

Week 13 | Joel 2:12-14 **“Return To The Lord Your God”**

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Beloved, these are not causal days, these are not normal days, these aren't sure or fixed days. These are days upheaval, days of unrest, days of economic stress, ethnic collisions, political polarization, moral unraveling, and days of which the intended ending or outcome is totally unclear.
- B. The Lord is calling His followers out of our political parties, out of our ideologies, and into His house of prayer, into His Church, into Christ, the only safety, the only constant, and sure thing in the middle of present and future shakings.
- C. Joel's prophecy through **Joel 1:1-2:11** (the past 12 weeks) is largely grim. But from there, it takes a radically different turn. But here's the thing, in the midst the decimating judgments through the locust, and the dismal outlook for the future through an impending military invasion and the utter destruction of their land, Joel doesn't call God's people into hopeless depression.
- D. They aren't to throw in the towel and quit, THEY'RE to run headlong into the grace of God, into the nature of God, into the goodness of God. The nature of God is their hope in crisis and it's also ours.
- E. As we are going to see through Joel **2:12-14**, God is always looking for a specific response from His people in the midst of crisis, in the time of trouble. And Joel is going to give us God's prescription, which is to come before Him with wholeheartedness, trust in His unfailing nature, to gather together for solemn assemblies, and to serve Him with prayer and fasting.

II. CHANGED HEART, CHANGED LIFE (JOEL 2:12)

- 1. **Joel 2:12** *“Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.”*
- B. The therefore is speaking to the previous verse's in **Joel 2:1-11**, and expressly the closing question of **Joel 2:11**, *“...who can endure it* (the great and terrible day of the Lord).” Joel is making clear, what is being said, is the way forward, to avert, or sustain this coming unendurable day.
- C. The call to soul reformation before God is always NOW, not later, not tomorrow, not then, but right now. We have to respond to God TODAY in light of what we've heard. If there is other work for you to put off for another time, then so be it, but your soul's sake, don't delay this one hour.
- D. There's always a better time to return to the Lord, there's always another tomorrow in our mind, but this global disruption should bring home the reality that we don't know what tomorrow holds, we don't even know what later today holds.
- E. These verses include remarkable hope because the God who's already judged them, and Whose threatening to judge them again, is also the One appealing for them to return to Him. He's not done with them; He's not throwing them away; He's calling out for them to return to Him!
 - 1. He's expressing two natures at the same time; righteous Judge and tender Bridegroom.

- F. We live in a culture of unending solutions on how to respond to this present crisis. Political leaders have suggestions. Celebrities have solutions. News outlets have supposed answers. But at the same time, God has a solution, a remedy for the people of God, but unfortunately, it goes almost entirely ignored, among the Church; it's called turning.
- G. "...turn to me..." means repent. In large part, this is what repentance is, *"turning from the direction you're currently going in, and going in the direction that God wants you to go in."* The Greek word for Repent is METANOIA, which means to change one's mind.
- H. As the New Testament opens, the first words from John the Baptist are, repent (**Matt. 3:2**). The first words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew were also repent (**Matt. 4:17**). And the first words of Peter on the day of Pentecost in response to the people's conviction was repent (**Acts 2:38**).
- I. However, our turning to God isn't just a change of mind, it's a *change of life, including our speech, our motives, how we spend money, how we spend time, how we treat the people around us, how we work our jobs, how we take care of our house.* Christ and His ongoing work is intended to change everything!
- J. Our danger is to have a response to Christ that's merely external, or ritualistic, devoid of intimacy with Jesus and a true connection with our hearts. A TURNING that doesn't just forgive us, but also makes us clean.
- K. David rightly said in **Psalm 51:6**, "...You desire truth in the inward parts..." expressing the reality that's it's always about internal transformation, not just external observance or the look of obedience.
- L. The question we have to ask ourselves is, are we being molded, shaped, and pressed into the image of Christ, or are we still running our own course, a course whose boundaries are set by the world, by the ruler of this world?
- M. The heart is always what God wanted. It's not that He hated the feasts, their gatherings and their sacrifices, it's that they offered them, they kept them with divided hearts (**Isaiah 1:10-20; Amos 5:21-27**). They had an external observance, without an internal purity.
- N. However, their inward turning was to be accompanied with the outward signs of, "...fasting, weeping and mourning." This is because fasting/mourning positions us to receive more of the grace of God upon our lives, which enables us, or awakens us to our need of holiness, and this comes by way of repentance (**Matt. 5:4; 9:14-17; 2nd Cor. 7:8-11**). As we turn, we see the discrepancy between our current state, and where God desires us to be.

