

Return to the Lord

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[0 : 00] Let us turn back to this portion of scripture we have read together. In the Old Testament and the prophecy of Joel.

And focusing again on chapter 2 and verses 12 and following. Amen. And he relents over disaster. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent. And leave a blessing behind him. A grain offering and a drink offering. For the Lord your God.

In the days of Joshua. Around 700 years before. Joel. He led the children of Israel into the land of Canaan.

And the land of Canaan then was a land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord saw fit. To give them that wonderful inheritance.

[1 : 40] In the land of Canaan. But sadly as the years went by. The children of Israel did not. Fulfill what the Lord asked of them.

That was. To slay. The Canaanites. Rather. Rather. The Canaanites. The Canaanites. Rather. What happened was.

That with the heathen. They were mingled. And they learned of them their way. We find that in Psalm 106. At verse 35.

That with the heathen. They mingled. And they learned. Of them their way. And that is what we have.

Here. In this particular. Context. We have a people. Who have turned their back upon God. They have been.

[2 : 42] Drawn aside. To the worship of idols. Mostly. The worship of Baal. And they had turned their back upon.

Their covenant God. The God who had provided so much for them. Down through the years. Whose eye was upon them. Even when they were.

Few in number. Nevertheless. The Lord protected them. And protected them through the wilderness journey. In the days of Moses and Joshua. Providing for them.

Manna from heaven to feed them. And water from the rock. That they might have water to sustain them. And brought them into the land of Canaan. And. Divided them.

Land. As an inheritance. What more could the Lord have done for them. That he had not done. And it's as if they repaid him. By turning their back.

[3 : 41] Upon him. Well. Joel was sent. With this particular. Prophecy and message. To these people.

And in chapter one. We see the way. The economic. Status of the nation. Was a total disaster. The Lord had sent.

Locusts upon them. And the Lord had. Granted the locusts power. To decimate. Their crops. To decimate their crops.

And also. The Lord had withheld rain. So that crops. Would not grow. We see that repeatedly. In the experience. Of the children of Israel. The Lord.

Repeatedly. In his providence. Makes known. His. Dissatisfaction. With the way. They were living. Withholding rain. From them.

[4 : 38] So that they wouldn't have crops. Even in the days of Elijah. That was the case. And also. Giving enemies around them. Strength to attack them. And destroy their village.

And destroy. Their cities. And their people. And also now. In chapter two. We have the same. Picture.

Following. And the Lord has. Sent this man. Joel. Of whom we know. Very little. Apart from the fact. That he is. The very beginning.

Of the prophecy. He is. Described as. The son of. Pethuel. Uncertain. Exactly. Who he was. But he was.

A prophet of God. And he sent this message. By the hand. Of his prophet. And we see here. That coming to the verses. We have mentioned. As our text.

[5 : 34] Verse 12. Onwards. We see that the Lord. Sends a word of command. To these people. Who have gone. So far away. From the paths.

That they ought to have been walking. A word of command. Verse 12. Yet even now. Declares the Lord. Return to me. With all your heart. With fasting.

With weeping. And with mourning. Rend your hearts. And not your garments. Return to the Lord. Your God. These are words of command. To these people.

And secondly. We have words of encouragement. In the second half. Of verse 13. The Lord. Who is calling them. To repentance.

Is a gracious God. A merciful God. Who is slow to anger. And abounding. In steadfast love. He relents over disaster.

[6 : 29] And then thirdly. A word of anticipation. In verse 14. Who knows. Whether he will not. Turn and relent. And leave a blessing behind him.

A grain offering. And a drink offering. For the Lord. Your God. This is what they lacked. They didn't have grain. Whereby they would bring. A grain offering.

In their worship. They didn't have wine. So that they couldn't bring. A wine offering. Or a poured offering. In the presence of the Lord. It's as if.

It was a vicious circle. Because of their sin. Things had ground them right down. And they were impoverished. Economically. And impoverished.

Spiritually. But the Lord calls. And. They need to respond. Well first of all then. This word of command.

[7 : 27] The Lord says. Return. To me. Repent. Isn't it interesting.

When. John the Baptist. Begins his public ministry. He begins his ministry. With that word. Repent. For the kingdom of heaven.

Is at hand. When the Lord Jesus. Begins his public ministry. He begins with that same word. Repent. For the kingdom of heaven.

Is at hand. Repentance. Is necessary. Repentance. Is something. That is absolutely necessary. If we are to come.

Truly into the presence of God. And know. His blessing. Someone once described. Repentance. Using this little picture. If someone has had surgery.

