

**Repent Now, the End is Near
Actually, It's Already Here - God
Joel 2:12 – 17**

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As we learned last time, Joel appears to be giving us a glimpse into a still future, technologically enabled battlefield. And while also relating some of what he sees, he is tying this back to the current situation in Judah with the locust problem they have.

The locust invasion is a type of the day of the Lord. Also, the events prophesied for the near future involving Assyria, Babylon and Rome as well.

In typical prophetic fashion, Joel hits present, near future and far future.

The shocker for us was discovering that this future Beast tech army made up of demon possessed enhanced humans, robots and fallen divine beings, only operates within the permission of the Lord and is part of His plan to judge not only the sin on this planet, but to also perfect and refine His people the Jews. Having been given the vision of the coming future Day of the Lord, we see the heart of YAHWEH, it is not one that wants to judge, but one that desires to save. A desire that continues to this day.

We, as Judah, must remember that God is merciful, but He is also just.

Isaiah 28:21–22

“For the LORD will rise up, as he did at Mount Perazim; he will rouse himself, as he did in the Valley of Gibeon, to accomplish his work, his peculiar work, to perform his task, his strange task. So now, do not

mock, or your chains will become heavier! For I have heard a message about decreed destruction, from the Sovereign LORD of Heaven's Armies, against the entire land." (NET 2nd ed.)

YAHWEH desires for His people to repent and return to Him, but if they remain stubborn, then His justice will hold sway resulting in judgement. So, lets take a deeper look at this thing called repentance.

Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning; And tear your heart and not merely your garments.” Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in mercy And relenting of catastrophe.” (NASB 2020)

The Lord, through Joel, now has the undivided attention of the people of Judah. Things are bad in the present day; things will be even worse in the future. What is required though has not changed in centuries...the need for repentance. What is that?

Repentance

Repent means to change your mind about your present course of living. For the present, there is nothing to eat...anywhere in the local area at all. How are your plans about that meal going now?

The only hope the people have...God's grace. Grace which He is holding out to them.

Judah is in a place where nothing they can do can save them. The locusts are done and so is Judah, in the present day of Joel. Hope resides in repentance and nowhere else.

In the future yet to occur for Judah, an army is moving in from the north. During the tribulation, the forces of the Beast are in the process of conducting their final assault and the time to repent is right now before it is too late.

It's bad right now, without repentance, it could be even worse.

Did it ever get worse in Judah? Yes, YAHWEH through the prophets, told Judah repeatedly to repent and return to the covenant. Jeremiah made it crystal clear what would happen if they did not avail themselves of the grace of God. They didn't, and it indeed did get much worse with the entire nation being taken into exile. At least the remnant who survived the fall and destruction of Jerusalem.

At a future date, the nation will once again look to the wrong person for salvation and cut a seven-year deal with a charismatic world leader who will make all kinds of promises for peace.

In the call to repent, God is demonstrating His grace to Judah. His heart is not to judge His people, His heart is to save them, but they need to accept the conditions.

In the present of Joel, the destruction has been done, there is no place left to turn, there is nothing they can do to fix the situation.

This is something that the Lord does even today as He works to shape us and mold us to be more like Him. He places us in situations that only the Lord can provide a way out for us or direct us to that next step we need to take in faith.

Don't respond with despair, respond with faith. “Joel affirmed that God had not finally rejected them and that he was yet ready to heal them. The call here is for repentance, an attitude of remorse for sin and a cry for forgiveness that weeping and fasting visibly express.” (Garrett 1997, 344-346)

By the way, we are talking about true repentance here, not just a nod and an acknowledgement that says, “Yeah, I get it. I need to change and turn things around some day.” Joel is clear...the time is now.

I think it is also important to make clear what Joel is not saying. He is not saying to Judah that “you need to clean up your act and live right in order to see if God finds you worthy of being saved.” We think that, or at least I did, when we hear the Holy Spirit telling us that we need to take advantage of what it is Jesus Christ did on the cross for us. I never did get around to cleaning up things on my own by the way.

