

Joel's Call to Repentance

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[0:00] Okay, you're in for it now. Preach it, yeah. We'll see what happens. We return to Joel this morning. Now, we've only got a couple more.

I think Glenn preaches next week, and then we've got a break, and then we do up the last one, right? Well, that's just right next week. Yeah, and then we do the two, yeah. We get them double-barreled and finish up Joel.

The good news is the part that's coming. But we're at the turning point here. We're in Joel 2, so you want to open your Bible to Joel 2? We're actually going to start in verse 12.

I went and did what Phil did last week. He borrowed one of my verses, so I'm borrowing one of his to start this out. And we're going to read the passage. I'm going to put the verses up there.

So, Mark, as we're reading, just keep moving the slides because it's just one slide after the other until we've read all the verses, okay? All right, so here we go. Let's read this, starting in verse 12.

[1:01] Yet, even now, the Lord says, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Tear your hearts, not just your garments.

Return to the Lord your God, for he is merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and boundless and loyal love, often relenting from calamitous punishment.

Who knows? Perhaps he will be compassionate and grant a reprieve and leave a blessing in his wake, a meal offering and a drink offering for you to offer to the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion. Announce a holy fast. Proclaim a sacred assembly. Gather the people. Sanctify the assembly. Gather the elders. Gather the children and the nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom come out of his bedroom, and the bride from her private quarters. Let the priests, those who serve the Lord, weep from the vestibule all the way back to the altar.

[1:57] Let them say, Have pity, O Lord, on your people. Please do not turn over your inheritance to be mocked, to become a proverb amongst the nations. Why should it be said amongst the people, where is their God?

So the prophet is calling the people and the priests back to repentance, to repent in face of God's judgment on their sin. Now, you know what the situation is.

Some of you haven't heard this, but here it is. They've had a drought, and the land has been just devastated from the drought, and then what was left, locusts came, and Mark gave us a pretty good description of the locusts.

If you're four different, whatever, either stages of the locust growth, or four different types of locusts come in, there's nothing, absolutely nothing left. Even the wild animals are in suffering.

There's no water. There's no food. There's nothing, and the people are going, What happened?

Before this happened, they were living in a very lush land. I mean, it was full of fruit, and vegetables, and grains, and olives, and vineyards, and everything was just going great for them, and all of a sudden, boom, it hits.

[3:08] And they're going, What? What happened? And he's telling them, This is God's judgment on you. And he calls them to return to the Lord with weeping, and fasting, and mourning.

He tells them they need to tear their hearts, not just their garments, because that was the practice.

When you mourn, you tore your garments. Garments were very expensive, so that was quite a...

You didn't have many either, and it was quite a statement of your grief. You would tear your garments. He says, No, no, don't tear your garments. Tear something much more personal and intimate. Tear your heart.

Tear your heart, because that's the part that's gone astray. He wants them to do more than just repent on the outward part, the outside. He wants them to not just go through a religious show of repentance, but rather know that God looks at the heart.

He knows what lurks in our hearts, and there has to be a change of heart for there to be true repentance. Now, repentance is not just being sorrow, but it's rather an agreement with God that what you are doing, either word or action or behavior or whatever, attitude is wrong.

[4:19] It's contrary to God's way of doing things and the way you'd have you do things. It's rather, it's the determination. You're going to change your behavior, and you're going to do what's right in God's eyes.

Now, I taught, Gretchen will know this. I taught many years, and I can remember catching students. I loved catching JROTC students because they, you know, they go, yes, sir, yes, sir, yes, sir. And somehow they knew I, they didn't know how I knew, but they knew I knew.

All right? There's one right there. Yeah, they knew. How did you know? Oh, a little bird was sitting in my window and telling me all the secrets of the world. And they say, oh, I'm really, really sorry.

I'll never do that again. What they were really sorry for is they got caught. Not that they did wrong. They were, you know, leave them alone, and they think they can get away with it. They'll do it again, right?

That's not true repentance. And that's not what the kind that Joel is calling these people to because that kind leads further sin and further death.

[5:20] So really, what's going on here in Israel and Judah, actually, is just classic human behavior. The book of Judges is just full of it. That's what the book of Judges is all about.

Up and down, up and down. Obey, disobey, disobey, disobey, obey. Repent, you know, and wander off. We're really good at that. I mean, that's a human situation.

