

Thursday Evening - English

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[0 : 00] Well, could we turn back to this portion of scripture we've read together in Joel and chapter 2? I'd like to focus in particular on verses 12 to 14.

Joel chapter 2, reading at verse 12, Yet even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning, and rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, 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.

Well, all that this prophecy reveals about Joel as an individual is that he was the son of Pethuel.

[1 : 25] And most commentators are a bit uncertain as to the exact time in which he lived.

It is quite possible that he lived about the same time as the prophet Amos, because Amos describes the same kind of judgments from the Lord coming upon the people.

For example, he talks about the locusts, and it's a description of the locusts we have in this particular chapter, chapter 2. He's talking about the great army before whom the land was like the garden of Eden, and then behind them it was a desolate wilderness.

We have that in verse 3 of this chapter. And the prophet Amos speaks in the same kind of strain regarding the situation in his own day.

Amos prophesied to the ten northern tribes of Israel, but Joel prophesied to Judah. And we see that the land had been drawn into idolatrous worship sometime before Joel began to prophesy.

[2 : 45] Probably as a result of the Queen Athaliah. She was on the throne for a number of years. She was the daughter of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, who had led Israel into the idolatrous worship of Baalism.

And the way sin is, it tends to spread its wings and infiltrate wherever it can. So Queen Athaliah in Judah facilitated the spread of Baalism among the people.

And of course, when the people turned to Baal away from the Lord, the disaster came upon them. And the Lord's displeasure was made known so clearly in this particular way in his providence. If you read in chapter 1, for example, from verse 8 onwards, you see the amazing situation that had come about.

Chapter 1, verse 8. In other words, there was no grain growing and there were no vines to produce wine for the drink offerings in the house of the Lord.

[4 : 13] The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. The fields are destroyed. The ground mourns because the grain is destroyed and the wine dries up and the oil languishes.

Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil. Wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine dries up.

The fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm and apple. All the trees of the field are dried up. And gladness dries up from the children of man.

All as a result of the sin of the people. And we see that often throughout the Old Testament. The way the Lord's displeasure was made known because the sin of the people had drawn him away from him.

To give you an example, when Solomon offers his prayer of consecration, when the temple was being consecrated, we find in 1 Kings 8, verse 35, when the heaven is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against you.

[5 : 23] Then he goes on to say, if they pray toward this place and acknowledge your name and turn from their sin when you afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of your servants.

There is always a repercussion. There was always a fallout from the sin of the nation and from our individual sins.

It says also in the book of Ruth, the very beginning of that book, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And you see, the book of Judges ends with this amazing verse. Every man did that which was right in his own eyes. It's as if they were inviting the judgment of God. They were inviting God's displeasure upon them.

And he made that known in the way his providence became so hard for them. The showers didn't come to water the seed. The ground didn't give its fruit.

[6 : 31] And they were left bankrupt in more than one way. So with these signs of God's displeasure and the threats of further judgment to come upon the people, it was surely a time for the people to repent.

Repentance requires a wholehearted turning unto God from sin. No nation, no individual can be spiritually healthy without an ongoing spirit of repentance.

A turning away unto God from every known sin. And this is the focus we have in the verses I've highlighted as our text this evening.

Verses 12 to 14. And there are three things I think I'd like to highlight from verses 12 to 14. First of all, we have a word of command from the Lord as he addresses the people of Judah through Joel the prophet.

Yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.

[7 : 49] And rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God. That's the first thing, a word of command. The second thing is a word of encouragement.

Immediately following the command, there is this encouragement. In the middle of verse 13, the Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and he relents over disaster.

That's the second point, a word of encouragement. And thirdly, a word of anticipation. From 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.

Who knows? The man of God is quietly confident that if the people turn from their sin unto God, the Lord will come with blessing upon the land.

And it's all very well us talking about a historical situation in Judah. We have to apply all these things to ourselves. And I hope to do that as we go on.

[9 : 08] Firstly then, God's word of command. Return to me. He doesn't say go away from me.

That's what their sins deserved to hear. That's what we ourselves deserve to hear. Because our sin is a breaking of God's law.

