

When Troubles Hit, Listen!

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[0:00] Would you take your Bibles, please? And now turn to the book of Joel. So you've got Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, you've gone too far.

Go back. If you're visiting though and you have that black Bible in your hand, start at the beginning and find page 647. And that black Bible there in the chair in front of you, 647, you'll find that, Joel chapter one.

So again, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, you've gone too far. Go back. I think I read, and I thought about reading Joel the whole thing like this morning, but I decided not to.

Maybe the last Sunday I'll do that, which will be May 27th. Maybe I'll do that. It took me, I think, 10 minutes to read it out loud, the book of Joel.

And I like to do this because it gives you a plethora of genres that's used in the Bible. I mean, you have, we went through historical narrative, we did the book of Exodus.

[1:29] I think before that we did first, didn't we do first Peter before that? I think we did one Peter before that. So you get epistle, you get historical narrative, but then there's prophecy prophecy, and almost apocalyptic language as well.

Like the end of time, the disaster that will come, the catastrophe that will come when Jesus returns. So I want us to look at the book of Joel, and it'll only be for this month, just four Sundays. So we're gonna do that.

I'm gonna read just the first chapter, and then we'll begin our study. So Joel chapter one. Everybody there? Nobody's in Obaniah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum.

You're not there, are you? Like, where is it? Go back. Okay. Joel chapter one. The word of Yahweh that came to Joel, the son of Pithul.

Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land. Has anything like this happened in your days? Or in your father's days? Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons, and their sons the next generation.

[2:34] What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten. What the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. Awake, drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.

For a nation has come against Yahweh's land, mighty and without number. It's teeth of the teeth of a lion and has the fangs of a lioness. It has made my vine a waste and my fig tree splinters. It has tripped them bare and cast them away. Their branches have become white. Wailed like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. The grain offering and the libation are cut off from the house of Yahweh.

The priests mourn the ministers of the Lord. The field is ruined. The land mourns. For the grain is ruined. The new wine dries up. Fresh oil fails. Verse 11.

Be ashamed, O farmers. Wail, O vine dressers, for the wheat and the barley because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up.

[3:43] The fig tree fails. The pomegranate. The palm also. The apple tree. All the trees of the field dry up. Yes, truly. Rejoicing dries up from the sons of men.

Gird yourselves and lament, O priest. Wail, O ministers of the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God. For the grain offering and the libation are withheld from the house of your God.

Consecrate a fast. Proclaim a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of Yahweh your God and cry out to Yahweh. Alas for that day. For the day of Yahweh is near. And it will come as destruction from the Almighty. Has not food been cut off before our eyes? Gladness and joy from the house of our God. The seeds shrivel under their clods.

The storehouses are desolate. The barns are torn down for grain is dried up. How the beasts groan. The herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them.

[4:44] Even the flocks of sheep suffer. To you, O Yahweh, I cry. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.

Even the beasts of the field long for you. For the water brooks are dried up and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. Amen. Amen. And then the title of the article that I have here is, quote, here's why you need to stop taking life so seriously after reading a chapter of the Bible like that.

So what are the symptoms that show you're taking life too seriously? Let me tell you. You're constantly worrying about the smallest things. You don't deal very well with uncertainty. You're afraid of embarrassing yourself.

You're afraid of being wrong or making a mistake. You're afraid of looking silly. You're overly self-conscious. You're prone to get hurt, anxious, angered, overwhelmed, offended, frustrated, or stressed.

You're incapable of self-deprecating humor. You're constantly focused on threats rather than opportunities. So those are the symptoms if you're taking life too seriously.

[6:05] And that's not necessarily wrong. I mean, it's true. Many of us do take life way too seriously. It's good for us to see the lighter side of life.

But usually, when tragedy hits, when troubles come, it's hard to see the lighter side of life, isn't it? Life does not become light. Life becomes more serious. And rightly so.

Troubles hit because we live in a lost world. Troubles come because we live in a fallen world, don't we? Think about your health.

Life takes a turn for the worst. Relationships, a job, school. And when it does, how do we respond?

[7:18] When life doesn't go as you expected, I know that probably never happens to you, but let's just say, when life doesn't go as you expected, what's our attitude?

I did a lot of studying this week. What's the main theme for the book of Joel? And I mean, I could tell you the day of the Lord. Okay, yeah, sure. What does that mean? What does that tell us? Well, maybe this might unpack it a little bit more for you.

Help drive it home, the theme. Take God seriously. He judges and saves. That's what Joel's all about.

See, if you forget things over the next four weeks, which you might, a few things, but if anything, I think it would be good for you to remember, and for me, it's this.

What's Joel all about? Take God seriously. He judges and He saves. Take Him seriously. And as we come here to chapter one, this is what we'll see from chapter one.

[8:33] When troubles hit, listen. And notice how it goes along with the main theme, taking God seriously. We take God seriously when troubles hit. We take Him so seriously, we listen.

What? God, what do you want me to know? How do you want me to respond? That's what this first chapter is all about.

I'll put other statements for you. When troubles hit, what's our response? Does it drive us to our Savior and Lord in deeper loving ways? Does it drive us to repent and seek God out?

Does it drive us to His word? Or, do we remain callous? Do we remain dull of hearing? Are we even listening to God when He providentially brings storms into our lives?

In a few moments, we will sing mercies anew. And when the storms come and rage, your mercies are anew. How do we respond to God?

[9:45] Are we listening? He's trying to get our attention through circumstances, through events. Some of these things He brings into our lives to discipline us, yes, that's true.

But some things just to test us. Either way, does it matter? We should listen. So to be attentive to our Lord and His word, that doesn't cause anxiety, depression, worry, or stress.

No, on the contrary. It helps to relieve because our trust is in El Shaddai. That's what you see there in verse 15.

The Almighty, it's the Hebrew, El Shaddai, the Almighty God. Look, if you don't trust Him, today, you should fear Him.

But if you truly trust Him, then you have nothing to fear because He'll be on your side. He is.

[10:50] He's on the side of His people. Those who trust Him, those who listen, those who hear, those who are attentive to Him. And this is very important for the people of Judah because there are some people in Judah who weren't listening.

And God's gonna say, it doesn't matter if you're Jewish. That doesn't matter. It was quite funny. I was actually talking to a guy in Jerome on Friday who was actually, he was actually adopted but he was kind of Jewish.

And I said, I had, this past week, I was studying. He said, well, we're studying. Well, let me tell you. I started going into it. You know, it's not about Jews thinking that they're the main deal.

They're God's chosen people. We're God's chosen people. God's gonna say, it's not about that. It doesn't matter your ethnicity. What matters is that you're listening to God.

He kind of got a little uncomfortable with that. Anyways, listening, listening to God. And Joel is gonna describe an actual locust plague. Calling the people to repent.

[11:57] Not only to stop the effects of the plague but to continue the worship of Yahweh. Not just to continue to worship Yahweh but really to trust Yahweh and God. For only those who take God seriously are true worshipers.

Only those who take God seriously are the ones who are truly listening. Those who don't take God seriously by not trusting Him or coming to Him with a repentant heart, they will face His just judgment.

You will. So notice verse 4. This is the locust plague. What the nine locusts has left, the swarming locusts has eaten.

What the swarming locusts has left, the creeping locusts has eaten. And what the creeping locusts has left, the stripping locusts has eaten. It's a three-fold, four-fold repetition. It's used to show their ferocious appetite.

So we'll talk more about the fangs and the teeth. Nothing remained. They devoured everything. Specifically vine, fig trees, crops, trees, everything gone.

[13:00] This truly happened. All was impacted. Nothing was left. And so Joel is going to call the people. He's going to try and get their attention and you're going to see four different groups of people.

I think I have it on the screen for you. Yes. Four main groups in society are called to observe this trouble. Notice. Elders, drinkers, leaders, farmers. Got a little er's there for you, right?

So you remember. Elders, drinkers, leaders, farmers. Elders, elders, elders, elders, elders, elders, elders, the ruling people, political leaders, so to speak.

The wine drinkers, they delighted the abundance. Wine was a vice for them. But there's other implications for the word wine as well, so we'll look at that in a moment. Life's luxuries, what they enjoyed.

The leaders, in terms of spiritual leaders, the religious leaders, the priests, and then forth, the land farmers. They planted, they cultivated, they harvested. They gave life's essentials to the people.

[14:03] So it's actually, it's a way to try and call everybody. Whether you're in politics or you're just, the guy, Joe Blow down the road is just doing his thing. Everybody.

Listen, says Joel. Says God through Joel. Notice first with the leaders or the elders, verse 2 and 3. He says, Listen, hear this. Arousing appeal to them. Consider the gravity of their conditions. Are they listening when things go wrong?

Are we listening when troubles come? Or are we dull in hearing? And notice he says, And listen, all inhabitants of the land. He's calling everybody. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your father's days?

Tell your sons about it, verse 3. And let your sons tell their sons and their sons tell their sons and their sons tell their sons and everybody tell their other sons. Why does he do this?

[15:04] Why does he say this? Well, let's just say for the sake of argument that there was people here sitting in the chairs and you're over 50. I know there's nobody here over 50, but let's just pretend.

Most of you are 49 and under. You better shake my hand very well when I go out the back door. Why does he do this?

Let's just say for the sake of argument there was people here over 50 because the elders should know. The olds should know better. Right? Right? Because listening involves perceiving and acting and obeying.

So he says make a conscious purposeful decision. It calls for action. You don't just sit back and the elders you remember. Remember when that happened? My father had a thing about food and stuff so much so because of this and that but the reason why was because he went through the Great Depression.

he knew it was like to have nothing. He remembered the Dust Bowl. He remembered coming out to Sacramento, California because that's where the jobs were as a kid because he was born in 25.

[16:29] He was like 10 years old. This is so serious. You should tell the generations to come teach your children this truth he says.

Let them know. So serious should we take God when troubles come into our lives that we take the time to show the next generation our humble response. that's why you even have the concept in Titus chapter 2 older women teaching the younger women older men teaching the younger men why?

What do you do that for? Because you say I remember when it was hard when I had little children snotty noses everywhere and you're not going anywhere you're staying at home I understand what that's like because I was there but be faithful because God is gracious and true.

Stay faithful listen you see? In other words are we taking the time to teach our kids and you might say well I don't have any children spiritual children then let it be like that.

What's our response to the troubled times in our lives with our health with our jobs in our marriages in our government the youth no offense millennials you're so naive you have no idea you think you know listen to those who've gone before you and those of you who've gone before them take the time to teach them graciously because they don't know.

[18:00] When troubles hit do we teach them listen he's talking to the elders well then he begins to describe how bad things got in verses 5-12 and that's where he moves into the next category of the drinkers why in the world would he bring up drinkers notice verse 5 awake drunkards and weep wail all you wine drinkers on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth what in the world is he doing bringing up drinkers how is that aspect of society well it's true it depicts people who are just kind of enjoying life really enjoying life but there's something else behind this as well just like there were with the elders the older people they were the complacent ones they represented the attitude of the people and that Judah had become callous almost indifferent to God to what extent like a drunkard complacent in their lives like a drunk who seeks after wine and doesn't really care about anything else but wine they just want to enjoy the luxuries of life they represented the drinkers true these are the ones they were there there was there's nothing left of the vine but these they represented those who were careless they were unaware of what was happening around them in whatever type attitude and that was the attitude that Judah was having

God was saying wake up listen notice he says they should wail which means they should mourn they should weep aloud a public lamentation you cannot just go about as business business as usual as a serious instead of enjoying the wine being out of control face the bitter realization there's nothing left but then notice he says sweet wine is cut off from your mouth this depicts a state of joy and rejoicing which is not necessarily bad in the Old Testament the idea of sweet wine was there was joy that's what it depicted it depicted God's blessing so when he says it's gone it's symbolizing the loss of intimacy between lovers between God and Judah they had departed from spiritual bliss and Yahweh's divine blessing they had become callous to him mourn wail notice verse 6 why for a nation has come against my land that is the land of Yahweh mighty without number teeth are like the teeth of a lion fangs of a lioness he's talking about real locusts who devoured everything but yet what he's going to do he's going to take this imagery this real historical event that actually represents a warring nation that would come against the land we'll see that next week in chapter 2 in other words

Joel used real events the locusts to direct their attention to future events it had destructive power of the locusts so much it had these fangs and these teeth like lions and lionesses notice verse 7 it's made my vine a waste fig tree splinters strip them bare so bare the branches are white the bark's gone total despair elders drinkers leaders now the spiritual leaders they should wail they should mourn will how bad should they wail to what extent verse 8 wail like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth they should wail like a young maiden who weeps profusely over the

death of her young husband shows the gravity of the issue instead of the music the gaiety of a wedding feast it's a funeral dirge and they would publicly express this by wearing sackcloth they publicly express it by wearing goats or camels hair and he used the image of a young maiden wailing for her young husband to emphasize their broken relationship with Yahweh now is the time for you to listen now is the time to repent when troubles hit listen to God seek him out mourn that much it says in verse 9 the priests mourn the ministers of Yahweh because the field is ruined the land mourns the grain is ruined the new wines rise up fresh oil fails what's going on they have no ability to carry on the services in the temple there's nothing left to sacrifice the grain offering the peace offerings yes yes it was their daily sustenance as priests yes it's true it was beyond that they had set aside they had to set aside their covenantal relationship with Yahweh all the elements necessary to worship Yahweh was no longer there it was gone you have nothing to sacrifice to God there's nothing there not to mention the fact a bountiful harvest communicated

Yahweh's blessing upon his people a decrease was viewed as him disciplining them so grain offering signifies a worshiper's gratitude and a restored relationship with Yahweh and the lack of it pointed to God's rejection now I'm not saying that all the trouble that we face from God is him disciplining us I'm not saying that he might be he may not be but either way are we listening are we attentive are we going to his word are we crying out to him which leads us to the last one land farmers elders drinkers leaders farmers notice they dealt with the most essential part of life he says verse 11 be ashamed oh farmers wail oh vine dressers for the wheat and the barley because the harvest of the field is destroyed the vine dries up the fig tree fails pomegranate palm tree apple tree everything is gone the most essential for life food that is in jeopardy there was nothing to eat it meant sure death the guy couldn't even feed his family life cannot be sustained without any food that's why you should desperately seek God all segments of society have lost all joy have lost all hope notice he says this the end of verse 12 yes indeed rejoicing dries up from the sons of men because human experience the things we experience as humans it all has spiritual meaning it does when troubles hit us like a ton of bricks that's the time we seek the

Lord and his word cry out to him with a trustful repentant attitude grieve wail grieve despair is there mourn because of the unprecedented jaw dropping experiences that you're facing and that's what leads us to the next part of the chapter in verse 13 and following listen respond repent and notice he's going to call the spiritual leaders you spiritual leaders bring the people together first you have a personal response verse 13 gird yourselves and lament the priests wail the ministers of the altar so Yahweh through Joel he called the people to repent starting with the priests it was a call to penitence and prayer take action first by setting the example have a personal response you spiritual leaders to what extent there in the middle of verse 13 come or enter spend the night in sack cloth ministers of my

[27 : 19] God the grain offering and the libation are withheld from the house of your God so horrible were their circumstances that Yahweh called them to replace their robes with sack cloth and instead of enjoying sleep you should be up all night praying enter the court of the temple spending the whole night there in sack cloth have continual uninterrupted intercession a whole night of prayer take this so seriously you won't even sleep and notice what the Lord says through Joel there at the end of verse 13 the grain offerings are withheld from the house of your God God was withholding these offerings because he wanted the people to listen look when

God is keeping us from worshiping him then that's the time we truly need to worship him then we truly need to seek him in prayer and penitence so that's why he says to spiritual leaders you have a personal response may God work in your heart first and then bring forth a public response consecrate proclaim gather do you see those verbs there in verse 14 consecrate a fast proclaim an assembly gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of Yahweh your God fasting it was a way for them to petition for God to graciously forgive and withhold further calamity and destruction says one writer ask for God's compassion the call is for the community to humble have humble dependence upon

God repent they should set the example and then stir the people to action we're going to repent together we're going to come together and have a public response to God and I understand the rituals could be external it could just be a ritual just be going through the motions I understand that but it was an appropriate way for the people to show their humility and submission to God by the way Joel later will call them to respond not just externally not just by rending their garments but rend your heart he's going to say that in chapter 2 when troubles hit that's the time to listen come

together to the temple God's people come together as God's people the leaders come together the farmers come together even the drinkers come together everyone comes and when they came together what should be their action cry out to Yahweh notice the end of verse 14 and cry out to Yahweh that should be the response the reason to fast the reason to assemble the reason to gather you call out to the covenant keeping God a loud prayer and desperate need and all and fear of God because of the seriousness of this issue ask for God's favor to avert his judgment show us mercy oh God look when all these troubles hit our lives political things relationships jobs career look in the end the answer was not going to be found in themselves the answer is going to be found in God and God and God alone is where the answer will always be found is where the answer can be found it's in God and crying out to

Him and notice what Joel does at this point Joel actually starts talking about his own experience you see Joel's own experience in verses 16 through 18 he says there in verse 16 has not food been cut off before our eyes gladness and joy from the house of our God he experienced these things himself he knew what it was like he felt it too where there was no food there was no joy verse 17 the seeds drivel under the clods the storehouses are desolate the barns are torn down for the grain is dried up the absence of food the seeds lose their ability to germinate because there's no water so now he's talking about a drought so not only was there a locust that infiltrated the land but now there's a drought and the barns were torn down because there was nothing left in them you don't have any food to put stuff in the barns that's why they're tearing down there was no joy he was relaying his own experience of trouble notice what he says there in verse 18 as well how the beasts groan the herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them when animals have no food or water they moan and groan so loud you can hear them miles away and they wander aimlessly looking for water and notice he says at the end of verse 18 even the flocks of sheep suffer sheep are kind of like catfish they'll eat anything so to speak relatively speaking even the things that some others that won't eat but even them there was nothing for them and then notice

[33:21] Joel's own response starting in verse 19 I cry to you you see that to you oh Yahweh I cry his only hope would be found in Yahweh notice he relates the devastation of the drought there at the end of verse 19 for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field verse 20 even the beast of the field longed for you for the water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness see Joel knew Joel knew a call for response in his own life may we respond to the things we know and may we may we have that response towards God towards the Lord Jesus Christ as he speaks from his word in the midst of our troubles he cried out to

God to be merciful he must be the first to take this warning seriously to listen and notice he used Yahweh's name Yahweh to appeal to God as the one who keeps his faithful gracious covenant to his people there's nothing left no food no water nothing when troubles hit that's that's the time to listen God wants us to take him seriously that's why we come to verse 15 why all of this God wants us to take him seriously look at verse 15 alas for that day this is the culmination of it all what was the ultimate compelling reason God's people should humble themselves he will judge and he will save these troubles come and

God is calling us to take him seriously to listen to seek him out he says for the day of the Lord the day of Yahweh is near it's a day of judgment and salvation depending on how you come to God he calls us to seek him to love him and worship him to take him seriously if you humble yourself you'll be shown mercy if you're prideful you will face judgment that's why the call is for us to listen when troubles come when difficulties in life come that's the time where God is shaking up our lives and saying listen to my word listen to my promises listen to who I am the attributes of God see who I am this is the essence of responding to the gospel you realize that the response to the gospel is you see the justice of

