

How God Pulls Us Into the Future

Joel Series, July 11-12 | Joel 2:28-32, 3:17-18 (2:28-3:21)

WHAT WILL THE FUTURE BE LIKE?

Some of us are profoundly afraid of the future.

Chronophobia is a real thing. Literally, chronophobia is the fear of time.

Chronophobia: the persistent and often irrational fear of the future or the fear of passing time.¹

It is a fear that time is slipping away from us, we can't stop it, and there is no way to get back the moments that we've lost.

It's a fear that we're wasting the days given to us and that the days ahead won't be as good as the days that are behind.

It's very easy right now to have a general sense of anxiety about the future.

Our lives have been disrupted.

We don't feel safe, and we don't know when things are going to feel normal again.

If you're having a difficult time facing the future, a digital detox might be a good idea.

A digital detox is just a step back from or a break from screens and electronics for a period of time. If you're interested in a digital detox, here are some tips:

1. **Remember why you need a digital detox.** We take a digital detox because a constant stream of bad news can make us worry about the future.
2. **Consider a "fast" at first.** It may be best for you to unplug from your phone, your tablet, your TV, your computer, and everything that's chirping at you. You may just have to stop them for a period of time to give your system a chance to reset.
3. **Remove distractions.** When you go back to your digital devices, disable at least some of your push notifications. Don't let things ding at you all day long. Take control of them.
4. **Set limits.** Decide how much time you're going to give to specific kinds of media when you start back. Otherwise, we tend to open up Twitter, get sucked in, and lose hours!
5. **Tell someone about your digital detox.** Accountability helps.

If you're worried about or afraid of the future, then it's time to do something about it!

The prophet Joel was actually longing for the future.

He saw a very specific future called the Day of the LORD.

The Day of the LORD means the time when God himself will interrupt human history. It's a day when God will judge his enemies and make all things right.

Joel's own day made him long for the Day of the LORD.

Joel could see that in the future signs would point repeatedly to the coming Day of the LORD.

But Joel could see that one point in history would be different. He called it the great and awesome Day of the LORD. We associate that Day of the LORD with the return of Jesus.

Joel was looking forward to that future instead of being afraid of it.

¹ <https://www.fearof.net/fear-of-the-future-phobia-chronophobia/> on 2020-07-08.

So what is the future going to be like? The prophet Joel has some important answers today.

GOD WILL POUR OUT HIS SPIRIT.

In Joel **2:28-32**, the prophet talked about signs of the coming Day of the LORD.

“And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.
Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

“And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.”

Joel knew that life in the Spirit is what we need to live out God’s **covenant** faithfully.

In chapter 2 Joel told his people that they weren’t living out God’s covenant faithfully and that there would be consequences if something didn’t change.

The people repented and God relented, so everything was okay.

However, as Joel looked to the future, he knew that something had to change. We are not naturally faithful to the demands of the Old Covenant. We don’t naturally love God steadily.

So the ending of Joel chapter 2 includes a promise that God would pour out his Holy Spirit on all of his people.

Everyone (men and women, old and young, big shots and servants) would get the Spirit.

Everyone would encourage each other to see the truth and live out the truth.

God was promising a day when all of his people would have the Holy Spirit.

God did indeed pour out his Spirit at **Pentecost**.

In Acts chapter 2, after Jesus ascended into heaven, his followers were gathered together.

On the day of the Feast of Pentecost, the sound of a rushing wind suddenly filled the Upper Room where they were gathered.

What looked like tongues of flame came to rest on the head of each person there, as they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

Immediately, they became able to speak other languages. They started preaching.

From that point forward, everyone who had the Holy Spirit was different.

When Peter stood up to explain what had happened to the crowd, he quoted Joel.

He basically said, “Joel told you this would happen. Now it has happened. And it’s amazing.”

Ephesians 1:13-14 explains that now every follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit inside of us:

In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

We have the Holy Spirit. Now we have the New Covenant living and breathing inside of us.
We get to live what Joel could only dream of. Isn't that amazing?

Life after receiving the Spirit is a little like being online after we replaced our modem.

In the early days of staying at home, I was attending one video conference after another.

I don't know about you, but it was a painful experience at first.

Our old modem felt like a tiny dirt path that four people had to travel regularly to get onto the information super-highway, so we decided to replace our old modem.

Our new modem instantly took our internet speed to 125 megabytes per second. More importantly, the signal reached every corner of the house.

Now we were zooming up and down the information superhighway.

Life in the Spirit feels a little bit like that change.

