

Intimacy & Imminence

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Date: 20 September 2020

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Turn with me, if you have a Bible, to the book of Joel, chapter 2. If you're in the sanctuary, the text will also be on the screens. As Pastor Matt mentioned, Pastor Nick wasn't able to be here this morning, but he wrote a great sermon, and so I'm going to preach it. Now, you might never have seen this happen before. I happened to be at a church this summer where they were meeting in several different locations, and the pastor would rotate around, and in the other locations, they were all meeting in backyards, somebody else would read the pastor's sermon, and it was very edifying.

Or you can imagine yourself in the early church, and the Apostle Paul, who perhaps planted your church, is under house arrest, and he can't come in person, but he writes a letter, and someone stands up in the church and reads Paul's sermon to you, right? So this has happened before in the history of the church. We're just going with it today. So, Joel 2, 28 to 32, is our sermon text this morning. We've been going through the book of Joel, and we come here to a great promise that Joel gave his people. Joel 2, beginning at verse 28.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions, even on the male and female servants in those days. I will pour out my spirit, and I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls. Let's pray. God, we have heard your word. Now we humbly ask that by your spirit, you would help us to understand it, and not just understand it, but to take it in and to live it out.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. One of the great longings of the human heart is for intimacy. What is intimacy? Well, we might say it's knowing and being known. But it's not just being known, it's also being welcomed, received, loved. That's intimacy. Knowing and being known, loving and being loved. And it's one of the great desires or longings of our hearts. Now it's easy to see that on the horizontal level in our human relationships. We long for friendship, or perhaps for marriage, or perhaps for a deeper connection with our children, or with our parents. We long for intimacy, but we also know this longing on the vertical plane toward God. The human heart was made for eternity, for transcendence, for intimacy with God. Now how do we know that? Well, just think, why is true satisfaction so hard to find? Even, and maybe especially when we're in the best of times, surrounded by friends and success, why doesn't that satisfaction seem to last?

And why, despite many people's predictions that religion in the modern world would gradually fade, and eventually become obsolete, why are religions and spiritualities flourishing and multiplying today, like never before all across the globe? The human heart longs for intimacy with God.

[4 : 06] Nothing else will satisfy, nothing else will do. C.S. Lewis wrote a long time ago, If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for something more.

In fact, long before C.S. Lewis, Augustine wrote, God, you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you. But here's the heart of the matter.

Is intimacy with God possible? Is it possible for my finite heart to touch eternity, for my created being to have real intimacy with the creator of the universe?

Is that really possible? Well, that's a question that Joel's audience might have been asking.

Remember, the message of Joel came to a people who had lost everything in a locust plague.

And after the call in the beginning of the book to lament and repent, Joel begins in the middle of chapter 2 to bring a message of hope. The message of hope began, as we saw last week, with the promise of physical restoration.

[5 : 20] Some of my favorite verses in the whole book are verses 24 and 25 of chapter 2. The threshing floor shall be full of grain. The vat shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten. I will restore to you the years that the locusts have devoured.

What a rich promise! It's a promise that stretches through the entire Bible. That God will undo the effects of sin on his creation and make all things new, a new creation where death, dying, and decay are no more.

But Jesus once asked this question. He said, What does it profit to gain the whole world if you lose your soul?

What if you could have threshing floors full of grain and vats overflowing with wine and oil, all the joys of this world? What if you could have the new creation at your fingertips and not have God?

[6 : 24] What good would that do? What if we had all the gifts that this world can give but not the giver? You know, any of us who have lost a parent or a spouse or someone very close to us would trade in a heartbeat every gift that person had ever given us for one more day in their presence with them?

The giver is more important than all the gifts. And how much more is that true of God? So is it possible to have intimacy with God? And if so, how do we get it?

That's the question Joel's audience may have been asking and it's the question that we may be asking too. And at the end of this chapter 2 of Joel, we see the answer.

Joel shows us first how intimacy with God is possible and second how we can get it. So first we'll look at how intimacy with God is possible.

Look at verses 28 and 29. These verses tell us that intimacy with God is possible because God has promised to pour out his spirit.

[7 : 41] It shall come to pass afterward, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female servants in those days, I will pour out my spirit. Now the spirit of God in the Old Testament is God's personal powerful presence.

And in the New Testament, we know that the Holy Spirit is none other than the third person of the Trinity. God himself. Now these verses highlight three things about this gift of God's spirit.

It's lavish, it's universal, and it's fruitful. Consider how lavish it is. God says, I will pour out my spirit. He says it at the beginning of verse 28 and at the end of verse 29.

It's not a trickle, it's not a drop, it's a lavish pouring out of the spirit. A few years ago, I was at a water park with my family, and at one spot near the splash pad, they had this giant bucket suspended in the air.

[8 : 53] And water would slowly pour into the bucket until it got so full that it would suddenly tip over and deluge all the kids standing underneath. And it would happen again and again and again.

That's the image here. God's spirit poured out, nothing held in reserve. Not just once, but on an ongoing, overflowing basis.