It's as if our sin is a spitting in God's eye. We will not have this man reign over us, the Jews were saying at one particular time.

And the people at the time of the crucifixion said, not this man, but Barabbas. It was as if it was the ultimate snub to the Lord Jesus that these people chose Barabbas instead of the Holy One of Israel who had come in our nature to seek and to save the lost.

And the Lord here says, come to me. Turn back to me. From your idols to me, your God.

[10 : 15] A God who is your God, he says. It is a covenant God. A covenant relationship in which they were with the Lord down through the years.

He had done great things for them. They only had to think back over the history of his dealings with them from the time he took them out as a people from the land of Egypt.

With a mighty hand and with his arms stretched forth, he took them through the Red Sea. He took them through this terrible wilderness over a period of 40 years.

Supplying manna from heaven for them. Supplying water from the rock. He was leading them with a pillar of cloud by day. A pillar of fire by night. He had brought them into the land of Canaan.

Divided the land for them. A land flowing with milk and honey. And now this is what has happened. They have turned their back upon him.

[11 : 15] They embraced the gods of the Canaanites. Baalism in particular. They embraced idolatry. What about ourselves?

What about me? What about you? When you think back over your own life? You think of the number of ways the Lord has come into your life with a blessing.

He has effectually called you. He has given you to know his fellowship. He has given you to know his love shed abroad in your heart. He has given you strength for service.

He has given you many things. And you say I don't deserve any of them. But what has happened? Well, what happened in the experience of the church down through the years?

They turned away from their God. They slid away. There was one particular one and she left her first love. Her love had got cold. But the Lord, despite the awfulness of sin, he doesn't say go away from me to these people.

[12:30] He says come. He sends them a word of grace. A word that's full of care for them. Of course, he spoke this to his erring people down through the years.

Again and again and again. Like a shepherd ensuring that his flock comes back to him from the precipice where they're standing.

In danger of going right over. The Lord, as the good shepherd, circles his people with his love and draws them back. See what he says?

Turn back through Ezekiel. Turn back, turn back from your evil ways. But why will you die, O house of Israel? And even when Hosea, the prophet, speaks on behalf of the Lord, he says, Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.

O you have stumbled because of your iniquity. And he even gives them a prayer. Say to him, we have sinned. We have done wickedly. It's as if he gives them every opportunity and every encouragement to come back from their wayward paths.

[13:45] In the New Testament, the Lord Jesus says, Come unto me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

If you're finding sin and its tyranny a burden for you this evening. If you're finding sin, a trial and an affliction to your soul, Well, the Lord Jesus says, come to me and I will give you rest.

The rest of forgiveness. The rest of heavenly blessing. The rest of heavenly love. The joy of the Lord. And this returning to him, when he calls, return to me.

I think really he's talking about what we call repentance. That's what repentance really is. It's that turning around of our life.

From walking one way to walking the opposite way. Certainly true when we are first converted, we have to repent and believe the gospel.

[15:07] These are the first words I believe that the Lord Jesus spoke as he entered his public ministry. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The same with John the Baptist.

The word repentance was foremost in the way he addressed the people. Repent. Remember the catechism, what is repentance unto life?

It's a saving grace. Whereby a sinner out of a true sense of his sin. An apprehension of the mercy of God in Christ. Does with grief and hatred of his sin.

Turn from it unto God. With full purpose of and endeavor after new obedience. And that's exactly what the prophet here is calling these people to do.

To turn unto God from their idols. Just like the Thessalonians did long ago. You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God. And to wait for his son from heaven.

[16:11] So, a word of command. That's full of grace. Turn. But then, having said that.

It's as if he gives them a root plan as to how to return. A kind of a... An outline of the kind of repentance that he required of them.

See what he says? Return to me with all your heart. With all your heart. This turning must be a wholehearted turning.

That the Lord would show us our sin. And that he would show us what our heart is like. You know that... Heart.

In the Old Testament particularly. If you look at the root meaning of the word. It illustrates what... Our will is. Our intellect is.

[17:23] And our affections are. That's as if what makes up our heart. Our will. Our intellect. And our affections. And when he is calling us to come.

