

For corn its right around 100 days. Tomato seedlings take about 75 days. Radishes even sooner needing only 35 days. Every plant and seed has its own number. It's the time from when the seed goes into the ground till harvest. That's why we plant. Tomatoes that rot on the vine are no good to anyone. Ears of corn that get overripe on the stalk don't taste good. We grow plants not so we can say we grew them. We want something from them at harvest time. And each plant has a day of harvest.

The wait to get to harvest day can be long, extremely long for some plants. In the meantime there's lots that goes into the growing process. Much of it happens without you. Sun shines. Rain falls. The seeds sprout and grow and you don't lift a finger. When the weather doesn't cooperate with your schedule you might water and fertilize. You pick weeds and mulch to ensure healthy plants. But everything you do is geared to the harvest.

Everything for God is geared to the harvest. For him that's what it's all about. It's the day he's been waiting for since this world was created, since you were born. There's plenty to do in the meantime. But people don't exist primarily just to enjoy this world. It's not just about living life, doing work, getting an education, and then living the retirement life. People exist to get ready for the harvest. God is doing the talking through the prophet Joel in the first lesson so that we know...

A harvest day is coming
Do what's right today
Expect the Day of the Lord soon

Parents use the counting trick all the time to get their kids to listen. You know, "1... 2..." Universally it's known that no one wants to see what happens when mom or dad gets to three. Every child knows it's something bad. So before three comes out they're usually doing what the parents wanted. Many have found it an effective tool. But what happens when the child pushes all the way to three? Parents better be prepared to follow through on some form of discipline or their child will never do anything again.

The Bible is filled with times where it almost seems like God is counting. "One! **Let the nations be roused;**" Two! **Let them advance into the valley of Jehoshaphat.**" He had warned them many times before. Instead with their sinful behavior the children of Israel and Judah pushed God like little children staring down their parents. They dared him to do something. They had many opportunities to do the right thing, to listen to God's warning, and to turn back to him. They should have known their sins would cause him to take action against them. But they didn't listen. So God got to three. **"Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow."** The time for doing what was right was over.

Every day life is filled with opportunities to do what's right. Most require sacrifice of some kind, giving up something we really like or that others really like because it takes our eyes off the Savior. The world doesn't need to know how we're spending our money or how much we're saving. But they'll know by our actions. Spending time isn't that much different. Where we spend our time, give our weekends, or choose to not take time indicates to us and to others what's important. Choosing sin fills up the vats. It tests the patience of God. It ignores God's warning that a harvest day is coming, a day of judgment.

God wanted the Israelites and Judah to act right and obey. He wants us to obey too and do what's right. But he knows we're burdened with sin. That's why a plan to save was needed. It had to be outside of us to save us. We needed a refuge for protection and for grace. The Lord is that refuge. But it wasn't enough for him to thunder from on high that humanity would be saved. God wanted you to be more secure than that. He wanted you to know him up close, to see his pain and know the depth of his love for you. So he sent Jesus. That's how you know the Lord is your refuge. He saved you through Jesus.

With the knowledge that you're saved be assured you're ready to grow. Take the opportunities that God will put before you today. Like doorways in a long hallway these opportunities stretch out before you. God loves you so much he gives them all to you and you get to pick. Take this door and you listen without complaining when your parents say you won't be getting a new cellphone. Take that door and without being asked you tell your spouse something nice about them. Take this door and you help the neighbor trim the bushes. The doors to doing what's right are there. You pick knowing each pleases God in Christ so each demonstrates your love for him. It tells others you know a harvest day is coming.

With so many days past and seemingly no end in sight we grow tired of our task. It's difficult to always be living for God and not for ourselves. Doing the right thing isn't easy, in fact in most situations it's the harder thing to do. We try to do the right thing because we know we should, but sometimes we fail. Christ forgives those failures by the price of his own blood. But it's not just today that we're concerned about. In fact we're always looking ahead. We're looking forward expecting the Day of the Lord soon.

A farmer who plants seeds and then pulls up a chair to sit right next to the field is going to be disappointed. There are many days before the plants come. But God kind of wants us to do that. He wants us living in this life waiting for the harvest. It's that close and that important. We must be ready. **"Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!"** A great many people gather; all the people of all time. But in this valley they make no decisions, the decisions have already been made. **"For the Day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."** The Day of the Lord refers to the end of the world. Joel is saying time's up. The decision is really the division of people into those being saved and everyone else on that Day of the Lord.

You've probably heard it like I have many times. 'I won't make it this week but maybe next week Pastor.' As if next week is guaranteed. Tomorrow we can get serious about God because today we're too busy. Listen because the sound of the sickle Joel spoke about is close. Some use their time to commit outward sin. They plan to get drunk because tomorrow they can ask for forgiveness. Or it's just this one time and God forgives anyway. But look because the sun and moon are close to being darkened as Joel warned. We know we're growing up as wheat among the weeds, believers among the sinful as Jesus pictured in the gospel. But sin is on us and in us. We don't escape it and sometimes we embrace it. Now listen because the thunder from the Lord on Zion Joel spoke of is growing closer.

Jesus never put off something important. He never preplanned a sin. Didn't once embrace the sins of the sinners around him. Jesus was everything we're not and then some. He was the Savior. He took the times we put off the important, the preplanned sins, and the embracing of sin around us and he took every other sin and nailed it with him on the cross. He responded to every sin against him with love. He knows there are two groups in the valley of decision. Jesus made the second group possible. Only through faith in him can anyone be in the group that's saved. We're in that group by God's grace. And by God's grace we respond to the warning that the Day of the Lord, the end of the world, could come at any moment so we must be ready.

We wait with quiet confidence and calm over what's happening and will happen. When Joel says that the sun, moon, and stars will be darkened we don't worry because Christ is our light in heaven. The Lord roaring doesn't scare us; the Lord's thunder doesn't cause us to tremble. We rejoice in knowing the end is soon to come and our new life will begin. We hear the words of our Savior through the prophet Joel. A time is coming soon when this world will come to an end. On that day our situation can't change anymore. Now is the time for believing in Jesus and living according to his will. Now is the time because a harvest day is coming soon.