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### **Sermon Transcript: End of the World as We Know It**

There is a 10% chance that all of humanity will be wiped out in the next 10 years. That's a thing that was said on the news. There's a researcher at one of the AI companies who recently quit their job and said, "I just—I can't be a part of that anymore, and it's not being done responsibly, and this—this could get out of control." So much out of control that once it starts self-editing and multiplying and connecting and breaking out of its proverbial cage, it could turn into a situation where humanity gets wiped out by a higher artificial intelligence. And I put the odds at about 10%. Now, what would have been really easy is for all of those folks who still have jobs at those companies to just jump in and go, "Look, that dude was whackadoodle. We're—we're just glad that he's gone. He doesn't know what he's talking about." But that didn't happen. All those really smart nerds that y'all beat up on in junior high and high school, well, they're now working at these companies. And their response to this wasn't, "He's crazy." Their response was, "Yeah, 10% sounds about right." What? What? There's not an army of people really refuting that there's a danger here. There's just a lot of people setting off alarm trumpets saying, "Hey, we ought to do something about this." And a lot of us feel pretty helpless. My programming skills are way too rusty for this one, I don't know about you.

I do remember other times in my lifetime when people talked about the "end of the world as we know it"—to quote R.E.M. from the 80s—and it didn't feel fine. We were worried about nuclear annihilation, that the Soviets and the United States would just start sending missiles back and forth, it would so destroy the earth that it would wipe out humanity. Apocalyptic visions and fears have been with us through the centuries.

Certainly, the people of the prophet Joel's time understood this type of language, and in fact felt themselves in the middle of a situation that felt that way. It felt like annihilation. Armies around them overwhelmed. And Joel says, "Sound the trumpet. Gather the people together. This is the mess that we are facing. It feels like the end of the world."

#### **The Character of God and the Cry of the People**

But let me remind you about something about our God that also appears way back in Exodus. Hear these words, which would have been familiar to them: that our God is gracious and merciful and slow to anger with steadfast love for us. And Joel says, "Let us gather together. Everybody. The kids. Yeah, the kids. The old people. Yeah, the old people. What about this bride and groom about ready to get married? Forget it. You got to come now. It's time. Come together." And then Joel says this: "And once we're gathered together—and—and crying out to our God, who knows what God will do?"

It's not exactly the most comforting words to hear, is it? "Who knows?" You know, I mean, God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. And you know, "Who knows? Who knows?" And under that vision, people gather and cry out to God. And as they cry out to

God—all these people coming together—God hears that. And not because of that—God is—it's not—it's not a transaction here where God's like, "Okay, well, you did enough now, now I'm going to act"—but God does come with a response.

Now, here's the thing is that I don't know if you caught on yet, but this is a theme that comes up again and again in our Bible all the way back to the Old Testament. We hit this one hard when we did a whole series on Judges, and it's coming up again in Joel, and that's it: Your relationship with God is not transactional. It's transformational. This is a message that you need to hear so bad that the Bible said, "Let me just repeat this about every other book. It's not about a transaction." God's response isn't because they did something, because they assembled. God simply hears their cries. And while they're still messed up—or to borrow words from the New Testament that comes later, while they're yet sinners—God responds, not because they got their act together, but because God hears their cries and responds. The God who is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. And Joel wants the people to hear this. And through the scriptures, we're meant to hear this very clearly, to understand the character of God.

And under this affliction, under this incredible insurmountable odds of this army that's just overwhelming them and what feels like the end of the world, what does God do? God rings the dinner bell and serves up food and wine. What? Did you catch that? All those verses about there's going to be grain and there's going to be wine, and they're like, "Um, army, um, destruction," and Joel's over in the corner going, "Who knows? Who knows what God will do?" Sometimes the response we get doesn't seem to match our expectations. There's this affliction, and God responds with bread. The Pouring Out of the Spirit

But it's even more unexpected, because it says, "Look, there will come this time, and God's response is coming. And when it comes, it'll—it'll be followed with a pouring out of the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is going to pour out over—over not just over—over sons and over daughters. Not just the young, but the old. Not just the free, but also the slave. Whatever barriers you put up between people, whatever categories you put around people, the Spirit of God is going to pour over each and every one of those barriers. There's not a little line that—that human beings can draw around other human beings that the Spirit of God is going to go, "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm not going to go there."

