

Week 9 | “A Response Equal To The Judgment—Joel 1:13-14”

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. It’s a strange season we find ourselves in today. We’re fast approaching three months of “stay home, stay safe” orders in Washington State, along with the majority of our nation, and really, every continent. And if you include our recent/long-term nation-wide tension that’s rapidly accelerated with the death of Ahmaud Arbery, and George Floyd, we’re not just a strange place, but a dangerous place; economically, and as well as socially.
- B. It’s a time of massive closures for pretty much everything around us, including a majority of our workplaces, schools, outdoor recreational activities, anything social, and not to mention our Churches. For the first-time in American history, Churches universally were closed over Passover/Resurrection weekend, and now Pentecost weekend.
- C. What should be a time of celebration, a time of rejoicing, a time of gathering, has turned into a time of weeping, a time of mourning, and a time of lamentation. As I said last week, Israel’s devastation around them, was an external picture, of what was happening internally; and I think our moment in history today, is no different! We are experiencing externally, what’s been going on internally, with the Church, with us as followers of Jesus.
- D. With the cancelation of our festivals, God is calling His Church, He’s calling you to another kind of festival, another type of gathering. He’s asking you to take off the clothing of a cocktail party, and put on the clothing of mourning, to take off the comfortable, stylish attire of celebration, and put on the uncomfortable attire of mourning, of sackcloth and ashes.
- E. Like Israel, God is calling us to mourn, not before crops, not before our many closures, not before our senators, politicians and our American rights, but before Christ, before our Great High Priest.
- F. **Joel 1:1-12** (all our previous sermons) informed us about the crisis at hand for Israel, not as something that *WOULD* happen, but something that *HAS* happened. But today, in **Joel 1:13-14** we are going to learn about the solution for Israel, and for us. It’s called a Sacred Assembly, a Solemn assembly, a gathering of mourning before God, together with ALL of God’s family. This is His solution to our current, and future crisis’s.

II. FASTING, LAMETNING AND SACKCLOTH

- 1. **Joel 1:13** *“Gird yourself and lament, you priests; Wail, you who minister before the altar. Come lie all night in sackcloth, you who minister to my God; For the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.”*
- B. Joel’s radical call for God’s family only makes sense if God’s the One driving the locust into the land. If this is just a freak event, an act of mother nature, then why the call to return to the Lord?
- C. As God moves through the nations, and in the lives of His family, He’s always looking for a specific response. His dealings with individuals, Churches, and nations is never without a target, never without the end of something specific in mind.

- D. God’s call for the nation of Israel to *mourning, weeping, and wailing*, wasn’t for the sake of those three things; it was for repentance. They were to assume an outward position, that was a reflection of their turned inward condition.
- E. The idea of rending our hearts (*lamenting, wailing*) means to violently, and forcibly tear our hearts from the things that easily ensnare us and entrap us.
1. **Matthew 5:29-30** “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it far from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than your whole body to be cast into hell.”
- F. As Jesus followers, we often want the fruit of mercy, we just don’t want it on God’s terms, in the way that He requires it. Mercy triumphs over judgment, IF we forcibly, and violently tear these sins, by the Spirit’s help from our hearts.
- G. In the middle of national, and societal upheaval the Church is God’s first line of defense. Our response to God can stave off God’s judgements in the land, which is why Joel first mentions the priests.
- H. These Priests, these were to be the discerning ones of Israel, the ones acquainted with God’s Words and God’s ways. They were supposed to be the ones shouting out loud, giving definition to what’s taking place among them. But it’s clear, they are disconnected from the moment, which is why God has to send the prophet Joel to them.
1. If they knew, if they were discerning, they’d be aware of the fact that this locust plague was the fulfillment of **Deuteronomy 28**, that the temple closure was God’s doing, not just a “natural disaster.” Instead of leading, they needed to be led.
- I. Gird Yourself And Lament, You Priests; Wail...Come Lie All Night In Sackcloth—They were to remove their white garments, and put on the black, course garments of mourning. They were to trade in their songs of joy and celebration, for songs of sorrow, remorse, and lamentation.
1. They aren’t to put on their silk pajamas, they aren’t to climb into their 1000 thread count Egyptian sheets, they aren’t to use My Pillow (which is made in America), they aren’t to turn on the electric blanket, or electronically control the temperature of the room, or adjust the height and firmness of the bed; NO, they are to wear the uncomfortable clothing of sackcloth, ALL NIGHT.
 2. Sackcloth is rough, scratchy clothing, often black as it was made from goat’s hair and wearing it, like fasting was showing that the person felt deep grief, contrition, and sorrow. It was worn as a sign of submission and self-humiliation. The specifics of the solution

