Joel 3:12-13 “Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!”

 Do you ever wonder what it is that the world is trying to avoid, especially when it comes down to spiritual matters, particularly the truth of God? You see, I believe there is a truth about God. I believe that since God does exist and since He is almighty, all-knowing, present everywhere and eternal that He has revealed Himself to the world. He has done that through the Bible, the place where the endless truths of God are found. Read the Bible carefully. Read it in the context in which it was written and read it working hard to let Scripture interpret Scripture and you will find wonderful, marvelous soul saving truths revealed for all of mankind. But it is exactly that, the truth of God that the world is trying to avoid. Why?

 Well, the why is fairly simple! The why is all about sin. The fact that there is sin in the world and that sin in the world actually explains every aspect of the human condition there is to be found. But sin, if acknowledged, means that we must acknowledge God and thus means that we are answerable to God. Mankind does not like that. Mankind doesn’t want to be answerable to anyone. Mankind just wants to do what it wants to do and mankind takes the attitude that no one has the right to tell them what to do or not to do. Of course, God’s Word and his truth of sin explains all of this.

 So the world is hostile to God, but not necessarily hostile to all religion. The world embraces all religions that leave salvation, goodness, right and wrong, and other spiritual matters in the hands of human kind. So as long as your feelings are your guide, as long as you can pursue happiness and good times, well then, that religion is all right. So the world and those of the world work hard to pretend that we can and we will eventually make a world that is a virtual paradise. A world where everyone is equal and at peace. A world where everyone gets what they want and can do what they want. Yet if you have noticed, as the world progresses, things are not getting better. Even as we advance technologically, the world’s paradise promises keep getting trashed. If you want to begin contemplating this truth of man’s destructive attitude getting worse, then ask yourself why computer viruses exist? What is the point? They exist because someone discovered that they can. They can destroy your program, get your information, steal and rob from you and create all kinds of destruction. Why? Why did computer viruses have to be invented? It is because of the innate sinfulness of man. We are inclined toward evil. We are enemies of God. We are wicked.

 What will God do about this? Oh, yes, God has informed us He will take care of this. That’s what our text is about today. It is about the great Day of Judgement that God tells us is yet to come. Our theme: **THE JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS.**

 Please note that Joel as a prophet is rather hard to assign a date to. There is not really a single clue in his book as to when he lived and yet Joel’s prophesy is clearly something that the Jewish people readily accepted as the words and prophesy of the Lord our God. The sharing of similar material between Hosea and Amos is what we believe gives Joel its traditional placement in Scripture but again nothing really helps us settle on his date. So for the most part, Joel is kind of a timeless book and in truth that seems to fit the very theme and core of what Joel writes about. Joel’s main topic is “The Day of the Lord” and it is clear that in speaking of this day Joel is always and clearly referencing the great Day of Judgment of the Lord and its components. And I think that is a great value in Joel. That God purposely kept us from dating Joel so that we had to concentrate on what he was saying and not on events of his day which would limit the understanding of Joel.

 So, yep, Joel is a book about “The day of the Lord.” If you noticed, our particular text today is clearly speaking of that great Day of Judgment. Verse 12 tells us that God calls all the nations into the Valley of Jehoshaphat and why? As the end of verse 12 says, **“For there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.”** By the way, the phrase “The Valley of Jeshoshaphat” could literally be translated: “The valley of Judgment.” Many scholars consider this valley to be the Kidron valley near Jerusalem, but honestly, that is a pretty late naming for a valley that was called Kidron almost from the beginning of Jerusalem. As far as we can tell, there was not necessarily a Valley of Jehoshaphat in Israel. So I think it is clear that we should grasp this is the valley of judgment or as it is called later, the valley of decision, a symbolic valley where the final judgment of the world and its people takes place before the Lord! Note that this theme of the judgment of God upon the nations is something carried throughout the Scriptures.

 Please note that every element of the Day of Judgment is here. The nations are gathered, multitudes of people. The sickle is swung, the harvest is ripe, the grapes are trampled, the winepress overflows. The sun and moon are darkened, the stars no longer shine. All of these components can be found in so many other prophecies about the Day of Judgment. But if you would, I would like to focus on something else.

 That something else is that this judgment is of and from God. It is God who calls the nations forward. It is God who administers the judgment, God who roars and thunders. The judgment of God will be swift and sure. The Scripture so pictures this great day as one where, as it happens, you will immediately find yourself either on the right or the left hand of God. In other words, all judgment is up to God!