The Lord does not say, “get your life together and then come to me.” The call is clear and has not changed, change your mind and do so right now. Once that question has been settled, then we can deal with the various details as we move forward. As NT believers, we have serious assistance in the person of the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in us. All we are asked to do is what Judah was asked to do, repent now.

Joel 2:12

““Yet even now,” declares the LORD, “Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning;” (NASB 2020)

Procrastination is why Judah has arrived at this place. As we discussed before, we are here at this point now considering new recipes of how to make locust pie because of putting things off that needed to be done with urgency in the past but were not done.

The Torah provided clear direction to the Priests.

Why didn't the High Priest take action and make Joash King earlier? Easy, he was scared. He had a faith problem. He experienced fear, fear that arose from his and the Levites lack of faith in the Lord being faithful and standing behind the enforcement of His own laws regarding all the evil that Queen Athaliah was doing.

We do not read that they held a massive prayer meeting in the Temple as this was all taking place and then took action...no. What we see and conjecture from events is that God put them into a corner.

Stepping out in faith is scary. It was scary to the High Priest then, it is scary to us now.

We read about Gideon and his placing a fleece before the Lord (Judges 6:36 – 40) and lament his lack of faith. But he was scared, and the Lord helped him work through that fear.

As Joshua prepared for military action against Jericho, and seriously walled city, the Lord encouraged him as well (Joshua 5:13 – 15).

But when we opt not to take the next step, we may find it quiet or even begin to experience a bit of God's discipline.

Hebrews 12:6–7

“For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son he accepts. Endure your suffering as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?” (NET 2nd ed.)

I have studied those verse at length looking for loopholes and have discovered that they do not exist. He loves us and when we stray off the reservation or opt to take a path He is not approving of, we will experience the gentle nudges of a loving Father to come back to where we had been.

This is where Judah was.

They had become unbelieving believers. Did they have knowledge of Torah? Yes. Did they know what had to occur because of the Torah violations taking place with Athaliah and her minions? Yes. Did the Priests have their own armed forces to take care of all of this? Yes.

But they were scared, and they procrastinated. Why step out today in faith when you can wait till tomorrow and know for sure what you should do? Sometimes God simply says trust me, and then we must step out.

Jesus taught this lesson to His disciples when He was out for a stroll one early morning on the Sea of Galilee.

Let me set the stage for you. Jesus had just finished a dynamic Spirit filled message complete with the miracle of a buffet for five thousand people using five loaves and two fish. He needed some time away with the Father to decompress from the events that had taken place because Jesus knew that at the moment of a Spiritual high, was when Satan would attack.

Paul would warn about this as well.

1 Corinthians 10:12

“Those who think they are standing firm had better be careful that they do not fall.” (GNB)

Jesus modeled ministry for us and here He is showing us where true power comes from, it comes from communing and being with the Father in prayer. Many times, we want to see the Spirit move in power, but how much have we talked to the Lord about it ahead of time? Yes, there are those times He will move despite us, but like Jesus, we also need to be deliberate about our relationship and obedience to Him.

After spending some time in prayer, Jesus decided it was time to walk over to where His disciples were and join them...in the middle of the Sea of Galilee. It is about His choice of a short cut to His team and of where He walked that brings up the topic of faith.

Matthew 14:25–29

“Between three and six o’clock in the morning Jesus came to the disciples, walking on the water. When they saw him walking on the water, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost!” they said, and screamed with fear. Jesus spoke to them at once. “Courage!” he said. “It is I. Don’t be afraid!” Then Peter spoke up. “Lord, if it is really you, order me to come out on the water to you.” “Come!” answered Jesus. So Peter got out of the boat and started walking on the water to Jesus.” (GNB)

Peter got it, he too wanted to go boardless so Peter stepped out in faith and then took His eyes off Jesus. When we step out, as the Priests should have, they needed to be ready and eyes on the Lord.