III. APPEALING TO GOD BASED ON HIS NATURE (JOEL 2:13)

1. **Joel 2:13** "So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness and He relents from doing harm."
- B. To rend means to tear something violently, or forcibly. In Joel's day, people tore their garments to show grief and desperation. And in our day, we are to tear our hearts away from everything and anything in our life that quenches the Spirit in our lives.

- C. It speaks of dealing radically with the issues in our hearts that hinder our relationship with God. This is because wholeheartedness with God is never pursued casually. Tearing our hearts from those things that hinder us is intensely personal, and painful. Some people want the Spirit to free them from their sinful patterns and relationships, without it requiring any personal choices to tear their hearts.
1. *“If a sinner (follower of Jesus) thinks that God’s mercy is not sufficient to pardon his sins, or the blood of Christ not sufficient to cleanse him, then he has not seen the glory of the Savior.”* – Jonathan Edwards
- D. Again, the danger is that we can have an external response to an inward call. Our changes externally, happen because we’ve torn our hearts internally. Christ is always working from the inside out, not primarily from the outside in.
- E. Joel is going to give us the key as to why we should return to the Lord our God through five reasons, based solely on the nature of God;
1. He Is Gracious—The Lord is graciousness is seen clearly in the way that He evaluates us. He’s not a harsh leader, like an angry coach or parent who despises weakness. God’s style is human-friendly. He doesn’t give us what we deserve but remembers our frailty and that we are but dust (**Psalm 103:10,14**). God’s graciousness puts His requirements within reach of weak people because they aren’t burdensome (**1st John 5:3; Matt. 11:30**).
 2. He Is Merciful—God delights in showing mercy (**Micah 7:18**). He loves to give us a new start after we repent of our failure and seek His way of restoration (**2nd Samuel 14:14**).
 3. Slow To Anger—God is not easily provoked by our weakness. The idea is that God has long nostrils, or that He doesn’t breathe deeply, in anger over our weakness. He remains calm when dealing with us, never losing His cool (**Revelation 2:20-22**).
 4. He Has Great Kindness—When we believe in God’s kindness, we have confidence to press into full repentance (**Psalm 18:34; Romans 2:4**). Our repentance will never be met by God with rejection. This gives us great courage to tear our hearts, knowing that God desires to help restore our fellowship with Him.
 5. He Relents From Doing Harm—The idea is that God does relent from releasing judgment. He desires to cancel judgements that nations/people deserve (**Ezekiel 33:11**). God searched for an intercessor to stand in the gap between Himself and Israel, to pray that judgment would be withheld (**Ezekiel 22:30**). But in that case, He destroyed the land because He couldn’t find anyone. *Intersession changes the course of nations.*
- F. If you remember, this phrase first appears to Moses in the second writing of the 10 commandments, as God Himself gave Moses and Israel a second chance to obey Him (**Exodus 34:6-7**). And this phrase was Jonah’s response to God’s nature towards his/Israel’s sworn enemies, revealing why Jonah didn’t want to go to Nineveh in the first place (**Jonah 4:2**).

IV. THE DIVINE PERHAPS (JOEL 2:14)

1. **Joel 2:14** *“Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?”*

- B. We don't want to move into presumption with God. We want to remain in anticipation, that's held in check by the sovereignty of God. We don't know what He will do, but we do know about His nature, and it's to His nature that we appeal. This is why corporate prayer meetings are essential, gatherings where God's family can pray together and reach out to the Lord collectively.
- C. Their hope was that God might leave a blessing behind, a grain offering and drink offering, signs that God's judgments wouldn't totally devastate the land so that they could once again open the temple and receive the covenant blessings once again.
- D. Beloved, it would be easy to give a big sigh of relief coming out of the previous 31 verses (**Joel 1:1-2:11**) and think to ourselves, "*yes, we are outta the woods. No more dark text, no more clouds, closed temples, barren fields, dried up water basins, lamenting animals and destroyed vines.*" But this would be to utterly miss what God is saying to us through these verses. Remember, the human army of **Joel 2** is a progressive, future increase of the locust's invasion of **Joel 1**. **Joel 1** becomes a harbinger, a testimony, a prophecy regarding the future if God's people don't repent.
- E. We're not outta the woods simply because we moved on in the text, we will be outta the woods, when we actually return to the Lord. When we actually repent. When we actually metanoia, when we about face, when we have a change of mind that results in a changed way of life. This is the goal of the terrifying words that Joel has to share.