

How Much Does Your God Weigh?

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[0:00] Take your Bibles and open to the prophet Joel. The last of the major prophets is Ezekiel, and right after Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel.

! And we'll read the first chapter tonight. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, son of Pethul. 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 forefathers? 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.

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. A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number.

[1:14] It has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. 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.

Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth, grieving for the husband of her youth. Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the Lord.

The priests are in mourning, those who minister before the Lord. The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed.

The new wine is dried up, the oil fails. Despair, you farmers, wail, you vine growers. Grieve for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed.

The vine is dried up and the fig tree is withered. The pomegranate, the palm, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field are dried up.

[2:17] Surely the joy of mankind is withered away. Put on sackcloth, O 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, Alas, for that day.

For the day of the Lord is near. It will come like destruction from the Almighty. Has not the food been cut off before our very eyes? Joy and gladness from the house of our God.

The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods. The storehouses are in ruins. The granaries have been broken down, for the grain has dried up. How the cattle moan.

[3:21] The herds mill around because they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep are suffering. To you, O Lord, I call. For fire has devoured the open pastures.

And flames have burned up all the trees of the field. Even the wild animals pant for you. The streams of water have dried up.

And the fire has devoured the open pastures. I have a question as we begin.

Who is the most important person in the universe? Who's the strongest? The greatest? The most impressive? The most influential person in the universe?

And I think you would say, God. Amen. So, some more questions. Children, if you go to school, how often do you talk about the most important person in the universe?

[4:26] Or, when you go to work, how much do you talk about? How much does that most important person have to do with your work?

Your job? Your work environment? So, if you go to college, the one who teaches everyone everything, the God of truth, how much do you talk about him?

How much does he figure in? How much do you count on him? Or, maybe, in your families. Is God the central, most awesome reality in your family?

David Wells wrote in his book, *God in the Wasteland*. It is one of the defining marks of our time that God is weightless.

I do not mean by this that he is ethereal, like he's gassy or spiritual, but rather that he has become unimportant. Those who assure the pollsters of their belief in God's existence.

[5:38] So, here's people that say, oh, I believe God exists. I believe there's a God, and I believe that he exists. They consider him less interesting than television. His commands, less authoritative than their appetites.

So, God says, do this, and my appetites say, do that, and so, who has more authority? His judgment, no more awe-inspiring than the evening news.

And his truth, less compelling than the sweet fog of flattery and lies that come from the advertisers. That is weightlessness.

So, for me to turn Isaiah chapter 40 on its head, God is a drop in man's bucket. He is dust on man's scales.

And so, it's our culture, more than any other culture, that has turned Jesus, instead of being a mighty savior, and someone, instead of someone to die for, even to kill for, that's wrong, but at least they thought Jesus was important.

[6:47] It's left to our culture that turned Jesus into a nice man with good ideas, but he's really dull, and unimportant, and uninfluential, and a big yawn, not a great savior.

Dorothy Sayers, in 1949, wrote, the people who hanged Christ, never, let's do them justice, never accused him of being a bore. On the contrary, they thought him too dynamic to be safe.

It has been left for later generations to muffle up, to silence that shattering personality, and surround him with an atmosphere of boredom. We have very efficiently clipped the claws of the Lion of Judah, and certified him meek and mild, and recommended him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.

So, who's God good for? Well, people who, men who like to go to funerals, and do weddings, and sort of make their living by doing religious things, and old ladies.

That's who Jesus is good for. But everyone else, sophisticated people, smart people, important people, even normal people, God is not important, and Jesus is not important.

[8:10] Well, that's our world. That's where you work. That's where you go to school. That's maybe even your house. But what about you? And what about us?

Is God here? Does God matter? Or is he just a domesticated, distant deity? That, you know, he's happy if we throw him a bone every now and then.

We just give him a little bit. If we give him Sunday, if we give him the whole day, but the rest of the time it's up for grabs. It's up to me. My son, this week, asked me how tall God is.