Back to Peter. After he took his eyes off the Lord and looked around at where his faith had taken him, he panicked. But notice who was right there with him.

Matthew 14 :30-31 “But when he noticed the strong wind, he was afraid and started to sink down in the water. “Save me, Lord!” he cried. At once Jesus reached out and grabbed hold of him and said, “How little faith you have! Why did you doubt?”” (GNB)

I’m sure there must have been discussions later with Peter about what was it like out walking on the water. John and the others probably thought to themselves, why didn’t we jump out there too?

Here is the thing, Peter stepped out, everyone else procrastinated. They were thinking, “let’s see how it goes for Peter here first.” Or possibly they were in the corner of, “no, just a little too scary for me.” So, what about John?

I find it interesting that John, who pointed out that he won a footrace with Peter (John 20:4) is silent in his gospel about Peter walking on the water and no one else doing so (John 6:1 – 21).

Looking at this after the fact though, why, why didn't we step out too. Wow, to be with Jesus out on the water.

The enemy is usually behind procrastination and as we can tell from John and his behavior, it can also be something we do not want to talk about later. If only we had stepped out with the Lord earlier. We all struggle with this by the way.

The priests didn't start off by being procrastinators, but they did fall into it as it is one of the traps that the enemy uses. We fight this today. "Unintentional procrastinators put off doing what should be done because of one or more of these five underlying roots: perfectionism, poor self-worth, fear, lack of goals, and feeling overwhelmed. These unintentional procrastinators want to change but don't know how to change. They don't know why they do what they don't want to do, nor do they know how to begin doing what they do want to do. Eventually, wave after wave of hopelessness overtakes them.

However, if they can gain wisdom about themselves and about God's will ... and His willingness to help them, not only can their lives be changed but their futures can also be full of hope...." (Hunt 2008, 3)

God has provided the swift kick in the north forty here to catch the attention of the nation. Reminder, there is something Moses told you on my behalf that is part of the Torah. Do you remember this about what happens if you repent and return?

Deuteronomy 30:9–10

"The LORD your God will make the labor of your hands abundantly successful and multiply your children, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil. For the LORD your God will once more rejoice over you to make you prosperous just as he rejoiced over your ancestors, if you obey the LORD your God and keep his commandments and statutes that are written in this scroll of the law. But you must turn to him with your whole mind and being." (NET 2nd ed.)

This call to repent here in Joel, comes directly from the Lord. There is no wiggle room here.

The time to do this is right here and now. Even though everything is dark, and you are now sharing recipes for barbecued locust kabobs, there is still hope.

God is the one making this appeal, not Joel. God is the one who is ready, willing and able to save no matter how desperate and hopeless it looks.

Joel 2:12

"Yet even now," declares the LORD, "Return to Me with all your heart, And with fasting, weeping, and mourning;" (NASB 2020)

Joel 2:13

"And tear your heart and not merely your garments." Now return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and compassionate, Slow to anger, abounding in mercy And relenting of catastrophe." (NASB 2020)

The call is simple, right now is the time to take radical action. As it pertains to repentance and coming/returning to the Lord, here is the thing, it is always time for radical action to take place. Why would we want to go one minute more with not being back in relationship with the creator of the universe? God is the one who is taking the initiative here, not us. What should be our response to this gracious act of God?

Yes, judgement has taken place, the locusts ate everything, then it stopped raining and fire is burning up what is left. I thought about trying the JTB diet but being forced onto the John the Baptist diet isn't all it's cut up to be. It's bad. But it could be worse.

Or to the Israel of the Tribulation. Yes, you listened to and cut a deal with a con man who then turned around and declared himself to be God in the very temple he enabled you to build, and now he wants to finish off all of you, but it could be worse.