God you see the righteousness of God you see how you are a rebellious sinner and yet God still shows you love in Jesus who was sent he died he rose and your response is I repent you humble yourself and I trust in you Lord Jesus that's how you can respond to the gospel today you can repent and put your trust in Jesus Christ alone and notice how he describes God here again in verse 15 and it will come as destruction from El Shaddai what does that mean El Shaddai what he means is the omnipotent invincible God this present catastrophe is merely a foreshadow of a day yet to come when God will really show his power really show his invincibility he's the El Shaddai and depending on how you come will he be your comforting almighty

God or will he be that wrathful judging God these catastrophes these troubles these things are foreshadowed things yet to come the worst is yet to come they foreshadow the future and so these troubles that we face remind us of the trouble that is coming into the future the trouble when God will pour out his wrath his judgment upon this world but see if you trust God you have nothing to fear we'll look at that later in chapter three that's kind of the good news but also keep this in mind though it's a preview of God's judgment so we flee to Christ because in him there is hope for everything that troubles our souls his mercies are anew God through Joel is lovingly reminding us that he is our God turn to God's word seek

[38:37] Christ heed his warning and cry out to the Lord in the midst of your troubles in the midst of your pains in the midst of your sufferings in the midst of your difficulties in the midst of your hardships that's the time to respond because God is speaking and notice how the prophet began verse one this is important because he says Joel says the word of the Lord the word of Yahweh that came to Joel the son of Bethuel interesting Joel's name means Yahweh is God Yahweh will never fail to act according to his character he will never fail to act according to his nature the character of his name his reputation in redemption and correction this is

God's word God is speaking from his word the word of the Lord that came to Joel he's calling are you listening so Joel uses this historical events locusts droughts fire all these things as a foreshadowing of what Yahweh will do in the future the day of Yahweh the day of the Lord so that when troubles hit us what is our response are we ready to listen to God's word are we asking for mercy and grace because God in his providence through the circumstances he gets our attention right we are in total ruin oh God please hear us we're listening to you we're taking you seriously we will trust you and see so as you read this chapter you say oh this is horrible well it depends it's actually good news in the midst of the troubles of this life how so take for instance your health our bodies aren't going to last forever our bodies will dissolve every day when you wake up in the morning why in the world does that hurt later on in the day why is that still hurting next week why is that still hurting that happens but all kidding aside our health can take a turn for the worse and yet this is good news because there will be a new body that's coming your job this difficult career will come to an end it won't always be like this family no family is perfect but it's a good thing that really this is temporary because this teaches us about God's family it teaches us how to interact with God's family realizing there will be a time where we will be with family forever without any sin but politics oh whether you love this administration or you hate it in the end when you think about it it doesn't matter because every nation will crumble every nation will crumble but we look for God's kingdom we look to the future when Jesus will reign and there will be a monarchy and there will be a cool perfect righteous monarchy what about a church

I hate to tell you there's no perfect church and this is one of them that's why we look to Jesus Christ we look to our Lord and we see excuse me that our Lord Jesus loves this church and all her blemishes and he loves his people the different churches we pray for these churches Jesus loves his people in spite of us ourselves as we said before you're not going to find the answers in any of these things and you're definitely not going to find the answer in yourself our hope is not found inside us goodness no some of the things that come out of our hearts is just plain downright wicked because when push comes to shove all I'm going to think about is me and you will do the same the answer is not in ourselves no no it's only found in Jesus Christ you see this all points to Jesus when troubles hit listen and so God let's we come to you we bow our heads and we want to think of you and even now we will prepare our hearts to partake of the Lord's supper together we thank you that the trouble that came upon

Jesus Christ it brought us salvation it brought us us grace it brings us your love thank you Lord Jesus for facing taking that trouble on behalf of sinners