Return with all our heart. It must be our wholehearted willingness. To part with every known sin. And come to him.

It must be an intellectual thing. We must know what we're doing. Turning from the sin that has captivated our minds.

And that has tricked our minds into thinking wrong things about God and about ourselves. And about the word of God. And our affections.

Love for sin. Love for the world. The apostle says. Love not the world. Nor the things that are in the world.

[18 : 26] If we love the world. The love of the father is not in us. And he says here. Return with all your heart. Your mind.

Totally committed to the things of God. Your will. Totally committed. To following the path that the Lord commends. And your affections. Totally given.

To the things. That the Lord commends. If you be risen with Christ. The apostle says. Set your affections on the things that are above.

Not on the things. That are on the earth. Isn't it always a struggle. Trying to have our heart and affection. Set on the things that are above.

When there are so many voices in the world. Seeking to. Claim our attention. And draw us away from the things of God. Return to me with all your heart.

[19 : 25] And then he says. Return to me with fasting. This is still verse 12. The original.

Or the root meaning of the word fasting. In the original. Means to cover one's mouth. And that certainly. Is something that many people do.

They deny themselves food. They have. Times of fighting. Fasting. And prayer. Not eating food. But I think the word fasting.

Has got a. Wider meaning. It means really. Abstaining. And spiritually speaking.

Abstaining from anything. That would impede. Our walk with God. Anything that would hold us back. From living the life.

[20 : 22] That God requires. Anything that would hold us back. From growing in grace. And in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ. What about things that.

Interfere with your prayer life. I mean he's saying here. You have to have. Fasting. In relation to the activities of your life.

And if there are things that seek to. Crawl into your mind. And into your life. And into your priorities. As you live your life. If these things interfere with your prayer life.

Well you have. To deny these things. Deny yourself these things. Self-denial. It's more important. It's more important. To keep in touch with God. In prayer.

Than many of the things. That demand our time. And our attention. From day to day. Isn't that true? What about.

[21 : 26] The things. That affect our. Christian service. Our Christian witness. Things that.

Really creep in. And you can't go. Where you're meant to go. You can't. Be where you're meant to be. Or do what you're meant to do. And what you'd like to do. There are things that seek.

To infiltrate. Into your mind. And your heart. Day by day. And the Lord says. Well if you're going to fully turn back to me. You have to come back.

Wholeheartedly. With fasting. With self-denial. Self-denial must be at the very core. Of the Christian life.

Self-denial. Deny yourself. Take up your cross. And follow me. The Lord Jesus says. With fasting.

[22 : 28] And then he says. With weeping. This points to godly sorrow.

Weeping. Over my sinful life. Weeping over my failures. I had promised to do this and that. And be this and that.

But really I failed miserably. And I weep. Because I sorrow before God. Because I've sinned against him. I have broken his law.

I've offended his holiness. I have offended his glory. And I've come short again and again. Paul writes to the Corinthian.

He says. Godly sorrow works repentance unto salvation. Not to be repented of. And who wouldn't want such godly sorrow.

[23 : 34] When we realize. What we've done. I often think of David. Having sinned with Bathsheba. And it looks as if he.

Went a whole year. Or close on a whole year. Without realizing the gravity of what he had done. Until Nathan the prophet came.

And in a parable about two people. One who was rich. And had a lot of flocks and herds. The other a poor man. Who only had one lamb. And a visitor came to the rich man.

And instead of taking one of his own flocks. He went and he took. The single lamb from the poor man. And David became furious.

He said that man must die. And I can almost see. The finger of Nathan the prophet. Directed by the Lord. And said.

[24 : 34] You are the man. It's as if David stood back. I didn't realize. The sinfulness of my actions until now.

The word of God found him out. The light from heaven shone into his heart. And he realized. How sinful he had been. And he repented.

And Nathan assured him that his sin had been forgiven. And we see here. With fasting. And weeping. Weeping over my sin. And with mourning.

In Zechariah chapter 12. We have this amazing statement. When he says. That he's going to pour out.