III. THE SPECIFICS OF GOD’S SOLUTION

1. **Joel 1:14** “Consecrate a fast. Call a sacred assembly; gather the elder’s and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God and cry out to the Lord.”
- B. Instead of joining together for a harvest feast, for the feast of Pentecost, they were to have a grim meeting, a solemn meeting. This was the opposite of joy and festivities. Instead of a feast of celebration, this was to be a feast of mourning, a time of grief, a time of brokenness. This is a stoppage of work, a deviation from the norm a disruption that leads to long-term change.

- C. One translation calls this a “special assembly,” which in Israel’s history was to be a day off, a time when you didn’t go to work, because you were prioritizing God. You were replacing food with prayer, work with worship, sleep with mourning, talking with listening, busy with sitting, opinions with repentance, arrogance with humility, confidence with dependence, frustration with sorrow.
- D. The call was first issued for the priests, but now it’s extended to the elder, and then to all the inhabitants of the land. Nobody was to be left out from this scared time, this special assembly.
- E. And as Lou Engle rightly says, “*this gather isn’t a festival, it’s a fast.*” There was to be a date, a specific time placed on the calendar, a time that wasn’t to get deleted, or replaced, but kept.
- F. Israel wasn’t to create a committee to figure out how to deal with the locust, they aren’t to come together with the board and see how they can continue temple ministry with laid off priests, they aren’t to try and solve the water shortage, or to predict the future economic losses.
 - 1. They were to come before God. God was the author of their crisis, and also the solution. Apart from Him there was just further death, destruction and devastation.
- G. These measures might sound intense, even over the top, and way to drastic; but they are simply commensurate with the judgement around them. What’s true for Israel, is also true for us; Our response to God has to be in line to the judgment that’s happening around us.

IV. PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS

- A. Today, many among God’s family simply want to gather together and celebrate Pentecost weekend. We desire a fresh Pentecost to happen today, and we desperately need it. But just as much as we want God to come down, God wants to come in. We’re praying **Isaiah 64:1-2**, asking God to rend the heavens and come down, and God says, “*I will rend the heavens and come down, when you rend your heart’s and come up!*”
- B. Our challenge as Christian Americans is that we tend to be more patriotic than we are priestly. We often assume that we can get further pleading our cause before our government, then we can pleading our cause before God. We assume more can happen by lobbying, by carrying assault rifles into our courthouses, then by carrying our Bibles into God house.
- C. When we should be praying, we’re protesting. When we should be interceding, we’re complaining. When we should be fasting, we’re venting. When we should be humble, we’re proud. When we should be bowing down, we’re standing up.
- D. Beloved, we feel emboldened today to appeal to our government because we have a conservative in the office. But when this liberal wave, this wave that’s left the shore of our cultural beach, only to gain steam and return even greater, crashes down upon our nation, and the nations of the earth, who will you appeal to? What government agency will we have that will carry our best interests at hand.
- E. My fear is that when our conservative voice is taken away, because we haven’t learned how to talk to God, how to lobby God, how to come before Him, we won’t have anyone to talk to. And then we will be left with only doubled down ideals, dug in heels, hearts brimming with anger, offense and bitterness that opens the door for every other evil.

- F. Judgment is in our land, God is exposing the Churches spiritual barrenness with economic and societal bareness. Our natural circumstances are the fruit of the Churches internal condition. There's not many ways out, there's not a couple ways out, there's only one way out; RETURNING TO GOD!

V. JUNE 1ST, 2ND AND 3RD

- A. Corporate fasting in times of crisis were central to Israel's history;
 - 1. **Nehemiah 1:1-11**
 - 2. **Nehemiah 9:1-3**
 - 3. **Daniel 9:1-23**
- B. I'm inviting you to join us Monday-Wednesday, for a solemn assembly, a time set aside for God. We will be live Monday night, 6P-8P, Tuesday 6P-8P, and then again Wednesday 6P-8P.
- C. Shut down business as usual and come before God. **Psalm 139:23**