

Crushing Grace

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[0:00] Joel chapter 2 and the first 17 verses tonight. 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. 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 of old nor ever will be in ages to come.

Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the Garden of Eden, behind them a desert waste.

Nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses. They gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots, they leap over the mountaintops.

[0:58] Like a crackling fire consuming stubble. Like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish.

Every face turns pale. They charge like warriors. They scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course.

They do not jostle each other. Each march is straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. They rush upon the city.

They run along the wall. They climb into the houses. Like thieves, they enter through the windows. Before them the earth shakes. The sky trembles.

The sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine. The Lord thunders at the head of his army. His forces are beyond number and mighty are those who obey his command.

[1:56] The day of the Lord is great. It is dreadful. Who can endure it? Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

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. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing. Grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion. Declare a holy fast. Call a sacred assembly. Gather the people.

Consecrate the assembly. Bring together the elders.

Gather the children. Those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. Let the priests who minister before the Lord weep between the temple porch and the altar.

[3:06] Let them say, Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn. A byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, Where is their God?

Children, if you have ever asked your parents, If you love me, why do you spank me? Then you're in good company.

I don't think it's the first time that you've asked, or a child's ever asked that question. And I'm sure it won't be the last. And maybe they tell you, We spank you because we love you.

And that doesn't make a lot of sense, does it? But, it really is true. And when you're a parent, You find out that that is exactly the truth.

But, moms and dads, It shows you how far we have to go When God disciplines us, How often do we say, Lord, if you love me, Why are you doing this?

[4:17] How can you let this happen? And you love me. Not much of a difference, is there? Between a little child asking that question, And when we're suffering in our trials, And we're wondering how God could do that to us.

Well, the answer is, Love has all kinds of ways of feeling towards people, And so does grace. Sometimes grace feels like broken bones. And sometimes grace breaks bones. Psalm 51, David said, Let the bones you have crushed rejoice. So you remember what happened. David was hardened in his sin, And nothing was getting through to him. He'd been there for a while now. And the stubbornness of his heart Was such that It didn't seem like anything was going to faze him.

And so, God called up his prophet Nathan. And Nathan came with a very simple story. But on the other hand, Nathan came with a sledgehammer.

[5 : 25] And God broke David's bones. It was severe mercy. It was crushing grace. Because God wanted David back.

God wanted David back. And David's way back started with broken bones. And so our feet wander. And our feet stray. And sometimes in crushing grace, God brings us back. And then we say with the psalmist, After it's over, We say, It was good that I was afflicted.

It was. But we don't say that very often in the midst of it. Well, in the book of Joel, God is doing that same thing. God's people were forgetting God.

We saw that a couple of weeks ago. The big question in Joel is, Who is the Lord? Who is God? Where is God at? I don't think God's here. No one's paying any attention to him. And with a loud bang And a horrible locust play, God says, I am the Lord.

[6 : 28] And you will listen. And you will pay attention to me. I am God in Israel. And so they were living for other things. But God wants his children close. So in grace and in anger, He unleashed this locust against his own people.

And it was chastisement. It was a spanking. And it was painful grace. Well, what does grace look like when God is wooing a sinner or when God is bringing a sinner back to himself?

Sometimes it looks like a locust plague. Flip over just a few pages to your right in the book of Amos. Should just be the next book over.

Amos chapter 4. And then we see again, what does grace look like? Sometimes it doesn't look like grace at all. But it really is.

Amos chapter 4 and verse 6. And look at what God was doing. But look at how he was doing it. Chapter 4, verse 6. I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town.

[7 : 38] Yet you have not returned to me. Verse 7. I also withheld rain from you. Verse 8. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink.

Yet you have not returned to me. Verse 9. Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees. Yet you have not, you did not return to me.

Verse 10. I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. And at the end it says, yet you have not returned to me. What is all that?

Empty stomachs and drought and locusts and plagues. It was God in severe mercy saying, come back to me. Return to me.

Now that's one way to understand the book of Joel. You can turn back to Joel chapter 2 now. That's one way to understand the book of Joel. It's an open window into God's sometimes strange way of dealing with his people.

[8 : 43] It's an open window into God's heart and to how seriously God takes his people. He wants them to be close to him. He wants them to return to him. And so often in our trials, we think God is forsaking us, is pushing us away.

But many times in our trials, God isn't saying, stay away from me. He's saying, return to me. That's what he's saying in our trials. It's the exact opposite. Repent and come close.

Now that's one way to look at the book of Joel. God struck his people Israel with this locust plague in order that they might know that he is God and that they would give him their hearts.