[8 : 24] In the hospital. Sometimes. Depending on the situation. The surgeon meets up with. When he sews up the wound.

He'll put a drain into the wound. So that any poisons left. Within the wound. May drain out. And not be. A danger to the patient.

If the drain wasn't there. Possibility is. That the patient. Would be poisoned. And maybe. Die. I find that.

That is a. A little picture. Of what repentance is like. We need to have. The voice of confession. Of sin. We need to come into the presence.

Of the Lord. Tell him. How awful we are. How poisonous. Our mind is. How poisonous. Our life is. How far away from God.

[9 : 18] Our heart is. As we are by nature. And how hard. Our hearts become. And how much. We love things. Rather than love God. We need to come.

Constantly. In repentance. And confession of sin. Into the presence of God. And this is what he's asking. Of these people. Return. To me.

He said. Return to me. They have turned their back. Upon him. But now he commands. You return. To me. What about ourselves?

Do we feel that this. Addresses us. As individuals. Think back to the number of things. The Lord has done for you. In your life.

In his kind providence. Even since you came into this world. He has provided us with food. With clothing. And. I don't remember war years.

[10 : 19] I don't think many. If anybody in here remembers war years. We have had peace in our land. Peace in our time. And these things are wonderful.

Blessings in providence. And what about the gospel. What about the pulpit. Of this. Island. And this nation. Down through the years. They have had men.

Who have declared. The unsearchable riches of Christ. Faithfully. And fervently. In our own hearing. Since we were young. And now.

Where are we? Have we. Turned away. From the God. Who has done so many. Wonderful things for us. In that particular way. Have we not yet.

Confessed our sins. Against him. Have we still. Got a hold. Upon the things. Of this world. And have the things. Of this world. Got a hold over us. In our outlook.

[11 : 15] And in our priorities. Is our life. Really. Upside down. Is God. At the bottom. And is everything else. At the top. That's what happened.

To these people. Their whole life. Was upside down. Because they weren't. Giving God. The place. That he required. Of them. The place. That he is due. He needs to be central.

To our thinking. To our planning. To our lifestyle. His world. Needs to be central. And fervent. In our life. We must live. According to his ways.

Not our own ways. Their own ways. Ended these people. Of Joel's day. In deepest trouble. But the ways. Of the Lord. The path.

Of the Lord. Are good. And just. The path. Of the righteous. Is a shining light. That shines. More and more. Until the perfect day.

[12 : 13] What about ourselves? What about the Christians? What about me? When the Lord speaks to me.

Through this particular verse. Return to me. With all your heart. Where has my heart been? Has my heart been divided? Have I left my first love?

Have I given my heart. To the things of the world? Have I given my mind. To the things of the flesh? Have I given myself. To things that are inappropriate.

For a Christian. To give oneself to. I have to ask myself. That question. Have I embraced. The lust of the flesh.

And the lust of the eye. And the pride of life. You know that. That is. A threesome. That the devil used.

[13 : 10] In the garden of Eden. When he tempted Eve. When he tempted Eve. With the forbidden fruit. The lust of the flesh. She saw that it was good for food.

The lust of the eye. The tree was good to look upon. Attractive. And the pride of life. Well. It was. It was. Something that was going to make her wise.

Wisdom. Even. Supplant God. From the throne. That he occupied in heaven. You shall be as gods. God saw you.

When you went. Where you ought not to have gone. God saw your mind. When you thought about things. Inappropriate. God heard your words.

Cruelly spoken. Unkindly spoken. God sees us. And knows us. God saw your heart.

[14 : 18] When the gospel was preached. And your heart didn't respond in faith. God saw the way your mind worked. And you said. Well. That's for other people.

Or maybe for me. At another time. Things are too good just now. I really don't want to take. Any interest in the things of the gospel. Right now. Maybe another time.

Well my friend. You. And I. Need to repent. Of all of these sins. That he would show us. That our sins are against God.

Not just against our fellow men. Not just against our own best welfare. All sins are against God. All sins are against God. Isn't this what the.

The elder son said in the far country. The prodigal son as we call him. He came to himself. And he said. I have sinned.

[15 : 18] I have sinned against heaven. And against my father. You see. The priority he gives. Sinned against heaven first. Against God.

And against his father. That's what David had in Psalm 51. Against thee. The only. Have I sinned. And in thy sight on this hill. He sinned against Bathsheba.

He sinned against Uriah. But he particularly sinned against God. And he came to realize that. And isn't it strange. How long he took to realize.

