**Joel 3:12-16** 12Let the nations be roused. Let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations. 13Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow, because their wickedness is so great! 14Multitudes, multitudes in the Valley of Decision! For the Day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Decision. 15The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars will stop shining. 16The Lord will roar from Zion and shout from Jerusalem. The sky and the earth will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

When we are involved in times like these a text like this really draws your attention. It draws your attention because this text is about the great Day of Judgment. And when it comes down to the Day of Judgment that is something that makes us just a bit uneasy. There is one side of us that thinks, “Yeah, I need to be ready for this!” But there is another side of us that thinks: “It isn’t going to happen in my lifetime, so why sweat it!” Except I am going to tell you that it is going to happen in your life! And recognize that there are also those who think: “This is all nothing but a bunch of religious hype and scare tactics, and such a thing is never going to take place.”

Let’s address a few things. First, for those who think this is just religious hype. I hope you are right. I say that because if you are right I am just a religious nut but if I am right, souls are at stake. Second, for those of you who think this won’t be in your life, well, it will be. I say that because our day of death is our personal day of judgment. So you might miss the final Day of Judgment, but you are not going to miss standing before the Lord. So now we are back to, “I need to be ready for this.”

Did you catch that our Gospel lesson is also really about the Day of Judgment? I ask that because I want you to grasp that Jesus, that guy we call our Lord and Savior from sin, Jesus tells us that such a day coming. He does it numerous times, this time by parable, a parable that he again explains. Since Jesus says it is so, then again we are at the old: “I need to be ready for this.”

We could even turn to other portions of God’s Word. Here are a few other important passages where we are told about this day. In Matthew 24:10ff Jesus gives us further insight into getting prepared. He said, **“Then many will fall away from faith. They will betray and hate each other. Many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because lawlessness will increase, the love of many will grow cold.”** I have to tell you that this passage really makes you think. Liberalism abounds in the Christian church on earth! It is clear people are abandoning the faith. What is one of the big issues that we keep hearing about in our very own nation? Lawlessness. How people don’t want to hear or follow or even have solid law. That ought to make us think all the more: “I need to be ready for this.”

The Apostle Paul expanded on the warning through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, **“In the last days there will be terrible times. For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemous, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, not able to reconcile with others, slanderous, without self-control, savage, haters of what is good, treacherous, reckless, puffed up with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to an outward form of godliness but denying its power”** (2 Ti 3:2f).Again, when we hear those words we think about how they so fit in our time. The one that truly sticks out for me is the last line, **“holding to an outward form of godliness but denying its power.”** That is any Christian church that openly and clearly denies the Bible as the Word of God or that in the name of this or that, denies the clear teachings of God’s Word for expediency. There are a lot, I mean a lot of churches and people who fit that statement today and it scares me. It shows me just how right God’s Word is! And it makes me think, “I need to be ready for this.”

I would think then that the most important question before us is: “How do we get ready for this?” Using Joel as our guideline, I believe we can find the answer that we need to know. Our theme will be: **THE LORD OUR REFUGE.**

The prophet Joel is really unknown to us. We can’t even pin down the dates in which he preached the Lord’s message. We don’t know if Joel preached during the time of the Assyrian conquest of Israel, the Babylonian captivity of Judah or at the time of the restoration of Judah. The fact of similar material with Hosea and Amos is what gives Joel its traditional placement in Scripture but again nothing really helps us settle on his date. Yet while we can’t pin a date on Joel and his ministry, what is clear is that his words are the words of the Lord and thus these words contain revelation for men of all ages.

Joel has been led by the Lord to speak of judgment. That judgment is spoken of first through the picture of a plague of locusts. It is a devastating picture, a picture of the land being devastated and death prevailing. Following this picture there is then a call to repentance. That call is given in beautiful but somber language. **“Put on sackcloth, you priests, and lament. Wail, you who minister in front of the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God, because the grain offerings and drink offerings are being held back from the house of your God. Set aside a day of fasting. Call a solemn convocation. Summon the elders and everyone who lives in the land to come to the house of the Lord your God. Cry out to the Lord!”**

Chapter 2 continues to speak of this army of locusts and the devastation that will come. Again this is a picture of the Lord’s judgment upon the world, a picture of how the Lord will act and move for his purposes. Those locusts represent any nation that the Lord has raised up to do his bidding. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, the Greeks, the Romans and so on. All these nations have come and gone fulfilling the Lord’s purpose in the course of history. By the way, we know these nations fulfilled God’s purpose because the Lord revealed it and not because we have guessed or declared it ourselves!

Following this revelation of the Lord’s acting in history we have another call for repentance just as poignant as before. **“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and grief. Tear your heart and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate.”**

What is clear as you progress in your reading of Joel is the fact that this locust invasion is ultimately a picture of the great and devastating Day of Judgment. It is that day when all the nations, all, regardless of race, color or creed will stand before the Lord to be judged for all eternity. That judgment will be with righteousness and justice. That judgment will be final and eternal. That day will bring either eternal salvation or eternal damnation to the individuals of the world. Clearly then, we need to be ready. Clearly then we need to understand that the Lord will be our judge. He will harvest the wheat. He will burn the weeds. No one will oppose Him. No one will stop Him. He is the Lord, the mighty and powerful who throughout history has let his way and His will be known. This day is coming. Are you ready?

What is it that will make us ready? Is it my life and how I have lived? Is it what I have done and accomplished, what I have achieved and performed? Hardly! What is interesting is that Joel clearly and positively tells us the measure of this judging. He tells us exactly how to be ready and yet how the world so misses the import of what is said.

Joel says in chapter 2: **“After this, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. Even on the servants, both male and female, I will pour out my Spirit in those days. I will show warning signs in the heavens and on the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and terrifying day of the Lord."** Do those words sound familiar?

They should. Peter in his Pentecost sermon tells us that these words were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. On the day of Pentecost Peter tells us that the judgment of the world that Joel spoke of was begun in Jesus, fulfilled in Jesus, yes, has its foundation in Jesus. It is following this revelation of Joel that we then have the words before us. Words that speak of the judgment of the world. Words that tell the nations before the Lord to be ready. I like the play on words that Joel uses. He speaks of **“the valley of Jehosephat,”** and **“the valley of decision.”** Jehosephat is a word that means, “the Lord judges.” The word translated as “decision” actually means “to cut” or “decide strictly.” Both words remind us that what is happening is of and from the Lord God.

By the way, that is important for us to grasp, that all the judgment, all the action of this great day is of and from the Lord. There are those who are falsely taught of a great battle that we have to help the Lord fight so He can overcome all evil. Seriously, think that teaching over. Since when does God need our help? And do you mean to tell me or even suggest that what Jesus did is not already the victory, forever? God is Almighty. With but one blink of an eyelash, God will end it all and judge it all. He does not need our help!

Now, on what basis will God make His judgment, his strict decision on who goes to hell and who goes to heaven? Remember I told you that preceding these verses was the revelation of the Savior. Now you have your answer.

How so in keeping with the New Testament is this truth. When the angel appeared to Joseph to assure him of the miraculous nature of the birth of the Christ child he also said, **“You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”** We hear in Mark, **“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned.”** John 14, Jesus’ words, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

There is more. In Acts 4:12 Peter confesses the way of salvation in these words, **“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to people by which we must be saved.”** In Acts 10 we again hear the voice of Peter: **“All the prophets testify about him that, through his name, everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins.”** Paul also gives the same truth, **“For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.”**

Clearly Jesus makes the difference. Clearly what Jesus has accomplished is the whole point of God’s revelation to the world. Clearly to be ready is to have faith in Jesus.

What faith? We are talking about what Jesus has accomplished. Faith in Him. Not in your works, not in your feelings, not in your experiences, not in what you think, but what Jesus has done and revealed. Jesus says, **“If anyone hears my words but does not hold on to them, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words does have a judge. The word which I spoke is what will judge him on the Last Day.”** In his prayer to his Father concerning believers Jesus says, **“Sanctify them by the truth. Your word is truth.”**

We turn to the epistles. Romans says, **“So then, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message comes through the word of Christ.”** Or how about this for a little different angle on this truth. Galatians 3 says, **“Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now trying to reach the goal by the flesh?”**

I think my point is made. Jesus is the heart and core of everything. That’s why even Joel can say, **“The Lord will be a refuge.”** Jesus is that refuge. Yes, our shelter, our protection our deliverer from every danger. At the judgment it is Jesus and His message that will judge. For those who have believed in Jesus there is life and salvation, eternal refuge. But for those who reject Jesus, reject his words, there is eternal damnation.

This has been the way it has always been. From Old Testament until New, from Pentecost until today the glory of salvation is found in Jesus and His Word. To grasp that Jesus suffered and died for our sins and freed us from the grasp of Satan. To realize that Jesus rose from the dead to assure us that all His promises are fast and true. We are forgiven. We are God’s children in Him. We are heirs of eternal life through His name. To know that we are guaranteed this salvation because of the Holy Spirit who works in our lives to call, gather, and keep us in this truth of Jesus. The Holy Spirit will lead us to thank God with our lives solely and simply because of the love of Jesus poured out upon us.

We are ready in Jesus, the Lord God and our refuge! Let the world do what it may. Let the rot and stench of sin rise up and foul this world of ours, as we are told it will. Though my heart ache, I know there is a solution and the perpetrators of evil will one day pay the eternal price for their rejection of God’s way and truth. Jesus is my hope and confidence in a world that stinks. Jesus is my strength, my foundation, the refuge that helps me get through. It is Jesus and all the wonders of his promises. Cling to Jesus and always be ready. Cling to Jesus and his salvation that is sure. Grasp that Jesus is the reason, the only reason that God is our refuge! Amen.