And another way to look at Joel is to see that it is building up to something. Chapter 2 is a lot like chapter 1. We're going to see that as we go. Chapter 1 sort of lays a foundation.

Now chapter 2, we're going to come back around and we're going to see the same picture. But this time it's slightly different. Now it's a warning shot off of our bow saying the end is coming. The day of the Lord is great and dreadful.

[9 : 51] Who can endure it? So it's grace to get us to repent. And sometimes trials are grace to say, get ready for the last day.

When nations are shaken and wars and desolations happen, it is God's way of saying, don't be caught off guard. Don't be caught sleeping. Worse is still to come. And so today we're going to look at Joel chapter 2 and we're going to see those two things going on. Painful grace that says repent and painful grace saying, get ready for the end. Get ready for the end.

So chapter 2 is like chapter 1 except it's worse. Chapter 2, we see the locust again, but what happens is not altogether natural.

There's something half supernatural about it. Chapter 2 has sort of an eye, one eye on the locust plagues that we looked at in chapter 1.

[10:48] And it also has an eye on the very end. And these two times, and these two events are layered upon each other so that when you see one, you're looking at both.

So it's two times, two events layered on each other so seeing one is like seeing the other. And that is often the way it is in biblical prophecy.

So when Jesus was explaining the fall of Jerusalem in Matthew chapter 24, it's notoriously difficult to discern.

Now, is he talking about the fall of Jerusalem here? Or is he talking about the end of the world?

Because they look a lot alike. So these two events layered on each other.

So do you want to know what the world's last day is going to look like? Joel chapter 2 is going to give us a picture of it.

[11:47] So, we have three points as we begin. And then we're going to look at a response. And the first point is we see a declaration of war. A declaration of war.

Verse 1, 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. Now, the trumpet was blown to warn the people of an invasion.

And so now, here it is. The prophet is announcing with a trumpet call that now the land is going to be invaded. And it's nothing less than God coming in judgment.

So, this locust plague wasn't just some sort of natural event. God was coming to Israel. And when he comes in judgment, it is darkness.

And it is gloom. It is clouds. It is blackness. When God came to Mount Sinai, the clouds were thick and dark and black and the people trembled and the mountain trembled.

[12:55] And when God came in judgment to the cross, it was dark again. And Joel is saying, God is coming. He is on the war path.

Get ready. So, how do we look at natural disasters? How do we look at horrific plagues? How do we look at earthquakes and wars and desolation? Joel is teaching us to say that, in part, God is giving us.

God is visiting the world with judgment. He's shaking the world of men. I was just reading a book called The Proud Tower.

Sort of like the Tower of Babel. But it's called The Proud Tower. And it's a history of Europe. right before World War I. And in that time in history and Europe and before World War I, there was this great optimism about what man was going to accomplish and what man can do and what governments could do.

And so Europe was proud. The elite, the ruling class, the nations were proud. They were secure. And then World War I happened. And millions and millions, a whole generation of men died in the trenches.

[14:18] And the Proud Tower fell. And after that, people weren't so optimistic about what things were going to be like. Well, it was judgment.

And it was painful grace to wake people up, to shake them out of their self-sufficiency. But just like in Amos' time, they did not return to me.

So what will the last day be like? Well, God will come. And it will not be in peace. It will be at war.

He'll be with war. And then we see next the Lord, God's army. So we saw the declaration of war.

Now we look at the army. God doesn't come alone.

The Lord Jesus, when he returns, it will not be alone. Verse 11 says, The Lord thunders at the head of his army. Revelation 19 shows us the king of kings named Faithful and True.

[15:17] He's dressed in a robe dipped in blood. It's not his blood. It's the blood of the people that he has slain. And that splashed on him and his name is the word of God.

He has come to carry out God's desires. He's come to make manifest what God wants. And then it says, And the armies of heaven were following him.

So what were the locusts like? What will God's army be like on the last day? Joel 2 tells us. You remember two weeks ago I quoted that museum article about the locust plague in Nebraska in 1875.

And remember what it said. They came in swarms. They came by the millions. They came in legions. They came by the mild. They darkened the heavens in their flight.

They blackened the earth's surface. That locust plague was like an army. Legions. That's the idea. Remember when the Midianites in the book of Judges invaded Israel and it was Gideon.

[16 : 19] He looks down in the valley and it says this. The Midianites settled in the valley thick as locusts. So there they were.

The Midianites thick as locusts. And now here they are the real locusts. So what kind of army is this? What kind of army was God bringing? What kind of army will God bring on the last day?