You know, in the Old Testament, the spirit of God would come and go on certain people. But Joel looks forward to a day when the spirit would be a lavish, permanent presence.

Nothing held back. But it won't just be lavish, it will be universal. That is for all kinds of people. I will pour out my spirit on all flesh.

On young and old, Joel says. On male and female. On the upper class, all the way down to the male and female servants. The spirit will come and make intimacy with God possible.

[9 : 58] For everyone. For all kinds of people without exception. Age won't be a barrier. Gender won't be a barrier. Social status won't be a barrier. Now back in chapter 1, when Joel was talking about the locust plague, everyone was affected by the devastation.

Young and old. Male and female. Priests and farmers. But now we see that intimacy with God will come. For all of those groups of people. As the great Christmas hymn puts it, he has come to make his blessings known as far as the curse is found.

But it's not just lavish and universal, it's fruitful. Verse 28 says, your sons and your daughters shall prophesy. Your old men shall dream dreams. Your young men shall see visions.

When the spirit is poured out, it's going to make a difference. And Joel talks about the effect of the spirit's fullness in terms of prophecy. Now on the one hand, we know from the New Testament that the indwelling spirit of God is given, gives a variety of gifts to believers to build up the church. To help and serve and love one another. And these gifts are given freely, without distinction, so we can build one another up in love. You can read more about that in 1 Corinthians 12, 13, and 14. [11:21] But to Joel's audience, they would have heard something even more than that in this promise. You see, in the Old Testament, to prophesy or to be a prophet was to be someone who had received the word of God in a special and powerful way, to have the knowledge of God wash over you so powerfully and so specifically that you had to share it with others.

You couldn't hold it to yourself. In the Old Testament, God would sometimes communicate to prophets through dreams or visions, as verse 28 mentions, or sometimes just by speaking to them. But the point is that to prophesy was to know God and God's word intimately and to be an instrument of sharing that word with others. So when Joel says, the spirit will be poured out and everyone will prophesy, yes, he means we'll have gifts to serve one another, but deeper down, he means that intimacy with God, knowing and being known, loving and being loved by the creator of the universe himself, will not be the privileged possession of a select few, but intimacy with God and his word will flow like a river over all the people of God, young and old, rich and poor, male and female.

What Joel sees here is the fulfillment of Moses' longing in Exodus or Numbers 11. Moses said, I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them. Jeremiah spoke of a similar thing in Jeremiah 31 when God said, I'm going to make a new covenant with my people. He says, I'll put my law within them and I'll write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people.

[13:12] And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me. From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

Intimacy with God is possible according to Joel because God has promised to pour out his spirit. And you know, that's one of the things that makes Christianity or biblical spirituality different from other religions.

You know, most other spiritual approaches will give you a program to follow in order to break through to intimacy with God. But the Bible turns all of that on its head.

According to the Bible, God breaks through to us. He forges the intimacy. He pours out his spirit. And doesn't that make sense when you think about it?

You know, intimacy is not something that can be forced. If I'm trying to get to know another person, they have to open up for a real friendship to develop.

[14:19] They have to pour out their spirit as it were. And if that's true with one another, how much more is that true when we approach an infinite, holy, and perfect God?

We can't create, we can't break through to intimacy with this God. God must break through to intimacy with us. There's no other way.

Maybe one of the reasons if you found intimacy with God to be fleeting or hard to come by, perhaps you've been looking in the wrong place. Perhaps you've been peeking through the back window trying to get a glimpse when God has flung open the front door and said, come inside.

But here's the good news. What in Joel's day was a future promise, Joel said afterwards, Joel was looking forward to a point in the future when this would happen.

For us, it's a present reality. And we heard earlier from the reading from Acts chapter 2 about the day of Pentecost.

[15:29] One of the most significant moments in all of redemptive history, in all of the biblical story. You see, on the day of Pentecost, this was after Jesus had died and resurrected from the grave and ascended into heaven.

His followers were gathered in the upper room and on that day, God poured out his spirit on all flesh just like he had promised. And on that day, the new covenant age of the risen Lord and his spirit began without reserve, without distinction, and fruitful beyond imagination.

God has poured out his spirit. But that leads us to our second point. We've seen how intimacy with God is possible because God has poured out his spirit, but now we need to see how do we get it? Let me read again the second half of our text, starting in verse 30. God says, And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke.

The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[16:42] For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said. And among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls. So how do we, here, right here and now, how do we get this intimacy with God through his spirit?

Joel says, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Now, verses 30 and 31 use the figurative language of a battle. Blood, fire, smoke.

smoke. And the smoke is rising so high that in daytime it blocks the sun and at night it makes the moon look blood red. This is battle language. Language of turmoil and conflict.

And what Joel is saying here is that between the outpouring of the spirit on the one hand and the great and awesome day of the Lord's return on the other, the in-between time will be a time of great upheaval.

And the in-between time it's the time we're living in now. And if you look over the last 2,000 years of human history since the day of Pentecost, you have to agree. There have been moments of grandeur and grace and peace.