Because they heard the warning of judgment, God's people should repent. It's doesn't make their repentance less valid because they had to be "scared" into it. The important thing is that they turn back to the LORD in sincerity, and God tells them how. (Guzik 2000, Joel 2:12-17)

Being scared straight is ok if it means we turn to God and away from sin. We simply must exercise some faith and just do it. There is nothing you have to do first, just this.

Oh, we need to mean it, this is a life changing decision.

Are you serious about this? It is okay to show it.

The change is in your heart, it is an agreement with God about our fallen sinful condition and the need for a savior. "But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'" (Luke 18:13, ESV)

Joel is telling Judah and us that God is waiting for you, to return to Him. Let me let you in on a secret, here is why you should return to Him.

Yep, that's right. The Creator of everything has stopped, taken notice of you and is waiting on a response. This is very personal now. Why?

Because God is gracious. "The only true God, who is just in all his judgment and sovereign in all his rule, is a God of grace. He wants to be known this way." (Piper 2012, 143)

Titus 2:11

"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people," (ESV)

Joel continues. God is compassionate. He is just. Judgement is coming "but not final because He is a loving, compassionate, and faithful God who will remain faithful to His promises to provide the nation of Israel a future of hope and restoration." (McAlack 2020)

Yes, the hammer has fallen, but God would rather lavish His love on you, if you return to Him, than judge you.

God is slow to anger. We are used to a world filled with retaliation, where getting even is valued almost as a virtue. "But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness." (Psalm 86:15, ESV)

God abounds in mercy. "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." (2 Peter 3:9, ESV)

God is promising to not give Judah what they deserve but instead, if they repent, to lavish on them that which they do not deserve and did not earn. He is promising His grace.

And here is the shocking thing, it looks like you really can change God's mind about not finishing what He started.

Joel 2:14

“Who knows, He might turn and relent, And leave a blessing behind Him, Resulting in a grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God.” (NASB 2020)

Because God is indeed gracious and compassionate and slow to anger and abundant in mercy, that means He provides us the time to come to our senses and repent of our sin. This is called grace. He is a God of grace, not of zapping. Even while in the reign of King Jesus, we see that 100 years to turn around is not unusual (Isaiah 65:20).

As we repent, and if we truly mean what it is we are saying, then we can change His mind. That thought alone is enough for me to start talking to myself. But God, who knows everything and knows of our decisions ahead of time knew we would repent.

This idea that the God of the universe, the same one that the Bible teaches never changes (Malachi 3:6) and clearly says He does not change His mind (1 Samuel 15:29, Psalms 110:4) actually changing His mind is mind blowing. I thought that one of God’s attributes is that He is immutable. How does this happen?

So, does He really change His mind, or do we confirm His love for us by reacting as He knew we would?

We will see a similar statement when we get to Jonah and read the comments of the Assyrian ruler.

Jonah 3:9–10

“Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish? Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.” (NKJV)

The statement in Joel as well as in Jonah is what is called, an anthropomorphism. This can be defined this way. “Because God formed Adam from the “dust of the earth” and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, making him in his own image and likeness, God makes himself known to his creatures in their likeness, as if he wears both their form and qualities, when in fact they wear his likeness.” He gets down to our level to communicate. (Piper, Taylor and Helseth, *Beyond the Bounds: Open Theism and the Undermining of Biblical Christianity* 2003, 161)

Yes, “God is immutable—He never changes. When His Word is rejected, when people turn from Him, they are lost. But when they turn to Him, He will always save them, regardless of who they are. Therefore, who changed? Did God change? No, but it looked as if He did.” (McGee 1997, 762)

Not only do we see that He relents, but He also provides a blessing instead. Remember, right now there is no way a grain offering, or a drink offering can happen, yet Joel says who knows, He might take care of that problem too.

The prophet expresses the hope that, upon repentance, He might command his reapers to leave some grain and fruit behind. The after Him would be better translated ‘after it,’ referring to a blessing left after the locust invasion. (Busenitz 2003, 154)

The blessing is not having the material things restored, but it is restored communion with God, a restored relationship with Him.

How do we get there? Joel - “Glad you asked that.”

Joel 2:15–17

“Blow a trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants. Have the groom come out of his room And the bride out of her bridal chamber. Let the priests, the LORD’S ministers, Weep

between the porch and the altar, And let them say, “Spare Your people, LORD, And do not make Your inheritance a disgrace, With the nations jeering at them. Why should those among the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’ ” (NASB 2020)

The first time the trumpet was blown was for a warning, now it is a call for everyone, all His people, to come together in the Temple as one. This forces the issue. Waiting for each person to return on their own may result in no one returning. Remember, one of the problems was a tendency to procrastinate. But this strikes us as strange.

We live in an individualistic culture, but Judah was not like that. The community was important and to have all who name the name of YAHWEH come together as one means that Judah is taking this matter seriously. The church is supposed to be similar in conduct.

Gathering at the temple is the way for the people, in practice, to return to the LORD. Left to each individual to make an inward journey back to God, the return would have been half-hearted, unreliable, and unverifiable. For the people to return to the LORD with all their heart meant that all the people needed to go together to one place at one time. (Prior 1988, 57)

Again, this idea is foreign to us. We have enough of a problem today in the west to even gather together believers for worship much less for corporate prayer, fasting, worship or humbling ourselves before the Lord in repentance for our nation. Our culture pushes that these days this is something to be done individually, not together.

We are incredibly naïve as a culture today if we continue to buy into this idea of going it alone. That is what Satan wants us to do, but it is a distinctive of western culture.

We are used to government being “by the people, for the people,” and we place a strong emphasis on individualism and independence. We define ourselves in terms of our rights and freedoms. By contrast, much of the world doesn’t see personal autonomy as an important value. Rather, they view people principally as members of groups—families, tribes, and nations—that make strong claims on the people’s loyalty.

What defines you are your relationships, and what orders your life are your responsibilities to others, not your personal freedom to do what you like. (Tverberg 2018, 38)

Our western view has impacted our worldview. A Biblical worldview understands there is no such thing as Lambo, the brave warrior lamb doing life on his own. But those who say they are believers tend to go there.

When I played football, the first thing that had to be dealt with was my individualism. A rugged individualist on the field is also known by another term, former player.

Football is a team sport. We were taught the importance of the team, were rewarded as a team and punished as a team. When I went offside in a game, we all ran wind sprints together. The running back cannot advance the ball unless others block for him and create the opportunity to advance the ball. There must be a change in identity that takes place. And this is a theme that does not go away.

Did I like doing extra wind sprints because the running back fumbled and we lost the ball. No. Did this incentivize me to be more alert to fumble recoveries, yes, because it meant no wind sprints.

Did it encourage me to go play on the defense, not really since I would prefer not to do a pushup for each point scored against us.

We did not lose a game, but tied one, because someone went offside and got a touchdown called back. Wind sprints.

I identified as a member of the team, and we had our own culture, mottos, sayings, and ways of doing business. We hung out together and accepted the fact that we were not admired by others, but we didn't care because we were all making the same sacrifices for each other. If we went above and beyond, we were recognized for doing so.

As believers in Christ, we are not individual performers either, but we are part of a much bigger team all under the leadership of a single leader who individually is inside each of us. But in the 21st century, teamwork still is a bad word many times.

In one Barna study, we discovered that there has been a shift in American Christianity toward the notion that discipleship is a solo effort, that the best way to grow spiritually is on your own. This trend echoes the cultural refrains of the moment: You do you. Find yourself by looking within. Speak your truth. (Kinnaman, Matlock and Hawkins 2019, 50)

But that is not what is taught in the Bible. That sure wasn't the culture of Judah.