Three times it says mighty. Mighty. verse 2, verse 5, verse 11. A large and mighty army comes.

Verse 11 says beyond number. It's mighty. When God comes he doesn't need to bring a lot but he is going to bring a lot.

Remember an angel or two destroyed 180,000 Assyrians in one night. He doesn't need a lot but Jesus is going to bring a lot.

[17 : 25] The Lord descends with all his hosts with the armies of heaven and the locusts are a picture of that. Angels without number. One angel sent hardened Roman soldiers into a dead faint for the open tomb and the last day the armies of heaven will descend.

So the army is mighty. The army is aggressive. Verse 5 they leap over the mountaintops. Now that's obviously a picture of what the locusts are doing but you sense the movement and they're leaping over the mountaintops.

They charge like warriors. They rush upon the city. They run along the wall. They go through the windows. They climb into the houses. Do you see what they're coming? They are coming. They are coming and nothing can stop them.

They've come to fight. They've come to destroy. They've come as the sword in God's hand. And with these weapons he is going to get his vengeance on sinful men. And they are not afraid.

They're not afraid. The locusts were not afraid. The angels will not be afraid. They're not second guessing themselves. Joel compares them to fire. You know when a big forest fire happens it doesn't ask whether it will burn down your house or not.

[18 : 37] It just does it because that's what fire does. A raging forest fire. Indeed God's servants in Hebrews 1 are called flames of fire. Servants are flames of fire. And on the last day you will not be able to find an angel to spare you.

You will not be able to find an angel reluctant to take you. Jesus says they will be like farmers reaping the field. Now farmers back then they waded into a field of grain with their sickles and they cut right and they cut left and they locked off the grapes.

They're mighty. They're aggressive. They're unstoppable. Nothing escapes them. The city, the walls, the defenses are no good.

In chapter 1 the locusts were seen mostly out in the countryside and it talked about the grain and the vineyards and the granaries and all the rest. So vineyards, fig trees, the fields of grain, it's all destroyed.

But in chapter 2 we aren't out in the field. We aren't exposed. We have a city. We have a wall. We have strength. We have defenses. And Jerusalem was not a walk in the park to take for any army.

[19 : 53] It took Rome months to take Jerusalem. It took Babylonians months to take the city. But against God's army, the city is no match. The city of man is no match against God's army.

All the walls, all the defenses, they go right through them like a hot knife, like a hot knife, right through butter. And so they will do their best to prepare, but none of it does any good. They can't be stopped.

It's inevitable. That's the locust. That's the Lord's army that he's going to bring on the last day. And so people will cry for the rocks and the hills to hide them, and it won't do any good.

Nothing to defend you. And then you see their commander. Verse 11, the Lord thunders at the head of his army.

So who is riding on the clouds, in the chariot, in the front, leading the way? Who comes as the commander of the army of the Lord? Joshua met him outside of Jericho.

[20:55] Joshua said, who are you for? Us or our enemies? He was a man with a drawn sword, and he wasn't for Israel, and he wasn't for their enemies, because his command was not so small.

He says, but I come to you as the commander of the army of heaven. And Joshua fell down on his face in reverence. So whose war is it?

It's the Lord's war. Whose army is it? It's the Lord's. And he doesn't wait in the rear, and he doesn't hope that his soldiers don't get out of hand.

He raises his sword, he raises his spear against Jerusalem, he raises his spear against the nations of the world, and they will fall. So what happens?

What happens when the Lord comes and makes war against his people? What happens when the Lord comes down in judgment? Well, verse 3, the earth is destroyed.

[22:02] Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them a desert waste. It seems to be echoes of Sodom and Gomorrah, beautiful cities of the plain, wealthy, and nothing left but ashes.

None survive. The fire comes before and it comes after and it leaves nothing green. The earth is destroyed and then the nations are left writhing in anguish.

Do you see that in verse, I think it's verse 6 there, the nations are in anguish. This isn't just a local event now, it's broadening its horizon to the end.

The nations are in anguish and agony, they writhe at misery and despair. The nations, they're so proud. In pride, they waged war, in pride, they did so many things, they're so strong and so able, and now God strikes them and now they are like pregnant women, writhing in agony, crying out in anguish, they crawl in the dust, and the proud tower of men falls.

And finally, the heavens themselves, in verse 10, are struck, and the earth shakes, and the heavens tremble. It's a picture of creation being undone.

[23:27] It's a picture of creation getting unwound and falling apart. The earth falls apart, the sky falls apart, and so now the sun and the moon are left like just dark orbs in the sky, and the stars, you can't be seen.

