

Pastor Shaun Arndt  
August 2, 2020  
Sermon Text – Joel 3:12-16  
Pentecost 9 – The Harvest Is Coming

## History is...

*Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come. Amen.*

*Dear Friends in Christ,*

**History is...** far from everybody's favorite topic. After all, **History is...** full of confusing and complicated names, dates and places to remember and long centuries worth of material.

Like today's Gospel, our first lesson from Joel lets us look at the entirety of this world's history, including how it will end. But far from being complicated, the Lord puts it before our eyes in very simple, but striking pictures to teach us what we need to know most above all.

Our reading picks up in the final section of the book of Joel where the prophet speaks of the end of this world when the LORD will judge all people. To teach us, he uses the imagery of a of a great final battle: **Let the nations be roused. Let them advance...**

The picture is of all the unbelieving **nations**, God's enemies marching off to war, **advancing** to attack God and His people. The verses before this have them arming themselves and getting ready for battle.

So **History is** really one long war of rebellious, sinful human beings fighting against their good and holy Creator God. It's been that way ever since Adam and Eve listened to Satan and they chose their own way over God's perfect ways, wanting to be gods for themselves, calling their own shots. We see it after the flood, when God said spread over the earth and the people said, "nope, we'll stay right here and build a great tower."

And of course nothing has changed down to this day. The Lord calls for love and compassion and mankind answers with greed and corruption. The Lord made humankind male and female (Gen. 1-2), but many loud voices of the day declare even gender to be a human construct. Our second lesson speaks of an **overflowing river of filth**. That does a pretty good job of describing much of the content found on TV and internet.

So **History is...** a battle between sinful human kind who are but dust and ashes and the holy and almighty God and Lord of all. How do you think *that's* going to turn out?

**Let the nations... advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat. For there I (the LORD) will be seated to judge all the nations.**

Though sinful humanity has been in rebellion against God since the fall into sin, yet in the final days of the world, the Bible tells us things will become even worse as so many deny God and His Word and Jesus tells us **the love of most will grow cold** (Mt 24:12). It's like all the nations rise up in one final attack against the Lord and His Church. Here in Joel this battle takes place in **the Valley of Jehoshaphat**, a name for a Judean King that means in Hebrew: **the LORD judges**. In the book of Revelation this same idea is called "Armageddon."

Now from these passages there have been all kinds of strange false teachings that this describes a literal battle between armies in a literal valley, rather than what it is, the culmination of man's spiritual rebellion against God ending in judgment day. That this is only an illustration of the last judgment is shown by the fact here in Joel, as in Revelation there is no literal battle at all.

Rather this is the picture: Sinful humanity advances like an army to challenge God in battle, but the Lord just calmly sits down and ends it all then and there with His judgment... **"I will be seated to judge all the nations."** All the noise of the sinful **multitudes** shouting "We won't follow God's ways" and "You can't judge us!" will be drowned out as **The Lord will roar from Zion** and give His verdict: **"Depart from me into eternal fire"** (Mt 25:41).

There's no actual battle, because sinful human beings don't stand a chance against the Holy God. On that day, this sin-ruined world as we know it comes to an end as the heavenly bodies are **darkened** and **the sky and the earth will tremble**.

Now of course all of this is utterly beyond our experience and imagination. And since a sinful nature that questions God's ways lives inside you and me, it's not only unsettling to hear about, but perhaps a little part of us even wonders, isn't this all a bit harsh, God?!

So with another picture, the prophet shows this is not just a sudden outburst of wrath but has been a long time in coming and is entirely deserved: **Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow, because the nations' wickedness is so great!**

Here, this world's **History** is a harvest field. Crops don't go on growing forever, a time comes to bring them in, throwing out the bad and the weeds. So the day will come when God brings the field of this world and human history to an end.

