

Sermon Notes
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“Return to Me with All Your Heart”

Joel Series: The Day of the LORD is Coming

Sermon 2: Joel 2:1-17

February 25, 2018

“Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming;” (Joel 2:1)

Appendix: On Prayer

There was so much here. I want to dwell on some advice for prayer rising from our passage. Read Joel 2:12-13 again (READ Joel 2:12-13a).

When we pray, we ought to approach with humility. We do well to remember that God is God and we are not. But what is all this about fasting and weeping and tearing up our hearts? It means that we recognize that God is Holy and we are sinful. It means that we recognize and regret the petty and mean-spirited things that we have done and thought. God is willing to forgive us if we confess the truth. What is more, it is when we see ourselves and see God rightly that we are in the right frame of mind to be speaking with God in the first place.

Notice in verse 13 that it says, “and rend your hearts and not your garments.” It was part of the culture at that time that a person would tear up their clothes to show distress. It might even become highly religious to make an outward show of it. But God doesn’t want an outward show. God wants the real thing. Again, hear the words of Jesus:

“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” (Matthew 6:16-18)

So, point 1 on prayer is pray with humility and be genuine. Point 2 is pray for what God thinks is good. The more you get to know God and the more your faith grows, the more you will desire what God desires, and the more your prayers will be answered the way you pray them. Joel 2:14 says (READ Joel 2:14).

See what kind of blessing Joel suggests in this passage? If the people humble themselves and repent of their sin and pray for God’s blessing, God might just make them wealthy and powerful, with great jobs and everything they ever wished for? No. God may, just maybe, bring back the grain and drink offerings that had run out in the temple in Joel chapter 1, verses 9 and 13.

In my last sermon I emphasized how Joel wants to awaken a sleepy and drunk people to the priorities of God.¹ I explained how the lack of joy in God's house was bad for God's reputation, which is itself bad for the world. It is bad for the world, because the Good News needs to go out into the world and catch people's attention. Why should people believe in God unless He seems trustworthy and able to save them?

My point is, the more you mature in faith, the more you will understand God's priorities. And on the way there, the more you pray according to God's priorities now, the more you will mature.

The last point on prayer is pray according to who God is and for God's glory. That is how Joel recommends we pray. Read with me starting at verse 15 (READ Joel 2:15-17).

Again, we see Joel directing us away from ourselves to focus on God's own glory. Why should God spare the people? It is because it is God's people. It is because God stands to lose out if the other nations start to believe God is powerless or absent.

The very same pattern is seen in Moses. In Numbers 14 when the people refuse to trust that God can bring them into the land He promised them, God threatens to destroy the people and start over. But Moses is concerned for God's glory. He says, "God, you can't do that! It's not you! What will people think?!" Here is Moses praying for the people:

"And the LORD said to Moses, "How long will this people despise me? And how long will they not believe in me, in spite of all the signs that I have done among them? I will strike them with the pestilence and disinherit them, and I will make of you a nation greater and mightier than they."

But Moses said to the LORD, "Then the Egyptians will hear of it, for you brought up this people in your might from among them, and they will tell the inhabitants of this land. They have heard that you, O LORD, are in the midst of this people. For you, O LORD, are seen face to face, and your cloud stands over them and you go before them, in a pillar of cloud by day and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if you kill this people as one man, then the nations who have heard your fame will say, 'It is because the LORD was not able to bring this people into the land that he swore to give to them that he has killed them in the wilderness.' And now, please let the power of the Lord be great as you have promised, saying, 'The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, forgiving iniquity and transgression, but he will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, to the third and the fourth generation.' Please pardon the iniquity of this people, according to the greatness of your steadfast love, just as you have forgiven this people, from Egypt until now." (Numbers 14:11-19 ESV)

Like Joel, Moses knows that there is a good chance that God will relent. It is part of who God is to be merciful and willing to hear prayer. He lets that knowledge guide his prayer, and he justifies his requests on the basis that it is consistent with what God has already said about Himself. Forgiving the people is consistent with God's character and that is why Moses is bold enough to ask for it.

1. See Joel 1:5.

Like Joel, Moses bets that God is concerned for His own image. Moses insists that it is best for God's reputation and glory to forgive the people. The more we grow in faith, the more we too become concerned for God's reputation. It affects the choices we make and it affects the way that we pray.

Hear Joel's exhortation one last time. (READ Joel 2:12-14)

This is a call to repentance, and it is a call to prayer. Remember that God remains sovereign even when we pray. He may change your situation, but He may not. He may prefer to change you as you pray.