Now, in a locust plague, it could cover the sun, and so it would actually get dark, or at least dimmer, and you couldn't see the moon, you couldn't have a hard time seeing the sun, but what that pictured in a little way, God is going to do finally.

When God comes in judgment, the lights go out. again, remember in the ten plagues, darkness came on the whole land, and then Jesus on the cross, darkness came on the whole land.

It's a picture of creation going back to the beginning. It's a picture of creation getting unwound, because what were those first words that God said? Let there be light.

There was light. light. But now he brings it to an end, and the night comes. And so it ends. The day of the Lord is great.

[24:46] It is dreadful. Who can endure it? You know, sometimes we wonder why the end doesn't come sooner.

And I think if we had an idea of how big it's going to be, we wouldn't be so hoping for it to come so soon. We're so wondering why it hasn't.

So who can endure it? How do you win a war against God? That's the all-important question that a general has to ask. If you're going to be in the war, how are you going to win it?

Well, Gamaliel told us this morning, there is no winning. There's just surrender. There's just surrender. The only way to make it through is to surrender before he gets there.

Jesus himself says, suppose a king is about to go to war against another king, will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with 10,000 men to oppose the one coming against him with 20,000? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

[25:55] So if you are in a fight that you cannot win, the best policy is peace. Make peace. That's the only way out, the only way through. It's surrender, it's repentance, it's peace now.

And that's what verses 12 through 17 are talking about. It's saying repent. Verse 12 says, even now, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.

So do you see the heart of God? And we need to hear this. Has God been bringing you to the brink? Has he been hammering you and hurting you, chastising you?

And maybe it's been for so long or maybe you've been saying no, no, no, and he's convicting you and convicting you. But now, even at the brink, when the trumpet is blowing and the invasion is coming, he says, even now, return to me.

It's not too late. Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. And so do you see the heart of God? Do you see he's giving us? He's giving us the way forward, what we can do.

[27:08] So even now, after all this time, after all this judgment, even after the trumpet has sounded, God says, return to me. Come back to me.

And Joel tells us how. With all your heart, all your heart, that means all that you are, all that you are, leaving nothing behind, put yourself completely on the line.

It's full, it's unconditional surrender. It's the only way to make it. full, unconditional surrender. That's how World War II ended.

They said, it has to be absolute, unconditional surrender. And that means the surrendering party, the nations that were surrendering, the countries that were surrendering, couldn't hold anything back.

They couldn't say, well, if we surrender, you have to do this, and you have to do that, and we'll surrender if you allow this to stay, or allow that to stay, or you allow us to keep doing this.

[28:11] No. To return with all your heart, to rend your heart, is not to put any conditions on the line. Not to say, God, I will come back if you let me do this, or if you promise to do that, if you keep some part of my life intact.

No, you come. No conditions. Maybe you remember that in the Chronicles of Narnia, I think it was Jill who met Aslan in the woods, and she was thirsty, and he said, come and drink, and she said, promise you won't eat me, and he said, well, I don't make promises.

Now, what Jill was wanting was conditions. She was willing to come and do what he said, as long as she kept some control that she knew that he wouldn't hurt her too badly, but repenting and returning to God with all your heart, you leave all those conditions and all your demands, and you leave your pet's sins at the door.

Aren't we too good at repenting of a hundred different things that we don't really need to repent of, but we leave those few things that we really love behind?

Returning to God with all your heart, you leave all your conditions. It's not, I'm going to keep this, it's not most, it's all, it's not everything but, no, it's unconditional surrender, and that's the only kind of repentance that will save you from God's wrath, because repentance is essentially a change of kings.

[29:51] It's a change of kings, it goes from you to him, so now instead of me telling me what to do and what I should do and what's right and what's wrong, no, now it's him, I'm turning away from myself, I'm turning away from the things that I wanted in my agenda and my sin, I'm turning to you.

It is a change of kingdoms from yours to his, and so everything else will still leave you in charge, still calling the shots, and the day of the Lord is when God's kingdom comes, when his authority is felt and made real, and everyone does exactly what God wants him to do.

Revelation says the kingdom of the world has now become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. So here's men with their kingdoms and when God comes, when the Lord comes, their kingdom is over.

It's now the beginning of a new kingdom. God has just taken over that kingdom. And so God gets to rule in your hearts either now or later. He will rule sometime, but he will rule now or later.

And that's why broken hearted surrender is the only way to endure the day of the Lord because you will bow either willingly now or when he takes his iron scepter and breaks your proud knees and down you go.

[31:23] You will bow. And so Joel says, come back even now with all your heart. And he says, come back because you know what kind of God he is.

What kind of God he is. See, there was something that we know about God that Jill didn't know about Aslan. Jill didn't know Aslan's heart, but the God that we return to is not a terrible, ferocious lion.

He is not tame, but he is good. He is gracious. That's what verses 12, the end of 12 says, return to the Lord your God for, here's a reason to return, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

That's the kind of God he is. And so when you return to him, you're not coming to some God that you're not sure what he's going to do or what he's going to be like.

No, you know him. You know what kind of God he is. He's gracious and compassionate. He longs to have mercy. His heart is given to compassion. He's slow to anger, abounding in love.

[32:29] And so dear brother, dear sister, lost sinner, do you need to return to God? Do you need to repent? Do you need to put things behind you and go to him and get close to him?

Then come and know that the God that you are returning to is gracious. He is gracious. He is good. He is kind. And he does make promises to sinners.

Later in this chapter, in verse 32, is that wonderful promise, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. So God's going to wage war, but his heart is open now.

His promises are for now. And he loves sinners and he's calling to sinners and he's saying, come home and I will forgive. Come home and I will save. Even now, it's not too late.

I will save. And Joel says, don't let anyone miss it. Blow the trumpet in Zion. Now here's the second trumpet, but this is not a trumpet for war. This is a trumpet to come to the temple and repent.

[33:29] And everyone is to repent. The whole assembly, the elders, the children. Children, you're not too young to repent. You don't have to wait until you're 11 or 12 or 15 or 18 or some really old age.

You can surrender right now and God will take your repentance. God will take you. And no one is to be too busy to repent. Or too much caught up in life and the good things of life to repent.

Do we ever struggle with that? Oh, it's so good. It's so wonderful. I'm so busy. I have things to do.

He says, bridegrooms in their rooms and brides in their chambers. You know, they're back there. everyone's here. They're back there waiting to come out and get married. God says, that's a great time to repent. You're not too busy to repent.

God calls everyone away from everything that they have their hearts set on and says, get ready. I'm coming. Repent and be saved. And then he says in verse 17, 17, and when you come, the end of verse 17, when you come, you can come with an argument.

[34:46] You can come with an argument. Let them say, here's your argument. Let them say, spare your people, O Lord.

Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples? Where is their God? When you come, whether it's for the hundredth time or for the very first time, you can come with this argument.

Lord, it will glorify you to forgive me. It will glorify you to rescue me. So why should God save sinners?

Lord, why should you do this for me? Because it glorifies you. Because when God saves, people know that God has shown up. And no one is saying, where's God at?

What's happening? When God saves, people don't say, I don't think there is a God. They say, who is like the Lord? And when we hear people coming and being saved, and when we hear people repenting of stubborn sins, and God sets them free, it sends tongues wagging, it makes hearts rejoice, and everyone's view of God is magnified.

[36:05] And so you come repenting, you come holding on to God's character, he's a good God, he's gracious and compassionate, and you come with words, forgive, save, so people will know that you are God.

Rescue me, so that others will know you are God. God, didn't Psalm 51 say something like that? Forgive me, and I will teach sinners your ways.

Lord, if you bring me back, if you rescue me, if you forgive me, if you wash me and cleanse me, it's not going to end here. I'm going to tell others about you. I'm going to tell them what you do for sinners.

So glorify yourself, Lord, in forgiving me. So take words with you. Go with all your heart. Go with confidence, because you know the one you're going to, and you repent, and you believe.

And isn't that something that we all need to do? Let's pray. Lord, we do, each one of us, have areas in our life that we need to start obeying in.

[37:24] And maybe some here need to obey the gospel. It says to come and make peace with God, to repent and to believe.

And some here need to put to death some stubborn sin. And even now you're saying, come, rend your heart, return to me.

And so we want to come to you, Lord. We don't want to wait for you to come to us in war, but we want to come to you in repentance and faith and to be reconciled to you, to have a renewed obedience, a renewed faith, a renewed life and love for you.

Will you give us that gift of repentance, Lord Jesus? thank you that you are Prince and Savior to give repentance to the nation of Israel, and surely we are your Israel, so please give us those gifts and save your people.

Lord Jesus, I pray that you would magnify yourself, even as we wait for your coming. The things that we heard should be startling, and they should be awe-inspiring and frightening to think of what you are going to do, and how is it going to be on that last day.

[38 : 51] I pray that we would each be prepared for that day, that we would not be caught unaware. Oh, we pray that you would have mercy on us, Lord Jesus.

In your name, Amen. Amen.