The sin that was in his life. It was when. The prophet came. And he said. You are the man. Having described a particular situation.

When a rich man with many flocks. Went. And he took the only lamb. That a poor man had. Out of his arms.

[16:17] That he might feed a traveler. Who came to him. And David was indignant. And he said. That man who did that must die. You are the man. Nathan said.

You are the man. Oh that the Lord would show us ourselves. Show us ourselves for what we are. That we are the man. We are the woman. We are the individual.

Who has sinned against God. Remember the two who went up to the temple to pray. The Lord describes the Pharisee and the publican. The tax collector.

The Pharisee goes up. Full confidence. In his own lifestyle. He thanked God that he wasn't like other people. He did this, that and the other thing. But when the tax collector began to pray.

He wouldn't lift his eyes to heaven. But he said. God. Be merciful to me. The sinner. And Jesus said. He. Went down to his house justified.

[17:20] In other words. He was forgiven. Because the Lord says. If we confess our sins. He is faithful and just. To forgive us our sins. And to cleanse us. From all unrighteousness.

And we see here. Return to me. He says. With all your heart. With all your heart. The Bible. When it speaks about the heart. In this kind of way. It talks particularly about. The mind. It talks about.

The intellect. The intellect. And the will. And the affections. And the conscience. What is central to our very being.

The heart is central to our physical being. It pumps. Blood around our system. Well. Our mind. And our intellect.

[18:17] Our will. Our affections. Our conscience. All these. Are central to our spiritual well-being. And we need to turn to the Lord. With all of our will.

That the Lord would renew our will. All of our intellect. All of our mind. Don't leave. As it were. Parts of your mind. Delighting in the things of the world.

Ask the Lord. Give me my whole. One-minded focus. To be upon yourself. Single-mindedly. Turning to God from sin.

And what about your affections? Ask the Lord. Break. The love that I have. For the things of the world. The things of the flesh.

The things of darkness. The things that are. To perish with the using. And give me to set my affections. On the things that are above. And not on the things that are on the earth.

[19:18] And also of course my conscience. That my conscience would be. Sprinkled with the blood of Christ Jesus. That I might have.

A true. Awareness of. Not only my sin. But how my sin. Can be forgiven. He said then.

Return to me with all of your heart. And then he goes on to describe. This. Gospel. Turning unto God. And he says.

With all your heart. And with fasting. Well. Fasting. Physically is something that.

The Bible talks about. The word fasting. Really. The root meaning of the word. In Hebrew is. To cover one's mouth. In other words.

[20:17] Deny yourself food. But we're talking here about. A spiritual activity. Fasting. And what does this mean?

Well. Well. Well. I believe it means. That we must abstain. From anything. And everything. That would impede.

The work of the gospel. In our heart. And in our lives. Whatever would. Stifle your prayer life. For example.

Stop it. That's fasting. In a spiritual sense. Or whatever would. Stop you from obeying. The word of God. Stop it.

That's fasting. Or whatever would. Curtail your service. For the gospel. Stop it. Surely you want to be.

[21:14] Wholehearted. In your serving of Christ. Stop whatever it is. By God's grace. Stop whatever it is. That doesn't allow you. To serve him. As well as you ought.

And as well as you want to. What about your witness? What about your growth. And grace? All of these things. Are under threat. And through spiritual fasting.

I believe. Involves. Abstaining from anything. And everything. That would. Stop your witness. Or growth. And grace. And all the other things. I've mentioned. Fasting. We need to.

We need to fast every day. In the spiritual sense. And then. With weeping. Godly sorrow.
[22 : 16] Godly sorrow. Sorrow. Sorrow. Sorrow for having. Sinned against God. And offended God. Sorrow for having.

Broken. God's law. Sorrow for having. Offended the Holy One. Of Israel. Godly sorrow.
With mourning. I will pour out my spirit. On the house of David. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
And they will look upon me. Whom they have pierced. And mourn for him. We need the Holy Spirit.
To enable us to look upon Jesus.

Whom we have pierced. By our sins. That is what true. Godly sorrow. Involves. Sorrowing over my sins.

[23 : 15] In view of Jesus Christ. And him crucified. They will look upon him. Whom they have pierced. And mourn for him. Have we had that true mourning.

In our lives. Ask that the Lord. Give you. This true. Godly sorrow. Mourning. And sorrowing.
For our sins. And then he goes on. Rend your hearts. And not your garments. It was a custom.
Back in these days. At times of sorrow. And bereavement. For people to rend their garments. An outward thing. But the Lord says.

