

## Week 24 – Tough Questions – Why Does God Threaten Humanity with Judgment Day?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church welcoming you to week 24 of Tough Questions.

Well, a question I've got right out of the shoot today – what is that? Cool picture, huh? While you're contemplating that, let me introduce my topic for this week. This week we're going to look at the theme of judgment day. It's going to start coming up in your Project 4:4 reading.

We read through the Prophet Joel and his message. In Joel, Joel talks about the coming Day of the Lord – the day of gloom and doom that's coming on the horizon for humanity and for God's people in particular.

Well, I thought I'd have a little bit of fun thinking about locusts and bugs. So I found this website called – [www.uglybug.org](http://www.uglybug.org) - and I think you will love it. Show it to your kids, but not before bedtime.

Here are a few fun bugs that you might find out in your garden. Recognize that ugly dude? Well, that's our sanctimonious Preying Mantis. Be careful what you say to him. Rhinoceros Beetle – he ranks right up there on the beauty contest of bugs. Mole Cricket – check out the little claw thing – kind of reminds you of a mole – they've got two of those things they dig with. Here's a bug called the Mole Cricket and now you know why they call them that. And listen to some of the names of these bugs. Here you've got the Ambush Bug – you know it's not the - "I'm your best buddy next door bug" or BFF bug. How about this – the Assassin Bug. He comes equipped with his own knife to tear your throat open.

Now wait a minute, these are not actually enormous things that are out roaming around. That would scare all of us – these are electron microscope images of bugs. Here you got the Robber Fly. Oh my, I wonder how many Robber Flies are creeping around your house?

Well, in the prophecy of Joel, and Joel prophesied to the Kingdom of Judah, right before the time in which Judah was going to be exiled. Joel had a fairly stern warning, but his warning comes on the heels of a locust invasion that the nations of Israel and Judah experienced at this time historically. And it became the occasion for Joel as a prophet of God's people to speak a word of warning to them about how they were living.

Let me read you a few lines out of there - Joel 1:3-7

*<sup>3</sup> Tell it to your children,  
and let your children tell it to their children,  
and their children to the next generation.*

*<sup>4</sup> 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.*

What is going on? They're experiencing an invasion of locusts that are destroying all of their crops. Their crops would have been the way that God provided for them and showed his mercy and his provision for them as a people. If they prayed and they were faithful to God's covenant, God would bless them and give them crops and so the occasion here of a locust plague is a real blight on their experience with God. It must be telling them something about their relationship with God.

*<sup>5</sup> Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!  
Wail, all you drinkers of wine;  
wail because of the new wine,  
for it has been snatched from your lips.*

*<sup>6</sup> A nation has invaded my land,  
a mighty army without number;  
it has the teeth of a lion,  
the fangs of a lioness.*

*<sup>7</sup> It has laid waste my vines  
and ruined my fig trees.  
It has stripped off their bark  
and thrown it away,  
leaving their branches white.*

Joel 2:1-2

*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 —*

*<sup>2</sup> 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.*

So this incredible, out-of-control locust plague is reminding Joel, the prophet, to speak to God's people and tell them, "Hey, you don't have just a mere locust invasion coming after you – this is like the day of the Lord. This is like judgment day coming upon you."

So it gets us thinking about the question – Does God just threaten people with judgment day? Is it an idle threat? Does God just randomly pick some point in time of history and say, “I’m coming – judgment is coming – you’d better clean up your act.”

Well, not exactly. Let’s look at how the voice of the prophet can be heard throughout history. So Joel here prophesying in his day and age is giving a warning to the nation of Israel that could be picked up and heard and taken heed of by any generation of Israelite or any generation of god-fearing person that’s come after him. Even today when we look at our circumstances and we see things that are dire around us, it should remind us that the quality of our life before God does matter to Him. It should remind us that we are accountable to God and that it isn’t necessarily an idle threat.

When we think about things like earthquakes, tornadoes, famines or droughts, we have to remember that God is over all of what the world is experiencing. So when something happens that’s beyond our human control – beyond what we can account for, we have to at least look to God and say, “God does that have something to do with how you’re acting in human history?” And it could point us forward to a day when God will show up on the scene – the Day of the Lord. Listen for that theme in the Old Testament as you continue to read through Project 4:4. The Old Testament Israelites – they watched and waited and longed for the Day of the Lord. It could have been a day of provision where God shows up big time – it could have been a day of judgment on the nations and even on themselves as Israelites. But it was a day of great fear and trembling for people because it reminded them of their accountability to God.