I don't know even what I said. I don't even know what to say to that. How tall is God? And that's, my question tonight is, how much does your God weigh? How important is he?

How much does he weigh on your, weigh on your mind and weigh on your heart and say, you know, we need to think about the Lord. We need to seek the Lord. We need, we need to do what he says.

[9:09] How much does he matter in your life? Those are really the driving questions of the book of Joel. So if you have your Bibles open to Joel, I hope you do.

Look at chapter two, verse 17. Look at the very end. And he says, in the very end, it's a really long verse.

Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? So people were saying, where's Israel's God? I mean, people talk about him, but he doesn't seem to factor in here.

People were saying, God isn't around or he doesn't care or he doesn't matter. And then turn over to Joel chapter two, verse 27. And after God, God sends judgment.

He says then, and not only judgment, but then revival. And he starts building Israel up. 227. Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other.

[10:10] Never again will my people be shamed. And then look at chapter three, verse 17 of Joel. Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill.

Then you will know that I am here. Then you will know. And then look at the very last phrase of the whole book of Joel, where the whole book ends up.

After everything is said and done, the Lord dwells in Zion. He's not far away. He's with his people.

And he is present. And he is powerful. Those are the questions of the book of Joel. So here's modern man. Here's my flesh.

Here are the people of Israel. Here are the nations that surrounded Israel back in Joel's day, saying God's not all that big, or God is far away. God doesn't matter.

[11:10] He's not that important. And so we care about our sports teams, and we care about our television, and our video games, and we care about our politicians, and our talk shows.

We care about Marvel movies and Captain America, and we care about what people think about us. We want their respect. We want them to think we have it together. We have our agendas.

We have our lives. We have our plans. We have our families. But does God matter? Is God here? Does he weigh anything? Well, the book of Joel answers that question. And God, through Joel, doesn't answer with gentle words.

He doesn't answer. We read the first chapter. It's the beginning of God's answer. And to be honest, the answer gets more and more extreme as you go through the book of Joel.

[12:11] He answers with ruin. He answers with plague. He answers with war, with the end of the whole world, with armies annihilated, with blood running over, with damnation, and with salvation.

And by the end of Joel, it leaves no doubt that the Lord is God. He alone is God. He alone has that place and he's not tame.

The Lion of Judah is going to roar and it says it's going to shake. Heaven and earth will tremble.

And the all-important question by the end of Joel is, how am I going to stand in the day of decision? How am I going to stand when I'm in the valley of decision? Because then it will be the all-important question of what is God going to do with me?

Not what am I going to do with God? We do need to get a couple of basic points out of the way.

First is that the book of Joel is the word of God that came to the prophet Joel.

[13:24] And we don't know anything about him except that his father's name was Pethuel. His name, Joel, means Yahweh is God. The Lord is God.

And his name fits the message of the book that he has written. And so that was the all-important question. Who's God? Well, Joel's message is that the Lord is God and he alone is God.

And we don't know anything about him. We don't know the occasion of this writing. We don't know when he wrote. We don't know exactly who he even wrote to, whether it was Israel or Judah or the combined nation.

We don't know. So there's this certain timelessness to it. There's a certain aspect where it's for all people. It's for us. It's for wherever his words are read, whoever reads them.

And so they're for us. They're for our world because just like in Israel, people were discounting God, so today they're discounting God. And so the message is the same. And so into that world and into our world, into our mindset of God being far off and I don't know how much he really counts.

[14:37] Joel speaks and God thunders. So that's Joel. That's his book. That's his audience. It's us.

And so how does God answer the question? If someone were to say, God, do you really matter? Are you important? Are you the Lord? Well, how does God answer?

Well, Joel 1, he reaches into his arsenal and to his armory. The Lord is a king. He has lots of weapons.

He has lots of weapons. He can choose all sorts of things. And he reaches into his armory and he pulls out a weapon. And it's a weapon that he's used before. It's a weapon that he's used against Egypt.