Well you can. Do a lot outwardly. But inwardly. You could feel quite different. From what you're doing outwardly. There were professional mourners. In Israel. And they could.

[24 : 17] Wail. And they could tear their garments. While at the same time. Not really feel. Mourning inside. But it says here.

Rend your hearts. Rend them. It's as if he is saying. Your hearts.

Are deceitful. And that's the Bible says that. The heart is deceitful. Above all things. Desperately wicked. Who can know it? And if we live according to our deceitful hearts.

Well. It's a bad map to follow. In your life. If you live according to. Your sinful inclinations.

It's a bad map. And a bad route to follow. And as if he is saying. Come to terms with the heart that you have. And confiscate it.

[25 : 21] Don't follow your heart. Follow the word of God. And rend that. That map. Root map. That you have been following.

He could say that. To these people here. You have been following. A map to Baalism. Following a map. That leads you there. Into idolatry. Deeper and deeper. And you see the trouble.

You have got into. Because of that. Rend that particular. Root map. And confess your sin. Rend your hearts. And not your garments.

But then he goes on. And he says. Return to the Lord your God. For he is gracious and merciful. He gives so much encouragement.

To return them to the Lord. Isn't it amazing. That this is the only one. Who is able to help us.

[26 : 26] In our predicament. The Lord against whom we have sinned. The Lord against whom these people have sinned. He is the one who invites them.

Commands them to come. Back to him. And it's the same with us. Against him we have sinned. And when Peter found out.

That the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ. Was difficult for some people. Who are following the Lord at the time. And they said. We can't take this teaching. We're going away.

We're leaving. And Jesus asked. Will you also go away to the disciples. And Peter said. Lord to whom can we go. You have the words of eternal life.

And that's the way we feel isn't it. We have made a mess of things so often. We have come short so often. Nevertheless to whom can we go. We can't go to the government.

[27 : 27] They can't deal with my personal spiritual problems. You can't go to your friends. There's a limit to what your friends can do for you. Your closest in the world. Can only sympathize.

At certain points. In your experience. But the Lord has the answer. And it says here. Return to the Lord your God.

Your God. He was the God of Israel. He was in covenant with them. He had a relationship with them. Although they had repeatedly broken that relationship.

He never did. He's a faithful God. Will you return to the Lord your God? It says. Why? Well he gives a number of reasons.

For he is gracious. What an amazing word that is. The word gracious gives the picture of somebody bending down.

[28 : 33] Stooping down in kindness to help you. I often think of the story of the good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite who were passing.

They didn't bother themselves too much. About the man who had fallen among thieves. And who was half dead. But the Samaritan came. The Samaritan came.

And he bound up the wounds of this poor victim. And he poured in oil and wine. And he went. To an inn.

And he paid money. So that the innkeeper could. Look after this poor man. Until the Samaritan came back. And he said.

If there's anything else I can do. I'll pay you. If there's anything else you need to do. I'll pay you on the way back. What a gracious man. Kind of a picture isn't it.

[29 : 31] Of what the Lord can do. And does with his people. He bends down. He sees our wounds. He knows our wounds. And our inability to heal them.

And he pours in the wine. To cleanse our wound. And the oil to comfort. The ravages that sin has left. Upon our lives.

He is gracious. To Jesus say. In that marvelous verse. Matthew 11 28. Come unto me. All you who labor.

And are heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Learn of me. I am meek and lowly in heart. You shall find rest unto your souls.

My yoke is easy. My burden is light. Who could refuse that invitation. What a savior. What an invitation.

[30 : 28] How gracious he is. And he is according to his promise. He'll never let you down. Then. He is gracious and merciful.

He shows. He shows. Mercy and compassion. The Lord does not show mercy.

But the Lord Jesus Christ. Is merciful. He forgives. Sin. The psalmist. In Psalm 103. Put it this way. As far as east. Is distant from the west. So far as he. From us removed. In his love. All our iniquity. He is full.

Of compassion. He is merciful. Also it says. He is slow to anger. Slow to anger. Well certainly.

[31 : 28] If the Lord were to mark. My iniquities today. I wouldn't be standing here. If you were to mark. Your iniquities. Even since this morning.

None of us would be here. He is slow to anger. He is long suffering. Slow to wrath. And in mercy. Plenteous.

What an invitation. From a lovely. And gracious God. Gracious and merciful. Slow to anger. And abounding.

In steadfast. Love. Abounding. In love. Abounding. In steadfast love.