The spirit of supplication. On his people. And he says. They will look upon me. Whom they have pierced. And they will mourn for me.

[25 : 40] You see. It's only when we see ourselves. And our sin. In the light of God. Do we realize. How sinful. Our life is.

It's like Isaiah was. In Isaiah chapter 6. He saw the Lord high and lifted up. And his train filled the temple. And then what was the response.

Of Isaiah. To that whole vision. Woe is me. For I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips. And I dwell among a people of unclean lips.

For mine eyes have seen the King. The Lord of hosts. We see ourselves. For what we are. In the glorious light of his holiness.

And we mourn. And before I go on. There is one more. Rend your hearts. And not your garments.

[26 : 42] In this. Coming back to him. We are going to rend our hearts. I like to think of this. As if he is.

Rending. Or tearing to pieces. A root map. That he has been using. Or a compass. That he has been using. To lead him in a particular direction.

And the compass. Is not true. And the root map. Is not true. And the Lord says. Tear it up. And our hearts.

Are not true. Our heart is deceitful. Above all things. And desperately wicked. Who can know it? Coming back again. To your.

Will. Your intellect. Your affections. These elements. That constitute. The human heart. Our will. Has been unwilling. To do what God requires.

[27 : 40] Our affections. Have been. Directed elsewhere. Instead of loving the Lord. We love sin. Our intellect. Has been misled. With the blinding lights.

Of this world. That Satan uses. So successfully. To distract us. From the things of God. What does the psalmist say.

In Psalm 119. Verse 105. Thy word. Thy word. Is to my feet. A lamp. And to my path.

A light. Tear up your own inclinations. Remove them. From the center. Of your life. And plan. And live according. To God's word.

Rend your hearts. And not your garments. Don't be happy. To have an outward show. Of your. Remorse. Or sorrow. For sin. May it be. Heartfelt.

[28 : 40] That's the first thing. And the second thing. Was this. He tells them. Commands them. To come back. And tells them. How to do it. Secondly.

The encouragement. He gives them. To return. Return. To me. He says. Return. To the Lord.

Your God. Your God. I am your God. I have embraced you. In covenant. Down through the years. I have supplied. All of your needs. I have shepherded you. Given you everything. That I saw. Was necessary. For you. I am the one.

Who cares for you. Not Baal. Or the followers. Of Baal. Or any other. Kind of sin. That has captivated. Your mind. And outlook. Come to me.

[29 : 35] I am your God. And then. What does he say. About him. For he. Is gracious.

That word. Gives you. A picture. Of someone. Bending down. To help. Someone in need. I often think.

That the good Samaritan. Is a. Living example. Of that kind of thing. Although the priest. And the Levite. Walked away. On the other side.

The good Samaritan. Came. Not only. Did he stop. To look. But he took out. His oil. And his wine. And he poured them. Onto the man's wounds. Bound them up. Put him on his animal. Took him to a hotel. Bail. Gave the man there. Money. To look after him. And he says. If there's anything else. Needed to look after him. I'll pay it when I come back.

[30 : 37] The Lord is like that. He is gracious. He bends down. To see us. Where we are. And that's our motive. To come back to him.

Bail has no heart. To show us compassion. No other God in this world. No other lifestyle in this world. Speaks so highly.

As the grace of God. Of care and compassion. In the highest possible way. He is gracious. And it says here.

He is merciful. The word merciful. The word merciful also can be translated. Compassionate. Compassionate. He is God.

Who is full of compassion. He's got a heart of compassion. His heart is full of compassion. Of mercy. Of care.

[31 : 37] For those who come. Then it says that he's slow to anger. In long suffering. And patient. He has borne with them for a long time.

And maybe he's borne with me for a long time. And with you for a long time. And it's time for me. And maybe for you. To remember.

That he is slow to anger. But his anger has limits. He's not all suffering. Although he's not. He's not. He's not.

All suffering. Although he's. Long suffering. His anger has a limit. His patience has a limit. And we see here. He's slow to anger.

And the psalmist got this. In Psalm 103. The Lord our God is merciful. And he is gracious. Long suffering. And slow to wrath. In mercy.