Listen to what happens. Read a little bit further into Joel prophecy:

Joel 2:11:14

*<sup>11</sup> The LORD thunders  
at the head of his army;  
his forces are beyond number,  
and mighty is the army that obeys his command.  
The day of the LORD is great;  
it is dreadful.  
Who can endure it?*

*<sup>12</sup> “Even now,” declares the LORD,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and mourning.”*

*<sup>13</sup> 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.  
14 Who knows? He may turn and relent  
and leave behind a blessing —  
grain offerings and drink offerings  
for the LORD your God.*

So what Joel is saying here is, “Look people, the Lord is coming. Be prepared for Him to enter into human history.” So in Joel’s day and age, people were poised for God to show up and do something – either to bring judgment on God’s people or surrounding nations. It’s really interesting that this particular book gets quoted in the New Testament at a period of time when Jesus has actually left the scene and ascended to heaven and the early apostles are spreading God’s word and preaching the Gospel boldly. In the Book of Acts – in the opening chapters, it tells the story about how people are moving out from Jerusalem and out into the surrounding areas with this news about Jesus.

Well, on the Day of Pentecost, if you’ve ever heard that phrase – all kinds of crazy things were starting to happen. God was showing up in some miraculous ways through the Holy Spirit. And this prophecy out of Joel is quoted by Peter, one of Jesus’ followers. Joel goes on to say this:

Joel 2:25-29

*25 “I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten —  
the great locust and the young locust,  
the other locusts and the locust swarm—  
my great army that I sent among you.  
26 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.*

So along with God’s warning and along with a prophecy about the coming of the Lord, also comes promises from God that when he does show up, He’s going to bring good things.

*27 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.*

*28 “And afterward,  
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.  
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,*

*your old men will dream dreams,  
your young men will see visions.  
29 Even on my servants, both men and women,  
I will pour out my Spirit in those days.*

A promise then that gets picked up in the New Testament in the Book of Acts when Peter preaches at Pentecost. There are a group of people there that are assembled from all kinds of language groups and nations and they hear Peter preaching the Gospel in their own language. So Peter interprets the experience and says, "This is like the Day of the Lord that Joel talked about because He's pouring out his Spirit on His people." Peter and the apostles were performing miracles, they were performing miracles of language and translating languages and the interpretation of this, Peter is drawing actually from Joel's prophecy in the Old Testament. This was God showing up.

Well, what are we do with this? What difference does it matter in our life today? How do we read the Book of Joel and think about God warning people to live in righteous ways and how do we think about things that come unraveled in our world today that remind us of our need for God? Well there are always three "R's" that you're going to find as you read these prophetic warnings out of the Old Testament:

1. Rend
2. Repent
3. Return

**Rend** your hearts the prophets would often say. Not just rend your garments – what a person would do when they were seriously struck by some bad news in the Old Testament – is that they would stand up and they would tear their garment in half. The prophet here is saying, "If you're worked up about the condition of the world that you live in and you long for God to show up and bring truth to the scene, rend your hearts over that issue.

So when we look at the world today and our hearts are broken over some of the things in our society and our world that long for God's rule, rend your heart – let your heart be penetrated by that.

Second of all, **repent**. Turn away from the things that are bringing God's disfavor on your life. God does speak to us through our circumstances, and there are times when – if our life has really gone badly that we may want to ask the question, "God, is there something that I need to repent of?" – just like those believers back in the Old Testament times. People today who have so much more to draw on in terms of Jesus, forgiveness and what Jesus offers us – we have all the more reason to repent – to return to the Lord.

And that's the last "R" – to **return** to the Lord. For these people in Joel's day – they had drifted away from God. God had spelled it all out in the covenant – how to

please Him, how to obey Him, how to live in His favor, but they had sought to kind of live life in their own way and to discard what God's guidelines were for their life. And God was saying to them, "Return to me, return to Scripture, return to prayer, return to a life of worship.

Well, I hope this answers the question that – no, God does not idly threaten judgment day on us all the time. If he did that, we would just kind of tune Him out after a while. But when we read through these prophetic messages out of the Old Testament, we do need to ask ourselves the question, "What would it mean for the Lord to show up in our world today? What would he say when he would arrive on the scene? What are the three "R's" in our life that would be appropriate as we think about needing to be really broken about the world that we live in, as we think about returning to the Lord, as we think about what repentance really means.

Well, if you've enjoyed my little bug show here today or if you just have a question that's bugging you and you want to reply, hit the reply link down there and write me and we'll talk.

This has been Tim Perry, pastor of Spiritual Discover at Christ Community Church. Thanks for watching.