That's what we do. We get caught in something. We realize things aren't going well, and so we go, oh, no, I've got to change my life. I've got to, God, forgive me. I know it's wrong. And then we go along for a little while and they say, you know, what are we doing?

We're right back at it. We're right back at it, doing the same type of stuff. And Judges, you know, everything was, when the, after the exile, I mean, after the exodus, and they got into the promised land, we're going to talk about it a little bit in a minute, life was good.

God blessed that land. It was a land of milk and honey. They were having a, everything was there. It didn't last because God had promised them, if you are obedient and trust me, I will bless you.

[6:26] And if you are disobedient and don't trust me, then I'm going to curse you. You're going to, you're going to suffer the consequence, good or bad, of your behavior and your relationship with me. That's what it all comes down to.

And people forgot who gave them all the good stuff that they had. They started acting on their own ideas, what was right and wrong, what was acceptable. They were taking credit for the blessings. Look what I've done. Look what I've done. Pursuing their own desires. And slowly things go from good to bad. From God to self.

Until God allows them to suffer the consequences of their own wisdom and their own failures. Now you want to see how wise human beings are, just look at the mess the world's in.

We were driving down 421 the other day, I think, I was at the party. You know how much plastic trash is on the side of the road? That's our wisdom. We think it's okay for the trucks that haul on all the construction trash to go down the road and it's blowing off and we just leave it there.

[7:30] What do we do? We don't pick it up before we mow, we just mow it over and make it smaller so that it gets really contaminating in the ground. You know? Just think about that. We got deer in our area.

Well, there'll be fewer deer next year because they're cutting the trees down as fast as they can and throw up houses. That's our wisdom. We think that we can take what's there and bend it to our will for our own gratification.

That's what we humans do. That's what we do. Our solution, you know, electric cars are supposed to solve the pollution problem but they cause another type of pollution problem that doesn't solve anything but makes it just as bad.

You know, our wisdom never leads to success. It only leads to another problem. We need God's wisdom in order to overcome all the things that are wrong with our world.

And God says, look, I'm going to leave you to yourself. If that's what you want, He's very generous. If that's what you want, I'll let you do it. Go ahead, try it. See what happens? Sort of that old sentence, I remember it's Sergeant Patrick, whatever his name was, one of my sergeants, he used to say, when a kid would have something go wrong, he says, well, how's that working for you?

[8:44] And the answer is, well, not too good. You know, and that's what God's saying. He's saying, how's that working for you? Well, we're getting by, but it's not really real nice. It's not working out real well.

You know, it all started in the garden. Right in the garden. See, God planted a garden. Genesis tells us this, and I'll read it to you.

It says, the Lord God planted an orchard, one calls it an orchard, it's a garden orchard, in the east, in Eden, and there he placed the man he had formed. Now, you think about that.

What do you think this garden was like? It was perfect. Now, it isn't the, you know, sometimes we think that God made the earth and it's this really wonderful, beautiful place, like the garden, except all over.

It wasn't. It was a wilderness, chaos outside. There was nothing. It's just wild. But he made a garden that was perfect. Exactly what man and animals and all that he made, needed in order to thrive in this garden.

[9:49] Now, Lord God made all kinds of trees grow from the soil and every tree that was pleasing to look at and good for food. Now, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the orchard.

So, he plants this garden and he puts man in it and it's in the middle of this untamed earth. And he says to Adam and Eve, I want you to tend this garden and as you work, I want you to expand it. And as you have children and the human population grows here to expand this until when? Until it covers the entire earth. That was their goal. That was what they were supposed to do. Eventually fill the whole earth with the glory of God and the perfection of His creation.

But God also knew that man needed to learn to trust God's wisdom. So, he gave them one command. One. Put them in a perfect environment, gave them everything they needed and said, by the way, I want you to learn to trust me so I'm going to tell you don't do this one thing.

And he said, you may freely eat fruit from every tree in the garden but you must not eat it from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil for when you eat from it you will surely die.

[11:01] Did Adam need the fruit from that one tree? No. He had everything he needed. He didn't need that. There was nothing there that he needed that that tree could offer him.

Well, we all know what happened. Adam and Eve were deceived and they ate from the tree and they were judged by God and where did He send them? Out of the garden into the wilderness.

Now, in the wilderness they were on their own. They had to figure out how to make this wild place suitable for them to live and that they could find sustenance.

They could get food. Now, at this point they weren't allowed to kill the animals that might be there but they had to work the ground and thorns and thistles and all that stuff that grows in my garden. All right? They had to face the trials and troubles of living in an un-teamed land. Now, why did he do that? He did that to teach Adam and his descendants to trust God's wisdom.

[12:09] To obey His commands. Adam was to learn to trust in the wilderness to trust Him for His provision because as best He could do He's only going to get a meager harvest if you want to say He's just going to get by.

But he would trust God for His provision God would provide for him. Now, let's jump in the story. We're going to go up to Exodus. God brings Israel out of Egypt.

Where does He take them? The wilderness. Why did He take them to the wilderness? To teach them to trust Him and to obey His commands. In fact, at Sinai He gives them all those commands. He says, this is how you're going to live a godly life. This is how you're going to be the people of God. You live like this. Now, they're in a desert. I've lived in a desert.

How many of you have been to the desert? Yeah. What do you find for food in the desert? Not only a cactus. Not much. There is things you can gather.

[13:10] This is a pretty bleak desert more than the one that I grew up in. There isn't much to eat. They had to trust God to provide. And what did they do? They complained and they wailed and they mourned and they said, let us go back to Egypt.

At least we had onions and garlic. Teresa would be a happy woman. But God said, no, no. I will provide for you. And He did.

He provided water. He provided manna. He provided quail. He did everything that they needed to provide it for Him. But they had to learn to trust Him for it. Because it wasn't just sort of automatic. They had to do it His way. Had to do it His way in the wilderness. Well, unfortunately, they failed miserably at this. They complained about the food.

They complained about the water. They complained about everything. Moses' leadership. Now, I mean, nobody was happy. And finally, they get to the border of the promised land. It should have been a short, straight shot, but it took them forever to get there.

[14:11] They get there. They're at the border. They send the spies in. They get the report back. And what do they do? Oh, no. We can't do this. This is too hard. We're not going to do it. No, no, no, no, no.

God said, I'm going to go in and fight the battles for it. Oh, no, no, no, no. We can't do this. So where, since they're now disobedient and fail to trust God, what happens to them?

They go back into the wilderness for 40 years. And a new generation is raised up to be taught to trust God and to obey Him.

And they do. They manage to do that. It's not always easy. There's some bad times in there, but generally, they get there. They get to the, all the way around. They come in from the east.

They're there. They're ready to cross into the promised land. And God says, okay, here's what's going to happen. They go, okay, we'll do that. And they manage to take the whole land. They conquer the land.

[15:11] They chase, well, they don't, they kill off all the people living there. And they occupy it. And God gives them, and think about this.

This is an amazing thing. God gave them a land that they did not have to build houses because the houses were already there. They did not have to plant fields. The fields were already there. They didn't have to plant olives.

They didn't have to plant vineyards. They were already there. All they had to do was bring in their families and their livestock and settle into places that were given to them. God provided them everything they needed.

Why did he do that? Because they were obedient and they trusted him to take the land. And things go well for a while. At least until Joshua and his generation die.

Then what happens? Well, now we're in the book of Judges. And they sort of start forgetting. Life is good. Life is easy. Life is great.

[16:11] They got it. And they start thinking, I got this. I don't need anything else. I don't need to be worried about God. I can just live.

Everything's good. What do I need? And everything sort of goes slowly downhill, downhill, downhill. What happens? God sends in invading raiders or whatever, enemies who raid them and take their stuff and cause them a great deal of harm.

And then God, they repent. Oh no, we need God. And he raises up a hero and the hero leads the people to victory and they settle down and everything's good for a while and then they start going back down that hill, living for themselves, trusting in their own wisdom and it just keeps going and going and going and going.

And finally, they get a king. Well, the first king they chose. He was a bad king. Things didn't go well. They get a new king, David. Everything's great.

Why? Because David trusts God. David's learned. Where did David learn to trust God? In the wilderness. He comes in and everything's fine.

[17:20] But David doesn't do perfect but he's considered a righteous man. And God blesses him in the kingdom. Solomon comes. God blesses them. Everything's great until the end of Solomon's reign.

What happens? Solomon strays off. Oh, look at me. Look at this big king. All this wealth. All this. I am so great. So what happens?

When he dies, the kingdom is split in two and things only get worse. Up and down. Especially in the north. Judah, it stays pretty good for a while and it goes really bad.