And he unleashes the tiniest of his soldiers, the lowly grasshopper. The lowly grasshopper.

[15:39] And we've all seen them. We've all seen them bouncing around in our yard or out in the field. But I don't think we have really an idea of what Joel is getting at because we're used to thinking about a single grasshopper or maybe two grasshoppers bouncing around in our yards.

But Joel is getting at something completely different. And so, because you see, when the conditions are just right, when the temperature is just right and the moisture is just right, the lowly locust, lowly grasshopper starts to change.

And it starts to change in size. It grows. And then it becomes extremely sexually active. One locust in two months' time can have over a billion descendants.

A billion descendants. Did you catch it when Pastor John read? It's an army without number.

There's no numbers in Hebrew that even go that high.

Literally. But in two months' time, there's over one little locust can have two million descendants. And then it swarms. And then the nice grasshopper becomes God's weapon to strike down the pride of men and to shake the foundations of an entire world.

[17:05] and it's God's way of saying, I'm here. Repent. And so Joel begins with this announcement of judgment that the old people are going to say, you know what, I've seen a lot of things but I've never seen anything like that before.

So, you understand, every new thing, people, older people have this tendency to say, well, you know, back in my day, it was different. And oh, I've seen something like this before.

Well, Joel is saying, something's going to happen that the elders are never, they'll be flabbergasted as the young people. And they're going to talk.

And the young children will sit in awe as they hear about what will happen. Or what is happening. A plague was coming. Or a plague had come. And it's a plague that's straight out of the book of Exodus.

And this time, it's not coming on the nation of Egypt. It's coming on God's own people. It's coming on God's own people. And just like God judged Egypt, now God is turning His plague against His own people because they've forgotten Him.

[18:16] Because He didn't weigh anything in their lives. And now nothing was going to be left. That's verse 4. 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. And now some people have tried to figure out what are these different kinds or these different species or these different stages of locusts.

I don't think that's the point. The point is that it's going to be complete ruin. That when one comes then another's going to come. And when the hammer falls it's going to fall again and again and again.

And when you think it's done it's not done. There's more to come. And it will fall again and again and again.

And He's saying you're going to stand outside of your house and see literally nothing alive. There's talk of fire.

[19:18] There's talk of drought in this book. and I think those are just pictures of what it's like what it's going to be like when the locusts are done. It's nothing but dirt.

There's nothing but decay. And so you're going to look at stand outside your house in complete dismay as you watch your life and your future slipping away.

So how bad is a locust swarm? A locust plague. Melba Holiday lived through one at least a swarm. She lived in Kansas and she went through one and so you can ask her on Sunday. Every piece of grass is eaten, is devoured.

Every leaf on all the trees is devoured. The bark of the tree is devoured. And so Melba told me the story of they left a rake outside leaning up against something I guess and the locusts completely covered the rake like top to bottom and after things had passed and they were gone, they were done, they went out and looked at that rake and it had millions of little bites all the way up where the locusts had tried to eat right through that piece of wood.

[20:44] A locust swarm will completely destroy a full-grown tree in 15 minutes. You can Google it. There's pictures of a live tree and then after the swarm and it's completely gone.

I mean, it's there but there's no bark, there's no leaves, there's no fruit, there's nothing on it. There's nothing but bare wood. And they don't just satisfy themselves with what's in the field and what's in the orchard.

We saw that. They're eating the pomegranates and the apples and everything, the palm and the apple tree. They're eating everything in the field but they also got into where you've stored your food, into your granaries, into your hiding places, and they find it and they eat there.

They eat everything and so not only is your field that's planted and so next year's harvest is devoured but last year's harvest is devoured. Years are destroyed and so now you don't have seed left either for the coming years.

and if you were in ancient Israel that meant starvation. That meant watching your children wither away and your babies dying and so can you imagine the fear?

[22:06] Can you imagine the arguing and the fighting? Can you imagine going to your neighbors and then not having anything and the desperation and everyone is reduced to just hoping to make it

by?