The Lord loves his people. And that love. Never.

[32 : 25] Varies. It is. An everlasting love. A love that does not diminish. With the passing of the years. A love that does not.

In any way. Fade. Despite. In any way. In any way. Despite the fact. That his people. Come so far short. Of what they ought to be. Oh he certainly shows.

That he is angry with them. Because of their sin. But that doesn't mean to say. That he stops loving them. His covenant.

Is. An unbreakable covenant commitment. I will betroth thee unto me. Forever. He.

He. Commits himself to his people. In love. And in faithfulness. And he. It says here. He relents.

[33 : 23] The verse. End of verse 13. He relents. Over disaster. Well. Around the same time. As. Joel lived.

At least. Some people feel. Was. The prophet Jonah. And. Jonah went to Nineveh. As you. Well know.

From the scripture. And the Lord. Had threatened. To destroy Nineveh. At a certain time. But the people.

Repented. And it says there. That the Lord himself. Did not do. What he had said. He would do. Because the people. Repented.

And. This I think. Comes in here. That the Lord. Will relent. For over disaster. He had promised.

[34 : 22] He would destroy Nineveh. But the fact. That they had. Repented. Of their sin. Meant. That the Lord. Also. Didn't fulfill. What he had threatened.

And now. We see here. Verse 14. Coming to this third point. Words of encouragement. And. Anticipation. Who knows. Whether he will not. Turn and relent. And leave a blessing. Behind him. A grain offering. And a drink offering. For the Lord. Your God. Who knows. Who knows. These are. I think. Words of. Reliance. And. Dependence. Upon God. To answer them. With a blessing. They are. God. To fulfill. What he has. Commanded them. Turning from their sin.

[35 : 23] And you know. You find this. In the epistle of James. If we draw near. To God. He will draw near. To us. Also. You find it in Zechariah.

Chapter 1. Verse 3. Return to me. And I will return to you. Says the Lord of hosts. These are promises. And this is what. Joel here. Says. Who knows. In a view of our repentance. Who knows. But he will turn and relent. And leave a blessing behind him. It is not our repentance. That earns our forgiveness. But God in his grace. Is willing. To bestow forgiveness. On those who do repent. And we see here. That he is going to leave. A blessing behind him. A grain offering. And a drink offering.

[36 : 20] For the Lord your God. They didn't have either grain. Or wine. Because of their sin. Because the land.

Had been decimated. And no crops were growing. But now. The fact that they are turning. To the Lord. The Lord. Will bring blessing. And give them what they need.

A grain offering. And a drink offering. For the Lord your God. Their service. At the sanctuary. At the temple. Was incomplete. It was not. According to God's mind. Because. They weren't. Giving the Lord. What he required. They didn't give the Lord. A grain offering. They didn't give the Lord. A drink offering. Maybe that's the way we are.

[37 : 22] We're not giving the Lord. What he requires of us. Maybe our hearts. Are so hard. Maybe our minds. Are so worldly.

Maybe our. Priorities. Are all wrong. Ask the Lord. To pour. His spirit. Upon you. That you also. Might be able. To offer him. A grain offering. And a drink offering. That is. An offering. That shows. You're consecrating. Yourself. In thankfulness.

To the Lord. The grain. And the drink offering. Were given. Associated. With the lamb. That was. Offered. Or sacrificed.

Morning and evening. In Israel. And that lamb. Offered. Showed. Consecration. Of the people.

[38 : 19] To the Lord. At the beginning of the day. The end of the day. And the fact that they. Were not. That they were coming short in that. Showed that their consecration.

To the Lord. Was not. Non-existent. They weren't consecrated to the Lord. The way they ought to have been. That the Lord would pour his spirit upon us.

That we would consecrate ourselves. And that the Lord would be pleased. To bestow upon us. His own spirit. In such a way.

That we would rise up. And. Give him. The praise and the glory. And the service. That he requires of us.

He says. Elsewhere in the scriptures. My son. Give me your heart. And it's the heart. That he wants. May we give him. Our heart.

[39 : 17] More and more. And that our whole lives. Would be increasingly. Dedicated to him. As the apostle Paul said. For to me.

To live. Is Christ. And to die. Is gain. Amen. These three points then. Command.

To repent. Encouragement. Because the Lord. Is gracious. And merciful. And thirdly. Anticipating. The Lord's blessing upon us. Who knows. Whether he will not. Turn and repent. Leave a blessing behind him. Grain offering. And a drink offering.

For the Lord. Your God. Amen. May God bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray.