

Week 8 |—Joel 1:8-12 “Closed Temples, Closed Churches”

I. JOY SUDDENLY TURNED TO MOURNING (JOEL 1:8)

1. **Joel 1:8** “Lament like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the husband of her youth.”
- B. The Bible’s process and language for our modern-day equivalent of engagement is much greater than ours. Historically, to be betrothed meant that you were technically married, requiring a public divorce to break the betrothal. Which is exactly what we see in the story of Mary and Joseph (**Deuteronomy 22:23-24; Matthew 1:18-25; Luke 1:26-38**).
- C. It wasn’t uncommon for girls still in the womb to be betrothed to future husbands, and it was standard practice for young girls to be betrothed to future husbands.
- D. Joel’s calling for this young, betrothed bride, who is symbolized as the nation of Israel, to exchange her dress, her joy, and her excitement, with the garments of sackcloth (*dark hair of animals*), with lamentation and unfathomable mourning. She’s not to dawn the attire of a festive party, but the attire of repentance and humility.
- E. God’s appeal through Joel is that she (Israel) not just simply change their clothing but change their way of life.
 1. **Jeremiah 2:2** “Go and cry in the hearing of Jerusalem, saying, thus says the Lord: I remember you, the kindness of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you went after Me in the wilderness...”
- F. The Lord in great kindness was calling them to awake from their slumber and their compliancy and to return to Him. *“Guys, look at what’s happened under My wrath, you must return to Me with wholeheartedness. I’ve spoken to you, and appealed through My prophets, but now I’ve spoken with my rod of judgment in the land. Do you hear Me, do you see Me?”*

II. TEMPLE LIFE COMES TO A GRINDING HALT (JOEL 1:9-10)

1. **Joel 1:9-10** “The grain offering, and the drink offering have been cut off from the house of the Lord; the priests mourn, who minister to the Lord. The field is wasted, the land mourns, for the grain is ruined, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails.”
- B. Here we learn why the call to mourning (*like that a virgin stripped of the promised husband of her youth*) is so great; the sacrifices/offerings before God have been cut off. The locust invasion, this army, that God Himself has sent among them, has destroyed all their crops, preventing them to offer sacrifices to God.
- C. Every morning and evening the nation of Israel presented a burnt offering’s before God, which was a lamb, along with moistened grain, wine and oil. But because the locust invasion has decimated all the crops, temple life, among which all of Israel orbited around, had come to a grinding halt.
- D. The sacrifices in their day were solely contingent upon human ministrations, and without the elements, nothing could be done in the temple. The judgments in the land (locust’s) were stopping the only thing they had to reverse the judgments (Temple sacrifices).

- E. This is a massive theological disaster for God’s people. Joel isn’t just adding this because he wants to further the locust invasions destruction. He’s adding it because temple worship was central to God’s family, and the fact that it was cut off, was a direct sign that God Himself had cut it off; *this was a day of the Lord*.
1. They’ve assumed that maybe He’s more tolerant than folks say He is. They’ve been busy pushing the boundaries of the covenant, and in so doing, it’s clear, Israel has found the border of the covenant.
 2. **Deuteronomy 28:1-2, 15, 42, 49-52** *“Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all his commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God...But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you...Locust shall consume all your trees and the produce of your land...The Lord will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as swift as the eagle flies, a nation whose language you will not understand, a nation of fierce countenance, which does not respect the elderly nor shall favor to the young. They shall eat the increase of your livestock and the produce of your land until you are destroyed; They shall not leave you grain or new wine or oil or the increase of your cattle or the offspring of your flocks, until they have destroyed you. They shall besiege you at all your gates until you're high and fortified walls, in which you trust, come down throughout all your land; And they shall besiege you at all your gates throughout all your land which the Lord your God has given you.”*
- F. Well, even the land is joining in the songs of lament from the priests. The priests, God’s family were in touch with nature, unified in a long of lament.
- G. It’s hard to see it, but this locust invasion among them, is the mercy of God. This is a redemptive work that God is performing among them. He’s reaching them before it’s too late.

III. THE PRIESTS AND THE EARTH SING A UNIFIED SONG OF LAMENT (JOEL 1:11-12)

1. **Joel 1:11-12** *“Be ashamed you farmers, wail you vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley; because the harvest of the field has perished. The vine has dried up, and the fig tree has withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field are withered, surely joy has withered away from the sons of men.”*
- B. If the priests, and the community of God were concerned, how much more so, or equally so for those whose lives depended on the crops; the farmers.
- C. We know that the palm trees go down deep and are able to withstand much destructive activity, but even they weren’t able to make through the recent judgments. It’s not just the fruit trees, but all the trees of the forest, even the harder trees that are built by God to endure virtually anything have been destroyed.
- D. All these trees, these fruit trees that God’s family so deeply loved, and were vital to their economic life were taken away from them, and in their loss, the people of God lost their joy. God was touching their temporal person to speak to their eternal person.