That's what a locust plague does. So how bad is it? How horrifying is it? Well, you could read and meditate and if you use your imagination you can begin to see how terrible it was but let me give you an idea of what Joel is talking about because it wasn't only the food that is devoured it's the experience itself it's the swarm itself that is so bad.

In 1915 a locust plague struck Jerusalem and there was a young British soldier stationed there and he wrote in his diary the locust invasion started seven days ago and covered the sky.

Today it took the locust clouds two hours to pass over the city. God protect us from the three plagues war, locusts, and disease for they are spreading through the whole country.

Pity the poor. So can you imagine a cloud of insects that takes two hours to cross over your head? And from what I could tell that was a rather small one.

[23 : 33] I'm not a bug scientist but in 1875 a locust plague struck Nebraska and Missouri and listen to one article.

According to the first hand account of A.L. Child a swarm of Rocky Mountain locusts passed over Plattsmouth, Nebraska in 1875 by timing the rate of movement as the insects streamed overhead for five days and by telegraphing to separate surrounding towns he was able to estimate that the swarm was 1,800 miles long and was at least 110 miles wide and based on his information this swarm covered a swath equal to the combined areas of Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

And the museum in Nebraska, the Henry County History Museum in Nebraska says this, they came in swarms, they came by the millions, they came in legions, they came by the mile, and they darkened the heavens in their flight and blackened the earth's surface where in myriads they sought their daily meal.

Henry County was visited from about the first week of May and remained until the first of June, 1875. And during that time every spear of wheat, oats, flax, and corn were eaten close to the ground.

Potatoes and all vegetables received the same treatment and on the line of their march ruin stared the farmer in the face and starvation knocked loudly on his door.

[25 : 17] In August of this year a locust plague struck southern Russia and it was the same, they used the same words. The sky is blackened. There's nothing left.

The land's covered. And with that the Lord says, I am God. I can take a lowly little grasshopper and multiply and multiply and destroy your whole world.

So who are you to forget me? Who are you to trifle with me? Who are you to think I don't count? I raise up and I destroy.

And he says in verse 5, now wake up you drunkards and weep and wail all you drinkers of wine. And so here they are living for their pleasures.

They're living for what they could put in their stomachs. They're living for their they think life is good and they're only thinking about when I can drink again when I can have that next pleasure when I can do that next thing and we could do it other ways.

[26 : 25] When am I going to have that next meal? When am I going to watch that next show? When am I going to be able to do this and go to the next game and watch the next thing? And going from day to day every day saying okay how can I fill this day up with the most things that make me happy?

How can I please themselves? There's no thought for God. There's no concern for God. God is weightless and it's brought all to an end. It all comes crashing down.

The life they built the joys they lived for in their thought there was no room for God and will God stand idly by and let that just happen? So why does God send ruin into our lives?

Well there's a lot of reasons. But isn't it sometimes because so often we are asleep and God is saying wake up.

Isn't it so often we've been living for the wrong things. And so in that severe mercy and in painful grace he strikes us and he chastises us and he sends us reeling because how else can he reach us?

[27 : 43] If he sends good to us what will we do with it? We'll just say this is great we'll want more. We'll just go on our way. pain.

But hurt. But ruin. But completely turning our lives upside down. That gets our attention. That gets our attention.

And so in this plague God was waking up Israel. He was giving a wake up call to Israel. And so this shows us that one way and one reason that are one way to look on the pain.

one way to look on those severe trials that aren't just bumps in the road but they're completely life altering and they're completely destructive of what I thought and they bring my life to a halt.

It's sometimes not definitely but it very well could be God putting his finger on your sin. On your godlessness.

[28:41] On your carelessness. On your self-sufficiency. And so you've loved the world too much. I've loved the world too much. I've loved the pleasures that I could get from the world. And so God is saying now wake up.

You're drunk with this world. You're drunk with it. Your own pleasure and comfort. And so wake up. I'm God. I am worth living for.