[32 : 38] He's plenteous. And his great kindness. Full of loving kindness. Full of favour and pity. To those who are in need.

That's the encouragement. And he relents. It says. Over disaster. Do you remember when.

The prophet Jonah was sent to Nineveh. When the Lord saw that the people of Nineveh. Repented at the preaching of Jonah.

He didn't do what he said. He would do. He didn't destroy the city. Because the people repented. He relented. And possibly.

This was before Joel's mind. Who knows. Because he knows. That he is a God. Who relents. In other words. He will not fulfil. What he said he would do.

[33 : 42] Because they repented. They repented. And the calamity didn't come. So that's an encouragement. And encouragement. And encouragement indeed.

And finally. We have these words of 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. These are words of.

Reliance upon God. That he may answer. With a blessing. They're not the words of someone who doubts. What God is able to do.

But as if the prophet is saying. With some confidence. That the Lord will answer. Graciously. When these people.

[34 : 48] Return to him. And that's still the case. There is a. Ample proof.

Throughout the scriptures. For example. In Zechariah 1.3. Thus declares. The Lord of hosts. Return to me. Says the Lord of hosts. Turn.

And I will return to you. Says the Lord of hosts. Turn. And I will turn to you. And James in the New Testament.

Chapter 4. Draw near to God. He says. And he will draw near to you. What an amazing. God we have.

Though our sins be as scarlet. They shall be as white as snow. Though they be like crimson. They shall be as wool. When?

[35 : 45] When we come and reason together. Isaiah 1.18. Come now let us reason together. And it's not a bargaining thing. Between God and us.

It is us coming into his presence. And seeing things from his perspective. That's what it really means. Seeing things from God's perspective.

And seeing the sinfulness of our lives. In the light of his purity. And holiness. And then if we come and acknowledge our sin. He is faithful and just.

To forgive us our sin. And cleanse us. From all unrighteousness. And coming to the end now we see. He will leave a blessing behind him.

A grain offering. And a drink offering. For the Lord your God. It is if he is saying. When things become right spiritually.

[36 : 46] They will become right. Temporally. For this nation. I will send the showers. And the fruit of the earth. Will come.

And there are two things he is mentioning. The grain offering. And the drink offering. In Leviticus chapter 2. We see. When anyone brings a grain offering.

As an offering. To the Lord. His offering shall be with fine flour. He must pour oil upon it. And frankincense. In other words. We are able to worship him aright.

These people. In Judah. Weren't able to worship him. According to what he had required of them. Because their land wasn't giving. Any fruit. No grain. No wine. No oil.

But when they repented. The fruit of the land came. And they were able to bring it. Into the presence of God. And of course. The drink offering. Every morning and evening.

[37 : 44] In Israel. There was a lamb. Offered. In the presence of God. And it says. There's a tenth measure of fine flour. Mingled with a quarter hen.

Of beaten oil. A quarter hen. Of wine. As a drink offering. And these lambs. Indicated. The consecration of the people.

To the Lord. Every morning. And every evening. And they couldn't show. Without wine and oil. That they were consecrating.

Themselves to him. But once the blessing came. They were able to. Consecrate themselves. And magnify his name. In a godly lifestyle.

What about us? Are we willing to. Come into his presence. And let his light shine. Into our heart and life.

[38 : 44] And highlight to us. Where we are wrong. In our thinking. In our will. In our affections.

Are we willing to come. And say. Lord give me. Grace to fast. To have self-denial. In my life. Examine me. And cast away.

What's wrong. That I might come to you. For cleansing. And for forgiveness. Who knows. Whether he will.

Not turn and relent. And leave a blessing. Behind him. Wouldn't it be amazing. During this communion season. If this were true.

Concerning ourselves here. That he would come. And in coming. Rather than destroying us. For our sin. That he would leave. A blessing behind him.

[39 : 42] That he would fill our hearts. And lives. With his gracious presence. Giving us to know. His love. Even shed abroad. In our heart.

And giving us to know. The joy of the Lord. As we go on. On our wilderness journey. May God bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Thank you.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Honey.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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