Before we have the Holy Spirit, we are struggling to obey God at all. Apart from the Holy Spirit, most people usually just give up.

But when we get the Holy Spirit, following Jesus may not be easy, but it comes much more naturally to us. I am so grateful for the gift of the Holy Spirit!

The Holy Spirit is just **one sign** among many of the coming "great and awesome day of the LORD."

Joel said that we would see signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth.

He talked about blood and fire and columns of smoke. He mentioned the sun being darkened and the moon turning to blood.

These things sound ominous! And at some point, they will become very ominous indeed.

But small instances of these signs happen all the time.

There are wars and deaths, fires and disasters, and things that make us ask, "Is this the end?"

There are solar and lunar eclipses and all kinds of strange things happening in the sky that make us ask, "Okay, then is THIS the end?"

We can almost get too eager to find signs of the Day of the LORD.

But the opposite is also true. We can become blind to the fact that God is reminding us repeatedly that the Day of the LORD is still coming.

We certainly don't want to fear the signs, nor do we want to become complacent.

We want to see the signs, celebrate them, and keep looking forward with a sense of urgency.

God sends signs that the Day of the LORD is coming, and in the Day of the LORD...

GOD WILL JUDGE EVIL.

Joel talked about the very real evils of his own day.

Joel chapter 3 begins with a very dark picture of what evil looked like in Joel's day.

In those days, Judah was recovering from having been conquered and punished by the Babylonian Empire a century earlier. The population was small, the economy was in sad shape, and the people had a difficult time defending themselves.

Consequently, people from surrounding nations would regularly raid Judah.

Joel chapter 3 lets us know that the surrounding nations subjected the people of Judah to human trafficking. They captured and sold young men and women for pleasure.

Furthermore, the people to the West raided Judah, snatched people, took them to the coast, sold them as slaves, and put them on boats headed across the sea.

God asked, "What have I done to you that you would do this to my people?"

And God promised that this kind of horrific evil would not stand. It had to be made right.

We think of the Day of the LORD in the end as dealing with evil itself in the abstract, and it does. But Joel reminds us that, when God finally overturns evil in the end, the evil of his day must be dealt with and defeated.

And the evil of our day will need to be dealt with and defeated as well.

None of it gets swept under the rug of history.

God says that he will gather the nations to a place called the "Valley of Jehoshaphat."

There is some effort to identify the Valley of Jehoshaphat as a particular place—possibly the Kidron Valley outside of Jerusalem—or to link it with Armageddon in the New Testament.

The word itself gives us the clue we need. "Jehoshaphat" brings together the Hebrew words for "God" and "judges." So the "Valley of Jehoshaphat" is the place where God judges or brings justice to evil. God is going to judge evil.

And that's what Joel 3 says! In the next part of Joel chapter 3, the prophet invites the nations to assemble and get ready for battle with the LORD God himself.

He taunts them and tells them to turn their farm implements into weapons and gather all the warriors they can find.

He says that, when they come to the Valley of God's Judgement, they will be harvested by the multitude. **Joel 3:13** says, Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great.

It's pointing us to the New Testament, to the great and awesome Day of the LORD, to the time when Jesus returns and judges the nations.

What Joel wrote in chapter 3 comes up again in the **Revelation 14:14-16** which says, Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and seated on the cloud one like a son of man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand. And another angel came out of the temple, calling with a loud voice to him who sat on the cloud, "Put in your sickle, and reap, for the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is fully ripe." So he who sat on the cloud swung his sickle across the earth, and the earth was reaped.

The Revelation continues, and the parallels continue, and the images of judgment become very dark indeed, but we get the point!

When Jesus returns, he will judge evil. He will overturn all the wrongs of history.

And we want God to overturn the evils of history. We want him to right the wrongs of Joel's day, and we want him to right the wrongs of our own day!

We know that something has to be done about the evils of our own day.

Theresa knows a little bit about the evils of our day. Growing up, Theresa's mom was addicted to drugs and would sell Theresa for money or drugs. Theresa first memories of this was at six years old.

Everything that should be right in her life was stolen. Everything good was distorted. It's no wonder that Theresa continued to live this life as an adult.

What happened to Theresa is the kind of evil that we're up against in our world today.

But God doesn't just leave the evil in our day alone. In Theresa's case, God did something about that kind of evil here and now.

In jail, Theresa met a minister who shared the love of God with her.

When she got out, she had nothing but an arrest record and very little chance that would change. At that moment, frankly, she thought about going back to the street. But that's when God reassured her quietly that he wanted to deliver her.

Theresa found a church and met a woman who got her help.

God used the Church to turn Theresa's life around.

Now Theresa is an advocate for human-trafficking victims and a voice for Jesus.

Theresa co-founded the Underground, which is a faith-based organization that fights trafficking here in Connecticut. We support the Underground through our World Outreach budget.

When we think about what happened to Theresa, though, we know that such things can't stand. We refuse to imagine a future where that kind of thing gets swept under the rug. Neither can God. Joel 3 tells us that God is going to judge, stop, and eliminate all of that evil one day, in the Day of the LORD.

The Day of the LORD, then, gives us a very concrete kind of hope.

God is going to eliminate the evils of Joel's day and our day.

God is going to overcome what COVID-19 has done to our culture.

God is going to overturn what racism has done to our society.

God is going to wipe away sickness, death, bitterness, fear, and injustice.

God is going to wipe away everything that causes tears of sadness in the Day of the LORD.

GOD WILL MAKE THE WORLD RIGHT.

Joel 3:17-18 paints of beautiful picture of how God will make the world right.

"So you shall know that I am the LORD your God,
who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.

And Jerusalem shall be holy,
and strangers shall never again pass through it.

"And in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the LORD
and water the Valley of Shittim."

Let's look at the future God will create once evil has been judged.

God himself will dwell with us, and Mount Zion in Jerusalem will be the center of his presence.

God's people will be safe.

There will be plenty.

A river flowing from God's presence on Mount Zion in Jerusalem will water everything.

Forever with God will open up in front of us.

The Revelation expands on that picture.

If you want more details of what the future will look like, study Revelation 21 and 22 in detail. There are lots of evocative details throughout the Bible that help us to understand what that future will be like.

Revelation chapter 22, verses 1-3 pick up what God said through the prophet Joel: Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.

God has pointed history toward the Day of the LORD.

Right now, our lives are naturally pointed toward the future. How are we looking at the future?

Sometimes we look forward to the future like we're waiting for packages to arrive.

My wife and I have been ordering more things online these days than we did before the virus. So we're always waiting for a package these days.

Amazon is brilliant for having a smile built into their logo. It really captures that feeling of ordering something, waiting for it, seeing it arrive, and then unpacking it. It can be exciting.

And I'm excited every time I get one of their packages. I wish we were always looking toward the future in that kind of way.

But I think more often we're waiting for the future the way that my dog waits for the UPS truck. Our dog has an uncanny sense that something's coming.

And when he hears the slightest rumbling of a truck in the distance, he heads toward the front door. He's small, but he's determined.

As soon as he sees the UPS truck, he starts barking like the world is ending.

Which way are we looking at the future? Like a package with a smile is coming? Or like our world is ending?

GOD EXPECTS US TO LEAN INTO THE FUTURE.

Are you afraid of the future?

Are these the days to panic? Is disaster just around the corner?

Are these the days to lose hope? Is it time to give up on each other?

Jesus' Resurrection has proven that evil will not have the last word.

When we human beings put Jesus on the cross in the first century, God the Father poured out all of our evil and sin and the consequences for our evil and sin on Jesus.

At the same time, evil itself was doing its best to destroy Jesus, to wipe out the Son of God.

So evil has already done its worst. But that's not how history ends.

God raised Jesus from the dead.

The power of God defeated the worst that evil can do.

The Resurrection means that God wins.

Evil lost. Evil loses. It always loses. It never has the last word. God overturns evil.

We win with God.

The victory is already won.

The Day of the LORD is when that victory will happen finally and forever.

So can we hope?

Jesus himself told us to keep on hoping and never to give up that hope.

In Matthew 24:42 he said, "Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming."

Jesus wants us watching, waiting, and hoping for the Day of the LORD.

So, as we look toward the future, we should expect God to do big things!

The future is going to be good, even if the way is sometimes rough.

As we think about the future, let's be people of hope.

And can we be agents of hope?

Hope usually does something. It usually leads to action.

And that's where I'd like to challenge us as a church today.

When we're afraid, we focus on ourselves. When we give up hope, we focus on surviving.

We can do better than that.

I want to invite you to find a way to do something right now.

Maybe you can find a way to engage again as a volunteer here through Valley. There are ways you can volunteer safely in person, and there are ways you can volunteer online only. Please reach out to your ministry leaders and just ask, "How can I help?"

Maybe you can give to support our World Outreach Partners like Theresa, who are still agents of hope where they are.

Maybe you can commit to pray for our church and our World Outreach Partners.

Valley, it's time to engage in whatever ways we can.

It's a bold way to say that we're still on the side of hope.