And what kind of fruit has mankind brought forth in the field of this world: **the nations' wickedness is so great!** Wars, oppression, persecution, lust, greed, lies, deceit and every possible way to break God's commands have littered human history. One historian, Edward Gibbon put it this way: *History is little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind.* Of course that also describes just about every news report as well!

Now, if we imperfect human beings with our limited and clouded notions of justice can just start to notice there's a problem, can you imagine just how **great** that **wickedness** appears in the sight of the holy eyes of God, who is pure and rejects every wrong!? Indeed **History** is filled with wickedness and ready for God's judgment.

And dear friends, that is horrifying! Because we are part of sinful human **History** too. The all-knowing God knows every imperfect thought of our hearts, every insult, injury and failure to support family and friends and others. He knows we have failed to keep His first command to trust and love Him above all else as proven by the fact that all we do all the time has not all been to His glory. And so we too should be **trampled** and crushed like ripe grapes, judged and sent to hell forever.

So how can we be saved?! Only one answer, and we can find it in **His-story**, (only add an extra 's' so it becomes **His-story**.) Yes **History** is the story of human sin, but praise God it is also the Lord's true **Story** of stunning love, mercy and rescue.

We saw it in the Gospel lesson. In mercy and incredible patience God allows the field to grow, giving it a chance! But because we could never change our sinful situation, the Lord did it Himself. He made and kept His promise to rescue sinful human beings to send His Son save the world.

In Jesus Christ, the timeless and eternal God entered into our human history and joined Himself to our human story. God the Son born of Mary, born into this world's history just like you and me, only born sinless and pure as the Holy God-man, born into a world of sin ruled by Roman conquest and brutality.

Our story as a human race and as individuals has been one long record of sin and rebellion against God's perfect will. But **His-Story**—Jesus' life was one of perfect obedience and self-giving love with every breath, every action, every attitude, all lived for our good so that He could give us the credit for His life of holiness.

On the cross, Jesus let the **sickle** and the **trampling** that our sins deserved all fall upon Himself. On Good Friday the **sun** was also **darkened** and the **earth trembled** as Jesus died beneath the curse our sins deserved. But the **earth trembled** again when the sinless Savior defeated death and bodily rose from the dead to pronounce His word of **peace** and forgiveness for all who believe!

And so that we would believe, the Holy Spirit entered our personal history, came to our hearts through the saving Word of God about Christ to create faith. Through faith created by the gospel message, Christ made **His-story** to be your-story, giving you the forgiving, righteous fruit of His saving work.

Yes, the Lord even ruled all history to bring you to baptism where with water and the Word He declares you one of His people, part of His new Israel of all believers in Christ.

And that means these words apply to you and all who trust in Jesus: **the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.**

Yes this world as we know it will come to an end. All mankind will stand before the Lord's judgment throne and those who in unbelief remain God's enemies will be condemned.

But when that happens, you have a **refuge**, a safe place, a strong shelter in Christ your Savior. Indeed, the mighty **Lord** who **will roar from Zion** is the same **Lord** Jesus who cried out in agony as He chose to suffer in your place on the cross to forgive our every sinful rebellion.

The same **Lord** who will judge the **Nations** is the same Jesus who has promised to hold you safe in palm of His hand. The Judge who requires absolute perfection is the same Jesus who gives you the perfection He requires, washing away your sin with His blood and wrapping you up in the robe of His own holy life.

This **Lord** is not just your **refuge** and **stronghold** for judgment day (as important as that is) but also for today, and in every day of trouble and struggle and then for all eternity in the harvest celebration where God's people will be forever free from the harmful effects of sin and never again be surrounded by temptation, sin and sorrow.

Praise God **His-Story** of salvation is now your story!

And since the **History** is not yet over, since we are still waiting the final harvest, let us stay with Christ, stay in His Word and never leave, for only in Christ do we have our refuge.

Then in joy and thanks, let us pray and work for sharing this **Refuge** we have in Jesus with **all the nations**. Amen.

*He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.*

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