joel was talking about!'

And it's what we still experience today—the Spirit of God coming upon all His people, making them fit for the final days. It gives it a whole different flavor, where there's no need to be afraid. You can step forward knowing God is prepared to work in us and through us to make a difference by His Spirit.

Back to our question—have you called upon the Lord for deliverance? You should be able to say yes or no to that question in your life experience. And I'll press you with it—have you called upon the Lord for deliverance? As I do that today I recognize some people resistant to this concept, resistant to this idea. And there's a hardness about you right now. You haven't listened to me since the opening phrases when I began to say we're gonna talk about this. I understand that. I'm not gonna try to hammer at that resistance right now.

Some of you are just the opposite. You're so impulsive, you'll jump at anything. And if I came in today and said, "The end's today!" you'd say, "Whoa! Yeah!" You need to slow down, think things through a little more carefully, and understand exactly what's goin' on.

There's still another group of you, and this is the group that probably concerns me the most—that you're aware of it, you sense it, you realize that 'yeah, there's something down there I should be getting ready for. But right now I got too many other things going on! I mean, the kings are runnin'! The housing market is shaky. The price of fuel's going up. And my wife and I just had a fight,' and there's all sorts of things pressing in on you, '...and I really don't have time to think about that now!' I understand that. And I'm not going to try to unclutter your mind right now.

But I do know...I do know there's some here...there's somethin' stirring. And you know you're not ready for that day. And you wanna be. As strange as it sounds...I mean, everything's goin' good for you, maybe, everything's alright, but you are unsettled about that day, and you wanna be settled. My encouragement to you is a simple promise. Go personal with God. Grab on to that promise. He has made it, He has said it. If you call upon Him, He will save you. Go personal with Jesus. You can do that right now. You can go home, in the quiet and the private of your home. But I want you to understand that if that question is unsettled with you, and it won't go away, and it keeps pressing on you, that's the Spirit of God and you need to respond to it.

I'm gonna invite you to do that. I ask you to stand.

Our Father in heaven,

In a culture that would say we're foolish, we've done simply what You've asked us to do. We've proclaimed Your word...that there is a great and final day. In the face of that day, Father, I pray that You would move in us and among us to keep that issue alive. Keep it pressed upon us. Don't allow the question to go away until it's settled in each one of our hearts. And then, as we look forward, Father, I pray and I ask that you would bring that day, when Your name will be hallowed, and Your kingdom will be on earth, and Your will will be done. As we go into this day I pray that You will meet us with grace sufficient and satisfying, greater than our sin, and stronger than evil.

In the name of Jesus, the coming king, amen.

Grace be with you.