Paul's warning that the world will enter a time when people will "no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching" (2 Tim. 4:3) but instead will "follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear" (v. 4) and "reject the truth and chase after myths" (v. 4) is an apt description of America at the start of the twenty-first century. (Barna 2016, Kindle Location 350-357)

The Bible teaches us this.

Proverbs 27:17

"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another." (ESV)

The analogy infers that the friend persists and does not shy away from critical, constructive criticism...As a result of his having a "hard" friend,—a true one—a man develops the capacity to succeed in his tasks as an effective tool, and in the end he will thank his friend for being hard as flint (see 28:28). (Waltke 2005, 384)

Hebrews 10:23–25

"Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise. Let us think of ways to motivate one another to acts of love and good works. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near." (NLT)

We must meet together and fellowship with each other because the day that Joel is writing about, is a day that is approaching very soon, and it is imperative that we lean on one another as we do battle with the enemy on a daily basis. Again, Christianity is a group sport.

Can we become more creative about how we do that? The recent experience with the pandemic has shown us that the answer is yes. Meeting in person is still the best, but online is now a viable option. This ministry, the UnSafe Bible, is online and went there initially because of the pandemic.

Can we fellowship if we can't get out of the house? Zoom, Skype and Facetime suddenly grew in popularity and also point to the new world we are in. What if the culture bans public gatherings? They did in many locations. We must be flexible to remain relevant in the culture today.

Can we continue to fellowship with one another and take part in each other's lives growing together in Christ if we cannot meet together in person? Once the Day of the Lord begins, Tribulation believers will become experts in this. Oh, by the way, we learned the answer is yes. The method was not preferred, but it did work.

I prefer to see and talk in person, but Zoom does work, the phone does work. I can pray with someone who has Covid over the phone and did so more than once. We must not though separate ourselves and become loners. The enemy wants that.

The enemy wants us one on one, so he can pick us off away from the rest of the flock.

What we see here in Joel is the entirety of Judah being called to show up at the Temple. Now the Priests will have to do their job...finally. There is no more putting off and no more procrastinating.

This is a national holiday, called by God, solely for the purpose of fasting and prayer.

For emphasis, the language changes to directive, almost military like with short directive phrases. The chance of misunderstanding has been removed.

Joel 2:16

“Gather the people, sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and the nursing infants. Have the groom come out of his room And the bride out of her bridal chamber.” (NASB 2020)

This consecrated fast requires everyone be there. Not only is this a day dedicated to this, but there will also be no exceptions at all.

1. Gather all the people in one place.
2. Sanctify them, sacrifice, repent and pray over, with and for them.
3. All the elders together as one.
4. The nursery and children's ministry will be going so bring the kids.
5. Anyone who had an exemption such as newly weds, there is no exemption from this.

The intent of these commands is clear, life stops right now for this. “No age, no rank, is to stay away, because no one, not even the suckling, is free from sin; but all, without exception, are exposed to the judgment.” (Keil and Delitzsch 1996, 131)

At the moment there is no place for normally legitimate human joy. The atmosphere of mourning must pervade every quarter in the hope that Yahweh will heed the conceited pleas of his people and turn away from wrath. (Allen 1976, 83)

Even the order of service has been dictated. This is so concerning that nothing is being left to chance, especially with the priests.

Joel 2:17

“Let the priests, the LORD'S ministers, Weep between the porch and the altar, And let them say, “Spare Your people, LORD, And do not make Your inheritance a disgrace, With the nations jeering at them. Why should those among the peoples say, ‘Where is their God?’ ”” (NASB 2020)

Two themes are paramount in the prayer to be said. Spare us is the minor theme, the major theme is concern for God's glory and how He will be seen by the nations if God does not move on behalf of His own people.

Joel gets this and so does our Lord. That is why there are no exceptions in the attendee list and why the methodology regarding repentance is so heavily dictated here. Are the people willing and ready to do what must be done in order to have the Lord save them? To repent?

The Priests will be leading the way in this. Their failures were a significant part of the reason the people are here, there are no sacrifices to worry about at present, the locusts took care of that. They will take their place at the customary location.