If you need a more modern translation of this, you can just pull out your worship handout and hear this: That the Spirit of God is going to pour out over all ages, all cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities, all gender identities and expressions, all sexual orientations, all physical and mental abilities, all socioeconomic backgrounds, all family structures, all political perspectives, all religious backgrounds. Get ready, people, because the Spirit of God is going to go in a lot of places that you don't expect. But the good news is that wherever you are, in the places where the world draws the lines, the Spirit of God can get there, and it's not blocked because the world defined something a certain way or drew a circle around it. That's the vision that we get.

The DoorDash of Blessings

The thing about this bread, though, this—this grain and this wine, is it never tells you how it makes it to the table. It says it's going to be there, but how does it get to the table? Well, once again, I ask

you to think for about your memory of what you know from scripture, your memory of the way you've seen God work in this world. And what I've noticed is that God really seems to like to use us as the DoorDash of blessings. We get it to the table. We're invited to be a part of that. So much, we just want to say, "Oh, God, this is really awful and this seems scary. Can you just take care of it?" And God's like, "Fine, I'll take care of it. Come on, do it with me."

You know, I have this good friend of mine and I went to her this week because I was thinking about this whole thing with AI and 10% chance—I don't like those odds—and—and what could happen? And it feels like the—that the church should have some kind of like response to this, that what's the church going to do in the midst of a world that's—I mean, going off in all these different directions? There's enough political unrest and division, and the world seems to be falling apart in different ways, and now we got AI that might just wipe us all out. It feels like the church ought to have something to say in this. And this wonderful wise friend of mine just looked at me and said, "So what do you want to do?"

I'm like, "I don't know. I'm—this is early workshopping for me. I'm just talking out loud." And they're like, "Well, I mean, you know, what's the plan that you would put together?" So, thoroughly encouraged, I left their presence and went out and went back to working on my sermon because I had to get that done for Sunday. And as I'm putting together the worship service, I realized that the answer to what we do in the midst of this is that we bring the bread to the table.

And so when I look at things like the Needs Among Us list that you have, when I think about the mobile market that's going to be here on Thursday morning, when I think about packing meals so that people on the other side of the planet might have food to eat, I think that's the work that we're meant to do even in the face of what feels like apocalypse, even in the face of what feels like destruction.

And I got news for you: When we run Mobile Market—and please, Judy, correct me if I'm wrong about this—we don't check what political party each person is who's lined up for food. Did you know that we don't make—we don't even check their gender when we give them food? Can you believe that? We just—"Are you hungry? We have food here." And there's not a line that this world will use to divide us that we use to divide that line of cars. Do you realize if you check one of those boxes on Needs Among Us, you might be helping a Democrat or a Republican? Oh no! You might—you might end up being a blessing to somebody who doesn't believe the same way you do about the way the world should be. Furthermore, they might have to put up with you being the one that helps them. You're not all sunshine and roses either.

In the midst of us getting the bread to the table, in the midst of us being the DoorDash of blessings, in the midst of us answering the Needs Among Us, putting food into cars, packing meals, I do not believe that the Lord God Almighty is dividing up the groups into little groups. I don't think God cares about those things when people are hungry. And so I think the God who is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love is displaying a character set that you and I are meant to duplicate. When we respond, it should look like a God response. I just don't think God cares about near the number of lines that we like to draw.

We have to just decide what do we want to do. And let's just look: If the end of the world is coming,

I want God to catch me feeding people when it hits. If the end of the world is coming, I want God to catch me being a blessing to someone who isn't like me, who maybe is very different from me. I don't want to get caught on that day finger-pointing, drawing lines, pushing anyone over to the side. I think what it means to be the people of God is that we're meant to participate in the business that God is up to.

So look at your scriptures. Look at the lessons. There's a lot of messed-upness going on there, and there's a lot of messed-upness going on in this world. But at the end of the day, someone is hungry. Someone is lonely. Someone is just overwhelmed and needs some help. And I don't need to sit there and draw a line around it or decide if I think it makes sense. I think I'm just supposed to help get the bread on the table. That's what I think we ought to get caught doing when it all goes down.

May God be glorified by what we get caught doing each and every day.

Hallelujah and amen.