

## Why is God taking us to Court?

Joel 3:1-16

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Joel Radford

Camden Valley Baptist Church

[www.cvbaptist.org.au](http://www.cvbaptist.org.au)

For a very long time - it may seem like it's been a short time that it's been here - but we were praying for this church when it was still a twinkle in Joshua's eye, when he was considering what the Lord would have him to do. And so it's been a great time for us as we've been able to send him out and watch the Lord's grace in his life, and of course in the lives of yourself as you've been ministered to by Joshua here. And we continue to pray for you, and this is at Drummoyne Baptist, the whole of us, the body of Christ there. We regularly remember you in our prayers, and so it's a privilege for me to be here this morning and to open up God's word with you.

I encourage you now to open your Bibles to Joel 3. Joel 3, and we'll be reading from verse 1 through to verse 16.

"In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning My inheritance, My people Israel, for they scattered My people among the nations and divided up My land. They cast lots for My people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink.

Now what have you against Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying Me for something I have done? If you are paying Me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. For you took My silver and My gold and carried off My finest treasures to your temples. You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.

See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabaeans, a nation far away." The Lord has spoken.

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, "I am

strong!" Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there. Bring down Your warriors, O Lord!

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!

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 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."

Let's come to God in prayer and ask for His help as we look at His word together.

Heavenly Father, we come before You and ask for Your mercy and Your grace to be extended to us this morning. We ask that You would send the Holy Spirit to us now and preserve our lives according to Your love, so that we would obey the laws that come from Your mouth. And we pray this in Christ's name, amen.

This morning, I'm going to be preaching on this passage that is before you from Joel 3. I've been working my way through the Book of Joel over at Dromoin, my church. The Book of Joel is primarily aimed at the Israelites. It's a word of prophecy from the Lord and an explanation as to the devastation that has happened to the people of Israel. In the early chapters of Joel, you see that a locust plague, particularly, had come through the land of Israel and devoured so much of the produce. And it seems like it was a locust plague on top of a locust plague on top of a locust plague on top of a locust plague. And so, there was nothing left in the land of Israel.

The prophet Joel was sent to warn the Israelites about the judgment of the Lord and also to encourage them to turn in repentance to God. It is a book that encourages repentance. But here, at the end of the book in chapter 3, the tone of the book changes, and there is this word of prophecy that is given to the nations, to the nations. And you see that in verse 1 and following. It says, "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat."

What is it that God is going to say to the nations? What is His promise that He is making to the nations? Well, it is that He will judge them, that He will judge all the nations. Now, how do we see this in the text that is

before us? Well, it's in the many ways that it's brought out in the text, but we see this with this name of the valley that God will bring them to. Verse 2 says, "I'll gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat." Now, I don't know how your Hebrew is, but the word Jehoshaphat means "the Lord judges." You may even have a footnote in your margins of your Bibles there to translate the word for you. But it means that the Lord, Jehovah, Yahweh, He will judge.

And so, what is the Lord going to do? He's going to hold court. He's going to hold court with the nations, and they are going to have to answer the charges that He is bringing against them. And what are the charges that God has against the nations? Well, the nations have harmed God's people. We see that in verse 2. It says, "I will enter into judgment against them concerning My inheritance, My people Israel, for they scattered My people among the nations and divided up My land."

He has a problem with the nations because of the way that they have treated His people, the people of Israel. What is it that they did to the people of Israel? What has God got against the nations? Well, they stole the Israelites. They stole the Israelites; they kidnapped them. We see that in verse 2. He will enter into judgment against them, and He says, "For they scattered My people among the nations." They stole the Israelites and scattered them among the nations. And we see that even in verse 6 as well. It says, "You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland."

What has God got against the Israelites? They kidnapped the people of God and sold them into slavery far, far away. And what did they sell them for? Well, He actually gives in verse 3 the reasons that the nation sold the Israelites. What does it say in verse 3? "They cast lots for My people and traded boys for prostitutes. They sold girls for wine that they might drink." What did the nation sell the Israelites for? Sex and alcohol, sex and alcohol. That's what they sold the Israelites for, was for sex and alcohol in many ways.

But what else did the nation steal? Well, they stole the Lord's land. If they take the Israelites and they sell them away, they didn't just move on; they actually took the land of Israel as well. And we see that in verse two: "For they scattered My people among the nations and divided up My land." They took the land of the Israelites, which was their promised inheritance from the Lord, and they kept it for themselves.