[18:00] But human history has also been full of upheaval, conflict, turmoil. And all this distress reminds us that our world is still broken.

things aren't how they're supposed to be. We're not how we're supposed to be. And if God were to return in his holiness, if he were to simply show up, the sinful world would collapse under the weight of his glory.

But in the midst of this upheaval and distress, something else is happening. Amidst the sounds of battle, another sound is going forth.

another voice is ringing out through the tumult of human history and it's the voice of the Lord calling. That's how verse 32 ends, with the reality of the Lord's call.

And that sovereign call of God is drawing forth a response in human hearts. The Lord's call goes out and the human response calls back.

[19:07] And in that call and response, this promise unfurls. Like a banner of hope over the chaos, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Now you might ask, well, saved from what? It's a good question. We're not saved from the tumult and upheaval and conflict of human history.

What we are saved from is permanent alienation from God. You see, that's the very opposite of intimacy with God, is alienation permanently from God.

In Matthew 25, Jesus says that to be permanently alienated from God is like being forever excluded from the feast.

Like being lost in perpetual darkness. Even like disintegrating in a fire. And if you've ever been alienated from a loved one, you know a little of what that disintegrating fire feels like.

[20:23] what if the trajectory of your life apart from God continues for eternity? What if when the curtain of your life drops and the play is over and the drama ends, what if you find yourself in darkness outside the feast, not in intimacy with God but alienated from God?

Is there any way to be saved from that? Is there any way to get the intimacy that God's spirit makes possible? Well the good news according to Joel is yes, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Now you might also ask, what does it mean to call on the name of the Lord? And that's a good question too. In the Old Testament to call on the name of the Lord is an expression that basically means to worship the Lord exclusively.

To shift the allegiance of your life from any other God to the Lord and to the Lord alone. In the New Testament this is called faith.

Trusting or resting the weight of your life no longer on yourself but on the Lord. And that raises another question.

[21:56] Why is calling on the name of the Lord the way to get intimacy with God? Why isn't it those who are smart enough can find intimacy with God or those who are good enough or enlightened enough or kind enough can find this intimacy with God?

Well the reality is you can never be enough. the chasm of sin between us and God is too great for us to bridge. That's an unpopular thing to say.

But maybe the reason that we try to keep telling ourselves over and over I'm enough I'm enough I'm enough is that deep down we know that we're really not enough.

enough. But here's the good news. There's one who is enough and he loves you. When sin separated us from God Jesus took our sin and he bore that separation on the cross in your place in my place and he rose again so we could call on his name and be saved.

You see we get intimacy with God not through what we've accomplished but through what Christ has accomplished. It's grace. Something has been done for you.

[23 : 22] The Lord Jesus has come and lived and died and rose again for you so you can call on his name and rest your life in him and be saved now and for all eternity.

And if you get that, if you get that it's all of grace and we can't accomplish it in our own name but we can receive it in his name, then the intimacy with God will come.

Because the spirit who is poured out at Pentecost will begin to wash over you too. And God will include us in his people, this new Jerusalem, this new Zion, those as Joel says, those whom the Lord calls.

I wonder do you sense that even now or have you sensed that? The Lord's call? In Acts, when Peter preached this very text, he read these very words on the day of Pentecost, it says the people were cut to the heart.

Have you felt a tug on your heart? On the one hand, it's a voice that may seem strange and other because it's not your own voice. And at the same time, it's familiar and true.

[24 : 32] And it's saying, come. And do you sense your own heart responding with a yes to the voice of God? If you've experienced that, if you're experiencing that now, you're experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit and the effective call of God, liberating you to call on Jesus and be saved.

So do just that. Call on the name of Jesus, take him as your Lord, the only Lord. Lord. And then go public, talk to a friend or talk to one of the pastors about making your faith public by getting baptized.

And if this is true of you already, if you've already heard and responded to that call of God, if you've called on the name of the Lord, continue to make your profession known.

Continue to enjoy the intimacy that you have in the Spirit of God, through prayer, through fellowship with other believers, through serving with the Spirit's gifts, through loving your neighbor, through sharing this good news of Jesus with others, all of those are ways that the indwelling Spirit of God works in us and through us.

And as we keep in step with the Spirit who's been poured out, this intimacy will continue through joys and sorrows until one day we will see him face to face, the Lord, on whose name we have called.

[26 : 11] And when the great and awesome day of the Lord comes, our faith will become sight and our intimacy with God will have no end. Let's pray. Father, thank you for this promise that you gave to your people long ago through the prophet Joel.

Thank you for fulfilling that promise by sending your Spirit on the day of Pentecost to seal the work that Jesus has done to our hearts, to fill us with that fountain of living water, of overflowing life.

We pray that we would be refreshed by the power of your Holy Spirit this morning. We pray that we would live in the power of your Spirit day by day.

We pray that we would call on you and know your promise that those who call upon your name will be saved, that you have rescued us and you will continue to abide with us.

Pray all these things in Jesus' name. Amen.