They just have these little blips where things would get better. And they're in one of those little blips where things aren't so good. They're about to have a new king that's going to help them get up but they've got to get through this and there's got to be some repentance.

And so, they experience the curse because of their sin. Drought and locusts in this time. In essence, God brought the wilderness to them.

[18:27] He took the land that was rich and full and a blessing to them and turned it into a curse. No food. No water.

Nothing. It is a wilderness. And he says, now it's time to relearn to trust God and to obey Him. And that brings us to Joel's appeal and he says, return to the Lord your God for He is merciful and compassionate.

He's merciful and compassionate. What is He doing? He's waiting for you to turn around and come back to Him so He can show you mercy and compassion. He's slow to anger. This has taken many years.

It doesn't happen. You don't sin once and you get it the next day. I mean, we fear that, right? Oh no, I sinned. Now God's going to zap me. No, it doesn't quite work that way. Boundless and loyal love. Often relenting from conodimous punishment. Who knows? Perhaps He will be compassionate and grant a reprieve and leave a blessing in His wake. A meal offering and a drink offering for you to offer to the Lord your God.

[19:34] Return to the Lord. He's saying, turn your hearts around. Change the source of your wisdom from self to God. Trust that His ways are best. He's always proved Himself to be slow to anger and boundless in love and mercy.

Maybe He'll relent. Grant a reprieve from the harshness of the wilderness and the ruin that's been called on to the people. And instead, leave a blessing in its place.

Joel calls the people and the priests to gather and to seize God's face. They're guilty before God and yet He's telling them, turn to Him in faith, trusting Him to provide and restore the land.

And Joel declares this is such a serious thing that people are to sanctify themselves, they're to examine themselves, and they're going to turn and cleanse themselves. And they're going to gather their children.

Of all ages, all the children, and the elders, and I don't think they mean the leaders of the people necessarily, but the old people. So young and old are to come before the Lord.

[20:38] Even the bridegroom is to leave his bedroom with his bride. See, they were exempt from a lot of things, but here God, Joel is saying, look, even you need to stop celebrating being married and come and repent.

It's that serious. This has to, that's more important than anything you might else be doing. Amen. And together, they're to cry out, have pity, O Lord, on your people.

Well, today, we're going to baptize some people. And fortunately, I'm only baptizing one and she's a gentle little soul.

Because if it was a young man, guess what I do? I hold them under until they see heaven or hell. One person told me, I'll hold them under until the bubbles stop coming up.

And I go, well, that's a little fur. But where we're going to baptize these people, they've come declaring that they have surrendered their lives to God.

[21:42] That they have found Christ and they're trusting Him because of His great love and His sacrifice for them. See, they're doing exactly what they're supposed to do.

They're turning from themselves and their sin and they're turning to Him and saying, I put my trust in You and I'm going to be obedient to You. And God is saying, and I'm going to bless you.

It doesn't mean it's going to be an easy life, but I'm going to bless you with the blessings that come in Christ. And the ultimate blessing that we have in Christ is what? Well, there's a couple of them. One is peace.

No matter what happens, we can have peace because we know that God's got this. And the other thing is we know that no matter what happens, even death is not the end but only a transition. There's a song that says, bottom is not a bad place to be, it's a place for a new start. So no matter how bad things get, God says, in Christ, this is just the beginning.

[22:45] We're getting there. And we're in an exodus. We're living in a wilderness. Did you know that? We live in a wilderness. And if you don't believe that, just read the newspaper. If you don't read the newspaper, look at the internet.

I don't know what you do. Out there, it's bad. It's really bad. But we're in an exodus. Where are we going? To the promised land.

The new earth. A place where God has prepared a place for us that is perfect. Perfectly matched to who we are and what we need. And He's going to change us to become what Jesus is.

We'll be finally a people of God that will be faithful and true and see Him face to face and live with Him forever. So these people are coming and saying, look, I've put my faith in Christ.

I believe that He's got a promise for me of good things, of blessings. They're declaring their faith in His wisdom. A wisdom that the world denies.

[23:46] And they're making this as a public demonstration or a declaration that Jesus Christ is both Lord and Savior. and that God has promised them life eternal with Him on the new earth.

The ultimate renewed garden. So as they are doing this publicly in baptism, we should also renew our decision to trust God and to obey His commands.

To follow in faith no matter what comes or where it leads us. To Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Let's pray.