

Forever Home

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[0:00] Joel chapter 3, and we'll begin reading at verse 14 and read to the end of the chapter.

The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem. The earth and the sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy. Never again will foreigners invade her.

In that day, the mountains will drip new wine and the hills will flow with milk. All the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of Acacias.

But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood.

[1:24] Judah will be inhabited forever in Jerusalem through all generations. Their blood guilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon.

The Lord dwells in Zion. Where does the story of the Bible end? Does the Bible story end in death?

Or does it end in the last day? Of course, the answer is no. The Bible story ends in forever.

With forever. Forever is a reality. It's the other side of this life. Paul Tripp wrote a book called *Forever, Why You Can't Live Without It*.

And that is so true, isn't it? We were never meant to live the Christian life without forever in mind. And so, think about what we've seen in Joel.

[2:31] Plagues, desolation, deserts, judgment, restoration, discipline, a great mission to go to the ends of the earth, hating evil enemies, persecution.

It's not easy. The story of Joel, if we take it to heart, is not an easy thing to realize. But it's your life.

It's a story about your Christian life and what's going to happen with the church. And if you're in the church, what's going to happen to you? It's not easy, but it's reality. But Joel doesn't end in any of those things, with persecution and hating evil enemies and all the rest.

Joel ends with forever. Forever and ever. All this judgment and discipline and persecution and trials and heartache and death and loss and all the rest, it's not the end.

Joel ends with forever, which is the end. Joel ends with home. With going home. And we were never meant to live the Christian life without home in view, without heaven in view.

[3:47] Because without home, in the midst of all that, and you know what I'm talking about, and you can bring your own personal experiences of those things, because without home I'd give up.

And I would give in. But the Bible keeps sweetly telling us about home. About what it's going to be like for the Christian forever. One of my favorite books is *The Wind in the Willows*, and I know I've referenced it lots of times, I'm sure.

I may have even told this story. I don't know. But you know the characters in The Wind in the Willows, or maybe you do. The most famous of all is Toad. He likes to drive fast cars, and he wrecks them. There's Rat and Badger.

But my favorite is Mole, because he's the most ordinary of all. He's not particularly brave. He's not particularly wise. He goes along with a lot of things that maybe he shouldn't go along with, but he does rise to the occasion every now and then.

But the whole story starts with Mole, and he leaves his home on a fine spring day. And he stays away from his home for a long time until the one freezing winter evening around Christmas time, when he and Rat are out walking, and they're looking at people's houses, and they're looking through the windows, and they're watching people celebrate Christmas and fires and food and family.

[5 : 14] And then suddenly, Little Mole, for the first time in a long, long time, smells something with his little mole nose that smells like home. And he senses home.

And his little home in the ground sends out these little wisps or these little threads and these little smells that only an animal can smell.

And they start pulling on Mole. They start pulling on him, first gently and then more powerful and more urgent until Mole can't take it anymore. He has to get home.

He's desperate to go back to where he started. And so at long last, he's crying to go back home. And finally, he drags Rat to his home. And with a long sigh, Mole goes through the door and everything is nice and comfy.

He's back home. He's where he belongs. So comfortable. So homey. So just right. Do you know that feeling? After you've been on vacation for a long time and you come back and your home is just the place you want to be.

[6 : 22] Well, the Bible is full of those threads and those wisps and those smells of home that tell us about heaven. And they pull us there if we will take time to pay attention to them.

And they tell us about living with God. That's where we began. And that's where we're ending. Because living with God is our real home.

That's where we were meant to be. And so Joel ends with a snapshot of home. Of heaven. And it's good. And we can't live the Christian life without it.

And so it would do us well to pay attention to what Joel has to tell us about forever. Because home and heaven, it has to weigh in on all of our thinking.

And if it doesn't, we're not thinking right. And I'll never live like I should. Especially when I'm in the midst of all those troubles that Joel talks about.

[7 : 22] The discipline. And the persecution. And so Joel comes to these people who have been through a lot or are going to go through a lot. And he says, now remember where you're ending up though.

Remember home. And heaven is where God lives with man. That's what we saw last Sunday afternoon. And that's actually what bookends this section of Joel.

It begins and it ends with saying God dwells in Zion. God living with his people. And that's what this is about. For ages and ages and forever.

That's where we're going to be. Living with God. And so that's where the Bible story ends. Not with death. And not with judgment.

And not with destruction. But it ends with forever. So when we've been there, how long? 10,000 years.

[8 : 24] Bright shining as the sun. We'll have no less days to sing his praise than when we first begun. 10,000 years. And it hasn't gone a day shorter.

Forever is forever. And so where are we at in the timeline of Joel? Because Joel does present a sort of a timeline. At the end of chapter 2, he said, in the last days as they begin, the spirit is going to come.

And the spirit, we are seeing this in Acts, it will send God's people to the ends of the earth and God's kingdom will come to those places. And then the nations will be judged.

And that's the next item on the great redemptive calendar. So the spirit has come. And now the next great event is the nations being judged.

Jesus coming back. So God will rouse the nations. This is what we saw last time. He'll stir them up. And he'll use their own hatred to bring them down into the valley, into the place of judgment.

[9 : 24] And there they don't find victory like they're hoping for. And like it's in their jaws and they almost have it. They don't find victory. Instead, it's a harvest.

And they are the ones getting harvested. The grapes are getting cut and put into the wine press and getting smashed and the juice is overflowing. It's a very graphic picture of God's wrath.

They are destroyed and God's people are saved. And then when we see all of that, then we will know that the Lord dwells in Zion.

That he makes the difference. When he roars from Jerusalem and his enemies are destroyed and yet he's a refuge and a shelter to us, then we will know, oh, God has been with us this whole time.

And what a difference he makes. So sometimes now we wonder if he's all that close or if he's concerned about my life and my situation or what's going on out there in the world.

[10 : 26] We wonder those things. We say with Old Testament Israel, why do you say, O Jacob and complain, O Israel, my way is hidden from the Lord. My cause is disregarded by my God.

Sometimes we say that. Sometimes we feel that. We probably never say it out loud here. But we can say it in our hearts. But when we see them thrown into the lake of fire and we see Jesus' wings hovering over us, and then we will know the Lord has not disregarded our cause at all.

The Lord dwells in Zion. So the nations are destroyed and we are saved. And then the end. Then forever begins.

Home, sweet home. So Joel 17 through the end of the chapter, it tells us three forever truths about us. Three things that are going to be true for us forever in heaven.

And what's it going to be like for us in heaven? And the first is that we will be forever a holy people. A holy people.

[11 : 42] Holy means sacred. It means set apart for God. So the temple in Israel in the Old Testament was holy to God. It was sacred. It was sacred space.

It was where God lived with men and so it was set apart for Him. Now, we are the new temple. The Bible talks about that. We write about it in 1 Peter in Sunday school.

We are this new temple, this eternal temple. And so we are set apart from God and we become the place where God lives. And so that's what we are in status now.

And to some degree, that's what we are in reality. But in heaven, it's going to be both status and reality. Do you see what I'm saying? We're not only going to be in status holy to God, but in reality, in fact, we are going to be holy to God, completely set apart.

So every movement of my heart, every motion of my mind, every thing that I do, it will be in complete love for God. I will be holy for Him.

[12 : 46] So now the temple gets dirty and defiled. We just read in family time about family worship about Hezekiah, and he had to clean out the temple because it was a mess.

It was filthy dirty. And so Hezekiah went in and he had everyone clean out the temple and make it sacred again. Well, this is the good news.

We get dirty sometimes. The church, we, the people, we get dirty, but one day, one greater than Hezekiah is going to come and he's going to completely perfect and clean out his temple forever.

And then Joel says, Jerusalem, the people of God will be holy. And the Bible calls us the new Jerusalem.

In Hebrews, it says, if you've come to Christ, you've come to that Jerusalem which is above. And so everything about the new world, everything about us, everything about forever in heaven is going to be holy.

[13:57] Zechariah, the prophet, said that the pots and the pans will be holy. And the bells on the horses whatever, Chuck, I don't know what they are. I forgot.

They're, they will be holy. Zechariah is saying the holiness will go right down to the littlest things of all, the most ordinary things.

Revelation paints a picture of the new Jerusalem. And Revelation, it's showing us who we are, but it's also showing us where we live or where, so this new Jerusalem.

And it says, it's going to be 12,000 stadia long and 12,000 stadia high and 12,000 stadia wide.

Now the point there is a perfect cube. It's a very, very big cube, but it's a perfect cube. And the only other perfect cube in the whole Bible is the holy of holies.

[14:59] So that holy of holies that was just that little room in the temple is now going to spread until it fills the whole earth. That's the point.

Everything in heaven, including us, will be the holy of holies. And we will be the priest that serve God in that holy place. And we ourselves will be completely holy forever.

But it also means that never again will foreigners invade her. Never again will we be threatened with sin and sinful people. Never again will it be clean and unclean together.

Never again will it be wheat and tares. Never again will it be sinners and saints mixed. Jesus says, well for now let them grow together.

Let the wheat and the tares grow together. But then he says, well let's harvest the wheat and take the tares and burn them. There will be separation. So together now we are like Jacob and Esau wrestling in Rebecca's womb.

[16:09] We're at each other and it's too small of a world for all of us. and we can't help but fight. But God says then Jerusalem will be holy.

The whole thing holy. No foreigners allowed in. No unclean allowed in. Two times in Revelation two times it says outside outside the city are the unbelieving the cowardly the vile the murderers the sexually immoral those who practice magic arts the idolaters and all liars their place not inside the city he says their place will be in the lake of burning sulfur the fiery lake of burning sulfur and so never again will it be unbelievers to grieve us and to persecute us and never again will we have to see sin and never again will our joy be ruined by their sin or by our own sin because God will put a great divide that no one can cross and at long last it will be joy without sorrow and it will be pleasure without poison because we will be a holy people every movement of our heart given to God and your neighbor will be that way they will love God with all their hearts and sin will never reach us again and that should be wonderful news because isn't the source of all of our sorrows and our heartache and isn't sin the ugly thing that ruins our joy now but in heaven it's a holy place and so it's a happy place and it's a forever happy place but that should also we should also take away from that if we don't love holiness then we won't love heaven very much we won't love heaven at all if that doesn't sound good to you if that doesn't sound exciting to you if that doesn't scratch where you really itch then that tells you that you don't belong in heaven because that's the kind of heaven

Jesus wants that's the kind of heaven God wants and that's the kind of heaven the saints want they want a holy heaven they don't want a party heaven they don't want a sinful heaven they want a holy heaven and that's the kind of heaven God is going to have so heaven is a holy place and Jesus is the one that can make you holy.

Jesus can make you holy in status. When you come to him, you are sanctified once and for all, set apart to God and then his blood purifies us from all unrighteousness and through his spirit, he sets us free more and more and so that the tree of holiness begins to grow and to produce fruit in our lives.

So the question is, do you have a tree of holiness and is it growing? I'm not saying is it huge, is it done growing? It's not, not for any of us. The point is, is it growing?

[19 : 32] And if it's growing and if it's beginning to produce fruit of even the smallest kind, then you can know that you're ready for heaven. You have the ticket. And Jesus will perfect that tree.

Now the point is, is Jesus can get us ready for heaven and he's the only one who can. So, first we will be a holy people and that means we should also take heart.

I think this is one of the most encouraging and stubborn truths that you can really think about because what sin likes to do is to say it's inevitable.

You will sin. Sin is just a part of it. To err is human, we say. And that's true to some extent now. But it's not true forever and ever.

To err is not to be human. Sin is not inevitable. And how do I know? Because in heaven we will never sin again. And if it's, so sin is not necessary.

[20 : 39] It's not the thing that has to be. It's not part of the human condition. It's not a part of you, Christian, that will be there forever. And so if that is true, then we can keep fighting.

We can keep fighting. And no matter how unsuccessful we are here, we keep fighting until the day that Jesus perfects us. So keep fighting. And so for, that's the first truth.

We will be a holy people. Forever holy. Now secondly, we will be forever a satisfied people. A satisfied people. That means a full people.

Satisfied seems sort of clinical. I mean, we'll be full. We'll be stuffed full of goodness. So imagine Thanksgiving after you've ate the huge meal and you can't eat another bite.

And yet the food looks so good still. And that's what we're talking about. Satisfied, full of good things. Look at verse 18. And that day, the mountains will drip new wine or sweet wine.

[21:45] And the hills will flow with milk. And all the ravines of Judah will run with water. And a fountain will flow out of the house, the Lord's house, and will water the valley of Acacias. So think of a sponge for a moment. That's this life. And this sponge doesn't have very much water in it. And when you squeeze it quickly, it's dry. That's life now. But imagine a sponge where the garden hose is stuck right to it. And no matter how much you squeeze it, it just keeps on coming out. Keeps filling up and keeps going everywhere. That's life. That's joy. That's satisfaction in heaven. And it's probably fitting that I use this sponge and moisture story or analogy because that's the center thought in Joel here. So think about everything we've seen in Joel. It's been ruined. It's been vines wasted and fields dried up and there's dirt clods in the ground and the farmers are just looking sad and in despair.

[22:58] There's nothing but, it's just like a drought everywhere. And we've seen God's army come in and destroy and lay ruined at Jerusalem and the city line in ruins. But now, in heaven, we see what God is going to do for his people. The mountains are so covered, and this is obviously a metaphor, but the mountains are so covered with grapes, the grapes are so plump and juicy that they're just squirting out new wine. And the hills are flowing with milk. Remember, the promised land was to be a land flowing like rivers with milk and honey. Wow. It'd be hard to stay on your diet. Land flowing with milk and honey, but here it is fulfilled. It's fulfilled. It's fulfilled. And the point is, look at where we are going to live, Christian. Look at where we're going to live. God's blessings are going to be bursting out of everything, out of everywhere. God's richness and God's life just exploding and radiating and flowing everywhere.

[24:17] It's not life just getting by. It's life thriving and growing and glorious. It's like a rainforest. Rainforests cover 2% of the Earth's surface, and they hold 50% of the Earth's wildlife. A single bush in the Amazon may have more species of ants on it than all of the species of ants in all of the British islands. And that's heaven. It goes from dirt clots and lifelessness to running water in every ravine. It's Eden, except now it's Eden new and improved. And so what's the source of all this life? What's the center of it? Well, we can go through Jerusalem's gates. We go through the great pearly gates, and we find ourselves on the great main street.

[25:26] And flowing beside that street is a great river. And we walk up that street, and we walk past lots of houses and lots of other gardens. But we're going further up. We're going further in. We're going to the center of it all. And when we get there, there's a river coming out of someone's house. And we can say, whose house is that? That's where the Lord lives. That's where His throne is. And all of this life, and all of this joy, and all of this satisfaction, it's coming from God Himself. And where does it reach? Well, it reaches everywhere. Every ravine. Every stream bed. Israel was a land full of wadis, which are temporary rivers. So you go to Him one day, and there's water. And then three months later, and there's no water there. But now it's a land of rivers.

[26:36] And God's blessing reaches into the very driest places of all. And I think that's what it's saying when it says, into the valley of acacias. Acacias trees, they live, they're very hardy.

They grow in the very driest places in Israel. And so even in the driest, most difficult areas, those places will be filled with water.

And we really have to, so what does that metaphor mean? Well, I think what it's saying is, if we go past just the plain literal, it's a picture of what God is going to do for us personally and spiritually.

Because we all have dry areas in our lives, don't we? Areas where life doesn't flourish because sin has a real strong hold there.

We have dry areas personally where life hardly grows, hardly thrives, and there's no satisfaction.

[27 : 40] Maybe there's no justice. Maybe it's just a great deal of that frustration that Ecclesiastes talks about. And so we all have that.

Are those places going to be places where God is able to reach and bless and make alive? And the answer is yes. So think about that area in your life that is dead and dry.