And these things I can snatch from your hands in a moment. And so he's saying wake up. And then next you see the morning. The morning. Or say says mourn like a virgin in sackcloth.

Mourning for her husband. It's either a virgin who's lost her fiancé or it's a young woman in the first years of her marriage. And now all of a sudden she loses her husband.

So you could put this is not a woman who's had a long life with her husband. woman. This is someone who all she looks in the future and she sees dreams.

[29:44] She sees wonderful things. She has plans for her and her husband. She thinks she has years of love and they're going to enjoy each other. And so you can just picture she's made her home.

She's set up everything. She's written her children's names in her journal of what she's going to name them. And she has these plans. and now he's dead.

She's in her house weeping and mourning. She's lost the love of her life and her future and her dreams are all taken away.

And that's Israel. God had taken their dreams away. God had taken their plans and their hopes. They didn't include him. They didn't include him and so he took them away.

And now all that's left is despair. Despair you farmers. Wail you vine growers. Verse 12 says surely the joy of mankind is withered away. Now my question is does God do that to us?

[30:52] Does he take away our dreams and our hopes? Does he completely overturn our plans? Does he ruin them and ruin our lives? At least the lives we had planned for ourselves?

And the answer is sometimes he does. Sometimes he does. Because God is committed to building his kingdom and his kingdom only gets built on the ruins of my kingdom.

I can't have my kingdom come and God's kingdom come at the same time in my life. And so as long as it's me and my dreams and what I want and my pleasures and God isn't factoring in there and I'm not living for him.

It's just me and what I've got going. And as long as that's as big as I dream, just as big as me, then how can God allow that to continue? How can God allow that to continue?

What else is there to do except to tear down my kingdom? Because my kingdom is about me. And his kingdom is about him.

[31:57] And God will not bow like a servant to the throne of my kingdom. And so in pain and in destroying my kingdom, he's giving me a chance to find my place.

To live for something better, to live for something grander, to bring him in and actually recognize him as the king that he is, that he has the right to my heart, he has the rule, he is the most important person in my life, and I can't live the way I was anymore.

And so in doing these things, he's waking me up so I can repent. And that's how Joel 1 ends. From the first 13 on to the end, we have people mourning and repenting.

We have animals doing it. We have the priests doing it. We have the elders doing it. We have the whole community doing it. Everyone as a whole, everyone that's been afflicted by the misery is now coming to God and repentance.

And so he calls Israel to repent, to turn away from the life that they were living and their plans that they were doing, and now to mourn and repent.

[33:10] So put on sackcloth, O priest, 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 are withheld

from the house of your God.

The priests in Deuteronomy again and again were told to get the sacrifices, and they're commanded to rejoice before the Lord. As part of the minister in the Old Testament, your job was to rejoice before the Lord.

You're receiving these sacrifices, you're being fed, the people are being blessed to eat the food and rejoice before the Lord. And again and again, Israel is commanded to bring their sacrifices and their fellowship offerings, bring them to the temple, bring them to the tabernacle, and rejoice before the Lord.

But now here in Joel, everything is turned upside down and there's no food. There's no rejoicing. There's nothing left. And so what should you do?

You mourn before God and you fast. And verse 14 says you cry out to the Lord. This helps us to think about what we should do when we're in these painful circumstances.

[34 : 20] experiences. And this helps us to understand what God is calling this world to. If you read the news or you watch the news or whatever, you see it again and again and again.

There's famine. There's earthquakes. There's floods. There's economic disasters. There's war. There's people driven from their homes.

Lives ruined. And what is God doing? What is God calling our world to?

He's calling our world to repentance. To say these things aren't worth living for. There's something more. And so when he shakes our tottering world, what is God saying to us?

Except repent. repentance. And so as long as things go well, people are satisfied. Have you noticed that about yourself? I've certainly noticed it about myself.

[35 : 24] As long as things are going well, I'm satisfied. There's no need to repent. But then the hammer falls and the world is shaken and finally we see and finally we wake up and we see things like we never saw them before and then we call out to the Lord.