And they didn't just steal people; they didn't just steal land; they also stole what? They stole God's treasures. They stole God's treasures. And we see that in verse five: "For you took My silver and My gold and carried off My

finest treasures to your temples."

So, what does the Lord have against the nations that He's bringing them into court, into the Valley of Jehoshaphat? It is the charge of theft: theft of people, theft of land, theft of treasure. The nations have broken the eighth commandment. They have taken what does not belong to them.

And so, what does the Lord have as a message for the nations in light of the theft that they have committed? He tells them that they need to get ready. Get ready for court. And we see that in verse nine. He says in verse nine, "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war." Prepare for war. You're going to pick a fight with Me? Okay, you want to fight with Me? You want to break My laws? Well, you'd better be ready for what I've got against you. You better be prepared for court.

How will you prepare for court? Well, bring your accusations; get your accusations ready. We see that in verse four: "Now what have you against Me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying Me for something I have done?" Okay, if you're doing this, you're stealing My people, you're stealing My land, you're stealing My treasures, why are you doing this? Get your accusations ready. What charges have you got against Me as you come into the courtroom? Get them ready.

And invest your resources, ready for court as well. If you're called to a court date, you'll take some resources that you have, and you will get ready for court with those resources. And we see that even in verse 10. He says in verse 10, God says to the nations, "Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears." Take those resources that you would usually use for the production of food so that you can satisfy your physical needs. And what are you going to use them for? You're going to use them for war with Myself. If you're going to break My commands, you'd better be ready for what's coming. And that's going to be war.

And so, your plowshares shouldn't be used for producing food; your pruning hooks shouldn't be used for producing food. Instead, they should be used for war. You'd better make use of them. And how else are you going to get ready? Well, get ready all the people that you can. And you see that in verse nine as well: "Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Get your strong men ready, because I am coming." And not just your strong men, we see in verse 10, it says, "Let the weakling say, 'I am strong.'" You're going to need every possible person in your nation to come and be ready for the war that I'm going to bring against you because of what you've done.

And what else does He say to them to do? Get ready your accusations, get

ready your warriors, get ready your weak ones, get ready your resources. And He says, get ready quickly. Verse 11, advice from the Lord to the nations: "Come quickly, all you nations from on every side, and assemble there." He tells them to get ready. Why does He tell them to get ready quickly? Well, because it's going to happen soon. Verse 14 says, "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."

And so the Lord tells the people, these nations, "You've sinned against Me. You better be ready for when I come to judge you in the valley of Jehoshaphat, in the valley of decision." And what will God do then? Why should they be so ready? Why should they fear Him coming in the valley of Jehoshaphat to judge the nations? Well, we understand that He will sit, and He will judge them. According to verse 12, "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." What will God do? He will judge them. That means He will harvest them. And we see this harvesting language given in verse 13: "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." What does that mean? He will separate the good from the bad. That's what you do at harvest time: you come in and you take the fruit that is there, you separate the good from the bad. And the harvest is ripe. We read in verse 13, "Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe." This is the time that He can separate the wicked from the righteous.

And what will God do in the valley of Jehoshaphat as He comes in and He harvests and He makes the decisions in the valley of decision? What will He do? He will roar and thunder His guilty verdict upon them. Verse 16: "The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the sky will tremble." God will bring these people into the valley of Jehoshaphat. He will judge them. He will harvest them. He will separate the good from the bad. And then He will roar His guilty verdict upon them.

And once that guilty verdict is proclaimed, what will He then do? He doesn't just condemn people as guilty; He then repays them for their wickedness. And we see that in verse 4: "Now what have you against Me, O Tyre and Sidon and all your regions of Philistia? Are you repaying Me for something I have done? If you are paying Me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done." God will repay the nations for their wickedness. And how will He do that? Well, what did they do to Him? They took from God. They took from God, so what will God do? He will take from them. The punishment will fit the crime. They took from Him; He will take from them. He will take their lands and their treasures, and even their own bodies and sell them into slavery. And we see that in verse seven and eight:

"See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them,

that's the Israelites, and I'll return on your own heads what you have done. I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabaeans, a nation far away. The Lord has spoken."

He will take them and He will sell them, and He will trample them. We see that in verse 13:

"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."

So this is what the Lord has as a message through the prophet Joel so many years ago to the nations: You have sinned, and I'm going to judge you for it. You better be ready for when I come. You pick a fight with Me, I will bring it. Are you going to bring it? You better make sure you do. And I will come and I will judge you, and I will punish you according to what you have done.

Now, did this come about? Did God judge the nations? There are many ways that we can see this prophecy in Joel chapter three fulfilled. One way, yes, we can see it when the Lord judged the Assyrians and punished them for the way that they had treated the nation and the land of Israel. And we can see it with the Babylonians, that they also treated the nation of Israel in the way that is described here with theft, and God accordingly punished them.

But is this a message for us today, so many years on? Is this still being fulfilled today? Was there a fulfillment at the time, soon after the prophet Joel spoke? And then, is there still a fulfillment today? And the answer is yes. How so? Well, the nations are still wicked. The nations of the world are still wicked. How so? They're all still guilty of theft. Still guilty of theft. How so? Well, people steal one another all the time, don't they? And take advantage of the weak. And why do they take advantage of the weak? For their own pleasures. So often, it's for their own pleasures. And what pleasures are the world taking advantage of others who are weaker? Well, it's the same things that we see here in verse three of Joel chapter three: sex and alcohol.

That's what we see the nations did it for in the past: "They cast lots for My people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine that they might drink." And we see this today in many different ways. How do we see it in one or two ways that I can talk about this morning? Well, how do we see theft for alcohol, theft of lives for alcohol? One way is when you see welfare money that is given to people, parents for the lives of their children, and it's poured into alcohol instead.

We have a very generous welfare system in our nation, in many respects compared to other nations. It's a lot of that money that goes to parents to look after the lives of children. Instead of being given for their needs, it is poured into alcohol. And what about the theft of lives for sex? Well, when we consider a lot of pornography is created by women who are in slavery, really. They're forced into doing what they do for the cameras. And so their lives are destroyed. Their lives are sold for the sake of sexual pleasure.

And when we consider that a lot of abortions take place so that people can enjoy the pleasures of sex without the pain that they think of children, it is so terrible that these little lives are destroyed, are murdered within the womb. They're traded for sex. And so those who watch pornography have to understand how much of the stealing of people's lives goes into that. And then, by watching it, they are stealing people's lives by supporting such an industry.

And so we see that this is still a relevant prophecy for today, as the nations still are concerned about taking advantage of the weak, taking advantage of others simply for the pleasures of alcohol and sex. How else are people guilty today? Well, they still steal land from one another, particularly we see this in national conflicts where one nation, maybe the people aren't all supportive of it, but one nation and you're guilty of it because of the association with that nation, it's your federal head. When they take another nation's land, it is theft. And we still see this going on today as we see nations taking the land of other nations or preparing to try and do so.

And we see this also today, this prophecy is fulfilled in the way that people take God's treasures for their own gods. We saw that here in the passage that they carry, it says in verse five, "For you took My silver and My gold and carried off My finest treasures to your temples." And we see this today as people take the resources that God has blessed them with, and instead of using them for God's glory and as good stewards of the resources that they've been given, they use them for idolatry, they use them for their own pleasures, and they use them for their own idols.

You may say, "Surely not I, surely I'm not caught up in this prophecy that is given to the nations so many years ago." The sad truth is, though we may not be as wicked as others, everyone is ultimately guilty of theft. We've all broken the Eighth Commandment, if not directly, indirectly. We can see it by the way that we associate with our nations and the way that they have in the past taken what does not belong to them. We're all descended from multiple great-great-great grandparents going back. We're part of nations, and we've all taken advantage of one another.

So what does Joel say to us today? What does he have to say to the na-

tions? He says the same thing today that he said so long ago. And what is that? "Get ready for court, prepare for war, prepare for Armageddon." How? Well, he says, "Get your accusations ready, get your accusations ready, get support of others as I'm coming to do battle with you, as I'm coming to court. Get your warriors, get your weak ones, get your valuable resources, and that would normally be used for supporting peace, and get them ready for war."

And what else does Joel say? He says, "Get ready quickly, get ready quickly." Why? Because the court date is soon. Verse 14 still applies today: "Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision." And do people do this? Do people get ready? Yes, we see people make a lifetime warring against God, getting ready for that time where they will fight with Him, and they fight with Him even now. They fight the guilt that they feel. How do we see this? Well, they get their accusations ready and they seek to justify their actions. They say, "God has wronged me, and therefore I can wrong Him." Just as we see in verse four where God is saying to them, "Now what have you against me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I've done?"

What do people say today, people who reject God? They say, "He has wronged me, and He has wronged others that I know about." How so? "Well, He hasn't given me the pleasures that I want. He doesn't give me what I want. And what has He given me instead? He's given me pain and suffering. And as I look around the world, I see pain and suffering. And so, therefore, I have every right to reject God and to not do what He wants and to take what I can from others and to take what I can from God Himself."

They get their accusations ready, and they get the support of the strongest and the weakest. As we saw Joel telling them, "Get your warriors, get your weak ones." And you see this with atheists. They'll get their very wise people and their arguments and they'll embrace those, but they also get the weak ones as well. The next-door neighbor who's a bit of an idiot and they don't really like anyway, but he's an atheist too, and I embrace him as well, and I'll take on what he says that there is no God. Doesn't really give an explanation why, but yes, the majority rules. And therefore, there is no God, and I can do what I like.

And how else do we see people doing it today, getting ready for court? Well, they take their valuable resources and they plow them into making war with God. How do we see this? Well, it's the way that false religions prosper. They take the resources that God has given them, and instead of worshipping the true God, they make a god for themselves and make a religion for themselves. And they plow those valuable resources into those, which

are really making war against the true God.

And so they do get ready, and God says, "Go on and get ready. Go on and get ready." And then what will He do? He says, "You'll get ready, and then I'll sit and I'll judge you. The valley of Jehoshaphat is coming." And what will He do when He judges? "I will harvest mankind. I will separate the wicked from the good in the valley of decision." And then what will He do? He will roar and thunder at people today as they pass through the valley of Jehoshaphat. He will roar and thunder His guilty verdict at them because of their sin in taking what does not belong to them, their guilty verdict of thieves as theft.

And then what will God do? Joel tells us He will repay upon them what their own heads have done. We see that in verse four; it still applies today. "Now if you against Me are Tyre and Sidon, and all your regions are Philistia, you are paying Me for something I've done. If you are paying Me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done." This still fits today. And what will God do? He will take from the nations today. He will take from them. The punishment fits the crime. God says, "You have taken from Me; I will take from you." What will He take? He will take land, He will take treasure, and He will take people. He'll strip them of all that they have and He'll send them to a land far, far away, as He promised to the nations in verse eight so many years ago. "I'll sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away." The Lord has spoken.

What is this land that the Lord will send the nations away to, the people of all nations away to, who have sinned against Him? A land we call hell, a place called hell. He will send them there. And what will happen to them there? They will be trampled for eternity in hell. That's what we read in verse 13: "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."

Will God really do this, though? Will God really do this? Can we see any indication in the New Testament that this is true, that Joel 3 applies today just as much as it did so many years ago to those nations that God was prophesying against? Well, yes, we see many places in the New Testament where it talks about this, and one of the clearest examples of this is in Revelation 20. Revelation 20: if you've got your Bibles there, you can turn to it now, and I'll read from verse seven through to the end of the chapter there. Revelation 20, where we see the ideas that are given in Joel 3 still apply in Revelation 20 as John looks to the future and what is to come.

In Revelation 20, what do we read in verse seven? "When the thousand

years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number, they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city He loves." Here we can see the fulfillment of Joel 3. What is that? The nations preparing for war with God. They're coming in battle. They're not passive; they're active. They are preparing for court.

What do we read in verse nine? "But fire came down from heaven and devoured them, and the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night forever and ever." And what do we read in verse 11 then? "Then I saw a great white throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from His presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, the warriors and the weakest, standing before the throne, and the books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. And death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Here we see in Revelation 20 the exact same thing that is prophesied in Joel 3: People coming, making war upon God, and God entering into the Valley of Jehoshaphat. The Lord judges them, and they are found wanting and are punished accordingly.

And this war that takes place, really, it is laughable in one sense that the nations gather together to make war against God. And then, what do we read in Revelation 20? As they gather against God and His holy city, fire falls from heaven and devours them. There's no contest. They come to court with all their arguments, with all their resources, with their plowshares beaten into swords and their pruning hooks into spears. They come ready for a fight. They bring the weakest; they bring the greatest, and fire falls upon them and devours them.

We opened the service this morning with Psalm 2, and it talks about the laughable nature of mankind fighting against God, that God laughs at them. In Psalm 2, reading from verse 1, it says, "Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against His Anointed One. 'Let us break their chains,' they say, 'and throw off their fetters.'" That's what they're saying to God. "Let's break His chains; let's throw off

His fetters." And what's the response of God? "The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying, 'I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill.'"

This is the fulfillment we see in Revelation 20 of Joel 3, where the nations come against God, and God scoffs at them in court because they've got no hope.

But is there any hope then? We are people of all nations. We have all sinned as well, haven't we? We've all taken what does not belong to us. We are all thieves. I defy anyone in this room to say that they've never wronged anyone else for pleasure, for their own pleasures, or taken the Lord's possessions and used them for idolatry in some form. We understand that our hearts are idol factories, and we will fuel them with the resources that God has given us. I defy anyone to say that they're not descended from someone or that they're not part of a nation at some time in their life that has not taken from others.

You may not think that we're personally that guilty by our actual sin. If we go all the way back to Adam, we recognize that we are guilty. We have taken what does not belong to us, even as Adam and Eve took what did not belong to them in the garden. And we are guilty of that as their descendants.

So, what hope is there for any of us? Well, Joel 3 does give us some hope. At the end of that passage, what did we read in verse 16? "But the Lord will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold for the people of Israel." There is hope. There is hope that there is a refuge, a stronghold by which people can survive the terrible judgment that is to come.

Now, how can God be that stronghold? How can He do so? How can He provide this place for us? Well, it's not by winking at sin and saying it doesn't really matter. Why would that be the case? Because then God's justice would be at stake. He can't just say, "Don't worry about the theft, I got it covered for you guys," because then He would be unjust.

So, what has God done to provide a stronghold, a refuge for His people? Well, it's by imputing the very great wickedness, the real very great wickedness of His people upon His Son and then putting His Son into court, putting His own Son, Jesus Christ, into court. What did God do so many years ago? Well, He set a court date to judge His Son, Jesus Christ. He set a day where Jesus would enter the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Valley of Decision.

And then, what did God do? Well, He brought His Son into that Valley of Jehoshaphat. And then, what did He do? He harvested His Son, Jesus Christ. He judged His Son as ripe in wickedness of the people of God as that wickedness was put upon Him, as they were imputed to Him. And then, what did God do? He swung His sickle. And what did God do? He roared and thundered at His Son instead of His people.

And then, what did God do? He repaid our sin upon Jesus. As we took from God, God took from His Son as He crucified Him. He stripped Jesus of all He had and sold Him into slavery, basically. We read that from Matthew 27 before. Jesus was sold for 30 pieces of silver. He was sold into slavery to go to the cross with nothing. Even His clothes, His garments were taken from Him.

And then, what did God do? He trampled Him. He trampled Him. He harvested Him. He roared His guilty verdict upon Him, not because of sin that He had done, but because of the guilt of His people. And then, He trampled Him at the cross with the pains of hell. Jesus experienced what it is to be sent to a place far, far away, hell itself, and experienced the trampling that comes to those who make war with God, who sin against the living God. God repaid upon Him what His people deserve.

And why did He do that? So that His Son would then become a refuge for those who trust in God as His people. How is that possible? Well, those who trust in Christ now are forgiven of all the sin that they've committed, all the theft, all the murder, whatever they have done. Even those who have aborted children in the womb, taken advantage of the most weak, that sin can be forgiven. Why? Because the penalty is taken in Christ Jesus. The harvest is completed. The judgment is over. The roaring, the thundering, the repayment, the slavery, the trampling that God's people deserve is done.

And so, what does the Judge do for God's people? He dismisses the case. Payment is made in full. There is a settlement that has been made. And so, the court is dismissed for God's people.

So the question for you this morning is, are you secure in the refuge, the stronghold that is Christ Jesus? The Lord will be a refuge for His people, a stronghold for the people of God. Is that the case for you? Are you secure in Him? If the answer is no, what should you know? You should know that God has laid criminal charges against you, charges of theft, of your thieving from people's lives, and from land and from treasures.

And what's the result? Well, God has assigned a court date for you. There will be a day where you will enter the Valley of Jehoshaphat, a court date with the multitudes and multitudes. We see that in verse 14: "Multitudes

and multitudes in the Valley of Decision, for the day of the Lord is near in the Valley of Decision." He has assigned you a court date. It varies from person to person until the Lord returns. The man is destined to die once, and after that face judgment. You will enter the Valley of Jehoshaphat.

And so, what should you do? As you hear that you're a criminal and that God has assigned you a court date, what should you do? Well, Jesus gives very good advice in Matthew 5. If someone is taking you to court, generally we look at this advice for if another person in this world is taking you to court. What does He advise? He says, "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still with him on the way, or he may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison."

This is very good advice. If someone's taking you to court, do what you can to settle with them if you can, so that you don't get a guilty verdict upon you and you end up in prison. We should all take Christ's advice and settle matters with God who is taking us to court. If you've never done it, you should do it. Or what will happen? You'll go to the judge, He will hand you to the officer, and you will go to prison in hell for all eternity.

Don't be so foolish as to arrive in the Valley of Jehoshaphat with your arguments and your accusations against God and all your resources that you've used over your lifetime to get you to that point where you'll have your day in court with God. Because what will happen? You'll be laughed out of court, laughed out by the Judge Himself. As you accuse God of hurting you, all He will have to do is show you all the ways that you have hurt mankind, and you will see the immensity of your guilt. Not just theft, but so many others. We just looked at theft this morning, but all our sin will come upon us, and we will see how terrible we have behaved. We have accusations against God, but God will show us all His accusations against us, and it will simply be laughable that we have ever tried to accuse the living God.

So if that is you, you've never settled with God. Settle with God now before your court appearance, before you end up in the Valley of Jehoshaphat. How? Offer Christ's body and blood to Him now. That is the settlement. The only settlement that you can make with God is that the penalty has been met, that the punishment that you deserve has been poured out upon Christ's body and blood.

It's so wonderful what we understand from the New Testament, and it's all there in the Old Testament hinted at, but so much more clearly in the New Testament: that God has actually given us the settlement price that needs to be paid. He has made it in His Son, Jesus, and we receive it by faith. If we trust in Christ Jesus, then the settlement is our settlement, and

it applies to our account. And we have settled matters with our adversary who is taking us to court. We've done it quickly while we're on the way to court, but it is done, and so we will not be handed over to the judge, we'll not be handed over to the officer, and we'll not be handed over to the prison of hell for all eternity.

I encourage you, if you've never done it before, trust in Christ Jesus. Trust that His body and blood is the payment for your sin, so that you do not have to fear the Valley of Jehoshaphat. But if you have trusted in Christ Jesus, what should you do? Oh, you should rejoice! Continue to rejoice every day. Oh, the joy of knowing that all our theft and the punishment that we deserve for our theft, the things that we have taken that do not belong to us, has been taken from us. The losing of everything that we deserve, the trampling in hell, it's all gone, and it's all because of Christ Jesus. This is something that we should rejoice in. This is something that we should rejoice in every day. And we should thank God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, for paying the settlement and forgiving our sins.

He didn't need to do it. He could have sent us all to prison for all of eternity, but in His mercy, in His grace, in His love, His kindness, He provided the sacrifice that is needed for us to be right with Him. And so we should thank Him every day. We should rejoice and thank Him because the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Valley of Decision, no longer holds fear for us. It's not a scary prospect for us. Why? Because even as we pass through the Valley of Jehoshaphat, we fear no evil because the Lord is with us. And we know that the condemnation that we deserve has been poured out upon Him. And we will pass through into heaven, to the paradise, and to be with our Lord, the One who paid for us, who made the settlement for us, so that we could be with Him for eternity in heaven rather than eternity in hell.

Let's come to God in prayer now. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise You as the Lord of justice who does not let thieves go unpunished. But we confess, even as we recognize this truth, that we are all guilty of theft. We've taken what does not belong to us. We've taken from our fellow man, and we've taken what belongs to You, O God. And we've used it for idolatry so often, O God. But we thank You for judging Your Son for our theft instead of judging us who believe. Lord, we ask that You would help us to rejoice and to thank You for the great salvation that You have wrought for us, the settlement that You have made so that we can settle with You, our adversary, and be right with You despite the wrong that we have committed.

But Lord, if there is anyone here this morning who does not trust in Christ Jesus, may they fear the Valley of Jehoshaphat, the Valley of Decision. And Lord, we pray that they would settle matters quickly with You now while they're on the way to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. May they settle matters

## Why is God taking us to Court?

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now by faith, trusting in Christ Jesus as a payment for their sin, so they can rejoice and thank You with us for what You've done for us in Christ Jesus. And we pray this in His name, Amen. Amen.