They must officiate between the porch and the altar. There they used to attend about the sacrifices, and therefore now that they have no sacrifices to offer, or next to none, there they must offer up spiritual sacrifices. There the people must see them weeping and wrestling, like their father Jacob, and be helped into the same devout frame. (Henry 1994, 1498)

Words here are put into their mouths, which they might in their prayers enlarge upon. Their petition must be, Spare thy people, O Lord! God's people, when they are in distress, can expect no relief against God's justice but what comes from his mercy. They cannot say, Lord, right us, but, Lord, spare us. We deserve the correction; we need it; but, Lord, mitigate it. (Henry 1994, 1498)

That is a hard prayer for us to even consider today, Lord, spare us. We believe our nation is blessed and it is. But what does our nation deserve?

We immediately begin to think about the condition of our country and many of the nations in the west today. Our nation today remains intact solely because of the mercy of God, those who love and remain faithful today to Jesus, and a discussion Abraham had with YAHWEH. But the question persists, has God removed His hand from our nation?

Even at that, we see things taking place in some parts of our nation that look and feel like some of the things that happened to Judah and Israel in judgement and stand in awe of our Lord and His mercy. We don't have locusts right now, but there is an invasion of Mormon crickets in eastern Oregon. Our nation has all the warning signs of God working to obtain our attention.

Are we listening? Are we standing up for Him?

Abraham's discussion with the Lord reflecting his concern for Lot over in Sodom.

Genesis 18:23–33

“Then Abraham came near and said, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; will you then sweep away the place and not forgive it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?” And the LORD said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will forgive the whole place for their sake.” Abraham answered, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking? Will you destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And he said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” Again he spoke to him, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” He said, “Let me take it upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.” Then he said, “Oh do not let the Lord be angry if I speak just once more. Suppose ten are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” And the LORD went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place.” (NRSV)

Our problem today is the same as Judah. Procrastination. We just did not have the time to engage with the warning signs in the culture. We did not understand that as believers, we are at war, there is no time out, there is no half-time.

The enemy has excellent intelligence on you and me. He knows our weaknesses and mistakes. He has thousands of years of experience and can tailor an attack to specifically get your goat and no one else's. He can and will suggest we are more important than we really are, and he really wants to keep us away from worship at all costs.

The enemy has convinced us that the culture isn't really out of control, and we can participate in the culture without becoming part of it. It's okay to wink at white lies. It's okay to watch programming that celebrates those things which God says are evil.

I can put off going to church this weekend because the weather is nice, and the boat is calling. I can put off serving and going to small groups or Bible study. I have lots of time and I need to work. "“But God said to him, ‘You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?’” (Luke 12:20, NLT)

Ephesians 6:10–13

“A final word: Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. Therefore, put on every piece of God's armor so you will be able to resist the enemy in the time of evil. Then after the battle you will still be standing firm.” (NLT)

Our need is the same as Judah's, we must, as His people, repent and pray.

Judah was compelled by God to do so. He removed the option from them. In the church today, we see it as optional. The last time of fasting we had here saw about 15% or so choose to be involved.

Do we see the need to pray? Do we see the need to repent on behalf of our nation? Are we convinced our nation is deeply in trouble?

If we have been compelled to pray, then we will be mobilized into action. Let's assess the needs and plight of the people in the community in which we live. Is there a need for us, for our churches, to rise up together and pray? To mobilize and take action? To mount up an attack on the strongholds of our common enemies? To take back lost ground, and to build a wall of protection around those who are desperately in need? Of course there is. (Elmore 2016, 89)

You see, we are in the same plight as Judah. Our problem isn't locusts, it's a culture that has embraced everything that God says is an abomination. It is a culture that says evil is good and good is evil (Isaiah 5:20).

It is time to become a watchman on the wall and say enough and begin praying for our city, state and nation. Let's start right now.

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