God. And so we turn from our ungodliness. And I'm not talking about out and out wickedness there. I'm talking about just the idea that God doesn't weigh anything on my mind. There's no room for him in my thoughts and so we turn away from our weightlessness of God and we cry out for mercy and forgiveness.

And so all of this for a believer and even for the world is a painful grace to bring people to God in repentance and in faith.

And so it's painful grace to say repent and turn to me and I will have mercy. So it's like God. So if God is a blacksmith right now in your life and he is hammering you and he is hammering you repent, cry out and he will be merciful.

He will receive you. And so it is this painful grace but there's another side to it. It brings us, it brings God's people to repentance but and it's calling the world to repentance.

[36 : 48] But there's another side to this whole locust plague. And it's a warning shot off the bow. You know that? So there's the boat and you're saying you can't get any closer, you can't get any closer and someone says send a warning shot off the bow and they send the shot.

And they're saying if you keep going we're not going to miss next time. We're going to hit you and your boat's going to sink. It's a warning shot. It's a ripple of the coming storm. You know like when the first clouds of a big storm are coming through or picture a hurricane and those outer clouds. The wind is starting to pick up. It's starting to get up. But there's worse coming. It's all part of the same system. It's all part of the same storm. But what these things are initially is just to say there's more to come and it's worse.

And so that's verse 15 starts to key us in in that direction. And it's saying alas for that day for the day of the Lord is near. It was drawing near in this locust plague, but it's getting closer and closer and he says it will come like destruction from the almighty.

And so this locust plague is just a first ripple. it's the first the first waves though. But but worst is coming. In Revelation 9, Joel's locusts show up again.

[38 : 14] But this time they're not swarming out of the hot desert sand. You can read about it. The furnace of hell is opened up and it's smoking.

and out of the smoke says this, the sun and the sky were darkened by the smoke from the abyss and out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth.

And now they're worse than ever and their mission is clear. They were told and this is if you read Joel 1, you'll see that this is almost the exact opposite of Joel 1.

They were told not to harm. The grass of the earth or any plant or tree. But only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads.

During those days men will seek death but will not find it. They will long to die but death will elude them. Joel points forward to the last plague and he's saying repent now because worse is coming. [39:25] when whatever Revelation is talking about those locusts they'll ignore the plants and the animals. They're after you. And Revelation says it will be only on those who have the seal of God on their foreheads that will escape.

Only those who belong to God. God's put his stamp on them. He's put his protection on them. And so everyone else will beg to die but won't be able to.

So do you belong to God? Do you belong to God? Are you on God's side? Joel is saying get ready. Get ready. How do you get ready?

Jesus Christ is how you get ready. Because only his blood and his righteousness can cover you. And when you come to Jesus that's how you get God's stamp on your head.

That's how he saves you. Coming to Jesus. And so repent. Repent of living like there's no God. Repent of living like God hardly weighs anything and he's not that important.

[40:34] And cry out for mercy. And brothers and sisters isn't that something that we all need to do? God needs to get bigger in all of our minds.

In all of our hearts. His kingdom needs to come more and more. And just like John the Baptist says he must increase and I must decrease. There's room for repentance for all of us.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father thank you for the kindness of giving us these words to shake us out of our apathy to give us clarity to show us what is really worth living for and how big and strong you are.

Forgive us for trifling with you and I pray that you would please work salvation tonight. But work in all of my brothers and sisters that you might grow in their estimation that we might together as a church as a body as a family as individuals that we might grow in the fear of the Lord because we know how fierce your judgment can be.

Teach us to fear you and teach us to love you and teach us to cherish Jesus because Jesus is the only way and the only reason we will escape the wrath to come.

[41:59] So I pray that each and every one of us would get closer and closer by faith to our Lord Jesus. Pray that these words would not slip out of our minds but would echo in our hearts and by the Spirit to change us.

I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.