- E. Well, these verse's climax in an emphatic summation of the impact of all this on the whole community of Israel, as gladness, which was normally produced by harvest time, which was expressed in the annual feasts of 1st fruits, Pentecost and Tabernacles is totally cut off! The joy of celebration around the God who gave great harvests to Israel was gone.

IV. WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?

- A. Did you know that the phrase “this too shall pass”, are not found in the whole of the Bible? And though I can understand the phrase, and similar ideas in the scriptures, I think the idea as its stated among God's family has disastrous theological implications; meaning how we view God and His activity among us.
- B. This too shall pass teaches us to almost separate God from His dealings in the nations and just wait for the natural course of life to conclude with this virus and then we can get on with life.
- C. Beloved, this is a travesty to approach the Holy One of Israel as the God who just says, “*hey, get some board games, find a few good shows, keep up your health routine, and just kick back. This thing will conclude soon, and you can get back to your life. Sorry for this rude disruption to what you were doing prior. This is Jesus, your Captain speaking, Sorry for the inconvenience on your flight, we are going to suspend the beverage service, put in your ear plugs, pull your eye covers down, kick your seat back, the rough skies will be over shortly, and then you can get back on with whatever really important thing you were doing prior. So sorry for the inconvenience this has caused you.*”
- D. Throughout the whole of Joel's prophecy, God isn't apologizing for the inconvenience He's causing to Israel. It would be counterproductive for God to send judgment among them, then apologize for it. Listen, the locust have an intended purpose, and unlike Israel and the people of God, the locust always do His will.
- E. Joel always, pictures this locust invasion, not as a natural event, not as a fluke, or a disaster, but as the day of the Lord among them. Joel is clear, there is no freak accidents with God because God's governance over the nations isn't impersonal (like Deism says), but personal. His leadership isn't removed, but deeply involved.
- F. The closed doors of Israel's temple, and the bareness of their land, was an external manifestation of their internal state. What's happening among them, is a direct reflection of where their hearts are at. They are barren internally, and it's manifesting externally, even in the land itself.
- G. God is simply giving to them, what they are given to Him; nothing. Their worship is empty, they've left God, they've indulged in this age, and forgot about their Creator, forgot about eternity, forgot about the covenant, and God in His great kindness is among them calling them back to Himself.

1. Hebrews 10:1-8

2. **Amos 5:21-24** *“I hate, I despise your feast days, and I do not savor your sacred assemblies. Though you offer Me burnt offerings in your grain offerings, I will not accept them, nor will I regard your fattened peace offerings. Take away from Me the noise of your songs, for I will not hear the melody of your stringed instruments. But let justice run down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream.”*

3. **Isaiah 1:11-15** “Hear the word of the Lord...to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices to Me? says the Lord. I've had enough of burnt offerings of Rams in the fat of fed cattle. I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs or goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has required this from your hand, to trample My courts? bring no more futile sacrifices; incense is an abomination to me. the new moons, the sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies--I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. when you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.”
- H. Could it be in our day, in our hour, with Good Friday/Passover and Easter/Resurrection Sunday, today on the eve of our celebration of Memorial Day, a week away from the feast of Pentecost, a massive festival in both Israel’s history and ours as followers of Jesus, that the doors of our temple/ Church being closed is a judgment from God?
- I. Could this be an indication for us of how He feels about the worship we are giving to Him? That we come, we give money, we give time, we sing songs, we listen to the teaching, we smile, but our hearts aren’t given in exchange. Our sacrifice comes with us, we bring it, but our hearts are removed.
- J. 3 of the 7 churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 were also “doing ministry” but were totally devoid of how Jesus felt about them;
1. **Ephesus**—“nevertheless, I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”
 2. **Sardis**—“I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.”
 3. **Laodicea**—“Because you say, I am rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked...”
- K. In the words of my fellow Federal Way pastor Ben Dixon from Northwest Church, *“It’s not just about opening the doors of our Churches, it about opening the door of our heart to God.”*
- L. I’m calling you to a week of preparation, leading up to Monday-Wednesday, June 1st-3rd, that you would join with me in fasting, prayer and worship to God. This is a call to ask the Holy Spirit to search our hearts, and to let us know if there’s anything in us that offends Him.