God is going to fill that with water and with life. But it's not just personally. It's the whole world. It's culturally. Because we as humans, as a group, have a way of sometimes when we come together and when we do things, we don't help life grow.

We make it die. It's worse for us being there. And so humans don't thrive. They suffer. So think of inner cities.

Think of refugee camps. Think of war zones. Think of countries like North Korea. where it's oppression and frustration. That's true of this world.

[28 : 41] But in heaven, all of those kinds of places will be done away with and filled with God's blessing. And so notice, it's not just life. It's the good life.

Heaven is the good life. And we are right to look forward to it. So when God wants to talk to us and tell us about heaven, he doesn't just say it's endless duration.

He doesn't just say that it's holy. It is that. But he says it's good. It's body and soul satisfaction.

It's body and soul satisfaction. So we will drink the milk and we will all have those milk mustaches saying, wow, I drank deep and I am full.

And it will wear it for everyone to see. It's external. It's soul satisfaction. Psalm 46, there's a stream that makes glad the city of God.

[29 : 40] If you go over to Israel now, there's no stream in Jerusalem and there's no stream near Jerusalem. But if God is in her, then he is the stream. And what does he do?

He makes people glad. It's the good life. It's the happy life. No one is happier than God. I feel sorry for people if they think God is a grouch and can't be pleased and isn't happy.

No one is happier than God. When Jesus talks about heaven, he says, now come enter the joy of your master. What is heaven?

Heaven is us entering into the stream of Jesus' joy, of God's happiness. It's when the happiness of God, it goes inside of me or I dive into that river and that's where I live from now on.

Heaven is living in this luxurious joy of Jesus. It's a very joy of God living in us and it fills us to bursting because if God is this infinite being, then his happiness and his joy is infinite and he's going to fill us until we're coming out of the joy just bursting out of our pores.

[30 : 55] So we will be a happy people. We will be a satisfied people. We will be a glad people forever. And third, we will forever be a different people. A different people.

I almost wish that Joel ended there. But it doesn't. He ends with a contrast.

He ends with a contrast. Because forever is a contrast. Forever will be a contrast. Because there's two different forever endings.

verse 19 says, Egypt will be desolate, abandoned, a ghost town, a haunted place, and Edom, a desert waste.

But God's people will be established through all generations. So Egypt and Edom, the enemies of God, the persecutors of God's people, we could talk about all the things that they did.

[32 : 01] read Obadiah, because I think it's Obadiah that's all about how did Edom treat Judah when Judah fell? I think it was Obadiah. I could be wrong.

But Edom mistreated them. They kicked them while they were down. Well, there's no milk and wine for them.

There's no lush ravines for them. There's no joy and satisfaction for them because of how they treated God's people, because of the violence done to the people of Judah.

And God avenges his people. And so it's two different endings. And while the world goes one way, we will go a different way.

Most people think heaven, you just get to heaven by dying. it's just justification by death. But the Bible entertains no idea, nothing like that.

[33 : 10] It's sheep to the right, goats to the left. It's grain to the barn, it's grapes to the wine press. God saves his children and he condemns his enemies.

enemies. And that's how Joel ends. Verse 21 is very difficult to translate.

The NIV, which I think half of us uses, says, their blood guilt, which I have not pardoned, I will pardon. But then the ESV, which a lot of you use, a lot of us use, says, I will avenge their blood.

Blood I have not avenged. So, is God promising vengeance or forgiveness? And I use the NIV and my wife uses the ESV.

So, which one is it? Well, it's a real head scratcher because the Hebrew is almost contradictory. It says one thing and it seems like it almost says the exact opposite right after that. And so there's all sorts of different ways of translating it.

[34 : 21] But I just want to point this out. Either way, it's good. We're either avenged or we're forgiven. So it's like choosing between cake and pie. It's a good thing. But after doing as much research as I could do, it seems that the ESV probably has it right.

That what God is saying here is not that he's going to forgive his people's bloodshed, but rather he is going to avenge their blood. Remember in Revelation, the martyrs cry out, how long, oh Lord, how long?

There is a certain sense where God's people want, just as Abel's blood cried out for vengeance, all of our blood is crying out for vengeance. And that seems to fit the context because all along in the book of Joel, it's been these nations, Christians.

First it was Tyre and Sidon and Phlystia back earlier part of chapter three, and now it's Egypt and Edom, all these nations that surrounded Israel. And the whole point of this has been that judgment is vengeance.

They are the ones shedding blood. They are the ones invading and abusing God's people, and God will not stand for it. And so I think the ESV translation that says God will avenge their blood is probably better because it fits the context.

[35 : 47] There's other reasons, but that would be the main one. And so how does Joel end? How does Joel end? If that's true, how does Joel end? Well, it ends with God tying up all the loose ends.

Because he looks out and he says, okay, is there any blood that needs avenged? The blood I have not avenged, I will now avenge. It's tying up the loose ends.

It's the last minute things that you do before you go on vacation. So it's the last minute emails, or the last minute errands that you have to run, the last minute details that you have to get off your plate so you don't have to think about them anymore as you go on vacation.

And so God at the end is going to track down the very last one of his people's persecutors and have his vengeance upon them. One commentator said, God's people will be able to hide in him, but there is no hiding place for those who hurt his children.

So he tracks down every last one, and he pays them back. And then the vacation begins.

[37 : 02] The holidays begin. The never ending joy, then forever. forever. And so when the last person sees justice done for their pain, their persecution, their suffering, and when heaven is open before us, and we can leave all of our hurts, and all of our pain, and all of the sins done against us, and all of our sins are paid for, and all of our hurts are healed, then we will be able to walk into heaven with this world behind us and live there forever.

And Joel says, the locusts will be behind you, the enemies will be behind you, the backsliding dull hearts that were wondering where is God in all of this, those will be behind us, and the Lord will dwell in Zion, and we will live with him.

And so Joel ends with glory, with God and his people living together, us living with God and him filling us with never ending joy.

So at the beginning we asked, how does the story end? How does the Bible story end? Well, let me read just the last paragraph of the very last book in the Chronicles of Narnia.

It's called The Last Battle, because it sums up very well Joel's ending. And Aslan says, the term is over, the school term is over, the holidays have begun, the dream has ended, this is the morning.

[38 : 47] And he really shows his hand here, but he says, and as he spoke to them, he, Aslan, no longer looked at them like a lion. man. But the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them.

And for us, this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them, it was only the beginning of the real story. And all their life in this world, and all their adventures had been the cover and the title page, and now at long last, they were beginning chapter one of the great story, which no one on earth has read, which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

Why will every chapter in heaven be better than the one before? Because we will live with God, and there is no end to his goodness.

Because he sent his very own son to die, to moan, and to weep, and to bleed, and to pay for the sins of his people.

And he put his son into the hands of sinful men to be abused and be mocked by them. And by his death, by Christ's death, God saved us.

[40 : 12] That shows you how good God is. And so why will every chapter in heaven be better than the last one, than the one before? It's because we will be with God, and there is no end to the goodness of God.

And so for the countless coming ages, he will show us the grace of his kindness expressed to us in his son. So that's what we're looking forward to.

We can't live this coming week very well without thinking about it. We were not meant to live this life without thinking about forever.

So I want to encourage you to read and reread this until it becomes a part of you, until it captures your imagination, until like little mole, you begin to smell home, and you begin to long more and more for it.

Let's pray. Father, we want to please you in this life. Will you please help us to see where you are taking us and what you are doing with us and your purpose is for us, that we might not be caught up in this world and the things of this world, but we might give ourselves wholeheartedly to you in obedience, that we might offer the parts of our bodies to you as instruments of righteousness because of how good you are, how good you have been, how good you will be.

[41 : 41] Keep us from being discouraged with this world and this life, to the point where we become ineffective, but as we grow more and more frustrated or we see the sin of this world, that it would beckon us to forever and the next world and that we might drink deep even now of the joys that are going to be ours.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that through your life and death and resurrection and ongoing reign, you are saving us. Thank you, and I pray that you would burst into the prisons that are keeping people in sin even tonight.

Please do that for your glory. Pray this in your name. Amen.