 What will God judge? Our text informs us: wickedness! That’s sin. God is the one who defines sin and is the one who will judge all sin in accord with his Holy Word. He has clearly revealed what is right and what is wrong. He has clearly revealed his justice and righteousness. Joel’s wording here is clear that God’s judgment will be his wrath upon the wicked. In Revelation 14 it is spoken of this way: **“The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the winepress of God’s wrath.”** Please, get the foolish notion out of your head that God will not judge or that God will not send to hell and damnation. God’s perfect and holy justice and judgments will stand and hell is real. And if you think you can just alter or dismiss God’s Word, well, Jesus said clearly: **“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words: that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”**

 Again note that all the action in these verses are the Lord’s. The Lord does not need the help of man in judging. The Lord does not need to send armies of angels or even people to fight for him. How did Psalm 46 put it: **“he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”** Get out of your head any notion of some final battle of good and evil where man must help and fight for God. Such talk is foolish in every way and yes, a failure to understand the complete wisdom and power of God. The judgment day is coming and when it comes it will be God and His ultimate power that totally and fully stands. If you don’t like what I say or don’t agree, that is your choice, but ultimately it is God who always has the final word, the word He revealed in the Bible and Jesus!

 Now if God is going to judge wickedness or sin, does that mean that no one is going to be saved? After all, who but Jesus has no sin? So, fair question and it is so interesting to again pay attention to Joel. Verse 16: **The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and sky will tremble. But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.”** Here are words of hope and deliverance.

 Again note that the hope and deliverance are not in our hands. It is the action of the Lord and I will tell you that I believe these words to be a prophetic glimpse of the victory of Jesus and the wonder He will bring to us.

 So did you know that Joel is referenced in the Book of Acts as being fulfilled in Jesus’ suffering, death and resurrection and then culminated in the Day of Pentecost! It is so. We are told in Acts that Joel’s words in chapter 2 are fulfilled in Jesus. And since this section of chapter 3 uses a similar phrase as chapter 2 about the darkening of the sun and moon, I believe it connects these words with the wonder of Jesus.

 It is Jesus who will roar, that is, raise his voice in victory from Zion…Zion is a reference to the Temple Mount and all the promises of eternal life and salvation the ceremonies of that Temple mount pointed to. Ceremonies that pointed to the victory of Jesus, to his dying for our sins and to his rising from the dead to prove that His victory is true! That is the roar that is heard! The victory cry of Jesus! The angels declaring: “**He is not here, He is risen, just as He said.”**

 Or the fact that the Lord thunders from Jerusalem. Thundering is how the Lord’s voice is portrayed in Scripture and it is also a reference to the wonder, power and truth of God found in His Word. The message of Jesus, found in Jerusalem now goes out from Jerusalem for all the world to hear. Jesus has won the victory. Jesus has defeated sin, death and the Devil and because of Jesus heaven and its wonders are ours! Yep, God, through Jesus, is our refuge, our stronghold forever. And is there anyone here who does not grasp that in Jesus we are the children and people of Israel, the true descendants of Abraham by grace through faith! God’s Word makes it clear that such are the facts of our salvation.

 So how do we escape the winepress? In Jesus. Our sins are forgiven in Jesus. We died to sin and live for Jesus. We believe Jesus won the victory and grants us eternal life and salvation because He fully and truly grants us forgiveness and with that forgiveness eternal life. Sins power over us is broken. Mind you, Scripture says the children of God die to sin and live to God! The world wants to believe that you can live in sin but understand that to do so means you have died to God! Faith never quits the battle of temptation and sin. Faith never just says it doesn’t matter. Faith, for the sake of Jesus, because of Jesus, in the power of Jesus, according to the Word of Jesus, which is the entire Bible, resists sin. And when we fail, we repent and get right back to Jesus. This is what the Lord has revealed. Our battle against sin is with “groans that words cannot express.” And the Lord helps us in our weakness! The Lord carries us through and wins the victory. Our Lord roars and thunders His amazing victory in our hearts by grace through faith.

 Joel’s prophecy is so awesome. What he reveals by the Holy Spirit stands from the time He wrote it even to today! It is testimony to the unity, the power and the wonder of God’s true and saving Word. May you hear and believe God’s Word, the testimony about Jesus! Amen.