

II. Joel in Biblical Perspective  
*A Minor Prophet with a Major Message*  
“The Day of the Lord Revealed by Days from the Lord”  
Joel 1  
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June 22, 2014, Evening Sermon

Joel 1:1-4 says [1] *The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:* [2] *Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?* [3] *Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation.* [4] *What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.*

If you desired to attack and bring low an adversary or if you were a nation or a movement and you were going to bring low, bring to defeat, strike a crippling blow at another nation, what would you do strategically? What would you do tactically? You would do everything you can to take out what you think they are putting their trust and their hope in. In Japan, the Japanese decide to invade and realized to attempt to intimidate America would be strike at the fleet of ships at Pearl Harbor. Of course that did not accomplish what was desired because first of all it wasn't what the country depended upon and secondly it was not done to completion or fruition but think about what you would strike at. You would strike at the heart and soul of that nation.

So sometimes the most helpful way for us to determine in this country, where we as Christians reside in this nation, what is the assessed hope for this nation is, is to look and see what the enemies attack. Satan will always attack the church because he knows the church is the true and actual hope but other enemies will not necessarily attack the church unless they think it is necessary. You would think our enemies, any nation or movement that would want to come against this nation, would attack anything related to the spiritual dynamic of this church. Why would I say that? Look at what is on our money – “In God we trust.” It has actually been voted as our national motto, yet in 9/11/2001 there was no attack on the church.

The assessment of radical Islam was the hope and trust of this country was in Wall Street and the Pentagon. The church, even though it was a religious movement attacking, a Jihad movement attacking they just bypassed the religious institutions. Their assessment was that this country's hope is its military might and its economic might. In other words, they would say what ought to be on our money is “In Money we trust.” It's not always been that assessment and other than Pearl Harbor the only other true invasions of this country was in the War of Independence with the Declaration of Independence and then the second war which took place after that which was the War of 1812. In both cases, the British invaded.

It was interesting what the British assessed about this country. The Declaration of Independence was read in Parliament after it had been signed and sent declaring our independence. When it was read in Parliament a parliamentarian stood up and the first words out of his mouth after hearing the Declaration of Independence was, “Cousin America, has run off with a Presbyterian parson.” That was their verdict. They did not look at our economic or military might but they looked at the movement of this nation being rooted, and dare I say, in a Presbyterian parson. Historically they are referring to Jonathan Witherspoon and other such men for not only was he in that continental congress but he in our language had ‘discipled’ thirteen of our delegates there and it had an unbelievable influence on them. So when the British invaded it

is no accident by strategy yet some of their generals would not do it, but many would and the first thing they would do when they came into a town to suppress the rebellion or in the War of 1812 was to occupy churches and empty the pulpit of preachers. To make a further statement many times they would use the churches as stables for their horses. That was their evaluation of where our hope and trust was as a country.

The enemies of this country today do not make such an evaluation. Before you decide to get huffy and puffy about America no longer putting her trust in the Lord, I think we have to take a look at ourselves. The only time a nation will be moved to securing its spiritual foundation as a priority is when the church has done it, propagates it and accomplishes it. The reason those things were done in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is because of the Great Awakening and the great awakenings that succeeded after that but there is no great awakening now for there is very little awakening. It doesn't take a rocket scientist or great sociologist to take a look at the very conditions of this nation now and see its moral decline and its spiritual impotency. It's not hard to see that.

We are actually still convinced that an election is going to turn this nation around. I'm all for elections and I work hard for them. I think it's very important who occupies offices in our country but I am saying as clearly as I can that this country is in a trajectory of destruction and its only answer is not coming from Wall Street or the Pentagon or the White House. Its answer will only come from Church street but Church street is empty. Look at our Sunday evening service or building after building. Look at the emptiness that is taking place. God's people having been blessed by the Lord have forgotten Him and they are at ease in Zion, even though everything is crumbling down around them and clear messages are shouting to us of what we're about to hand off to our children and grandchildren. It is because the salt is no longer salty and the light is no longer shining. It isn't present.

Joel ministered in such a day. We don't know much about Joel and his name means "Yahweh is God." We are not sure about what kingship he ministered in or even the date he wrote this but we know his name, his father's name and that he ministered in a day in which a plague of epic proportions had hit the covenant people of God, who had been delivered from Egypt, brought into the Promised Land, the monarchy had been divided and this was a moment in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century that they were now at the zenith of their popularity and influence, militarily and economically since the days of Solomon. In the midst of this comes a devastating plague.

The text tells us there were four strands that were interdependent and entwined with each other. The most predominant one were waves of locusts that would be followed by another wave, then another wave and another wave. There was also famine in the land which you would expect when the locusts hit. They had nine words for locust in the Hebrew language. Locust was an issue. They couldn't just call someone to get rid of them. They would plant and here they would come and did you know one locust starting the process of laying and hatching its eggs, if lives for the next ten months will produce eighteen million offspring. When the locust would come through they would devastate everything and the result would be a famine. The third piece of it was a drought and the fourth piece of the plague was uncontrollable fires that would consume whatever was not eaten by the locusts. It is in that day of adversity that Joel writes.

In this passage Joel refers five times to what this day of adversity from the Lord is pointing to. It is a term that is found fifteen times by the other prophets and the phrase is 'the Day of the Lord', the inevitable, irreversible, destructive, final day of the Lord when His unmixed wrath will consume the heavens and the earth and all who have stood against Him,

individually and as nations, will be swept away in the Day of the Lord. Joel says these days are here from the Lord to tell you that Day is coming. Now what does that call us to do?

Joel, in his first chapter, gives seven commands to the people of God in light of this devastating plague that has come upon them with fire, famine, drought and all of the things that have descended upon them. Here are his seven imperatives. The first one is found in Joel 1:2. Here he is speaking to the leaders of the church and through the leaders to the people. Joel 1:2 says [2] *Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land!* Something has occurred and the closest thing in history that has happened like this was in Egypt whereby you were freed by the Lord but you have seen nothing like this plague in all of its proportions so elders listen up and not only the elders but all the inhabitants of land. Here is a message to the leaders of God's covenant people whom He has blessed and to all of the people through the leaders as they consider this.

By the way, this is a lesson that needs to be passed from generation to generation to generation. Tell it to your children and tell your children to tell it to their children. This is something that is to be passed on because there is a lesson embedded here that must be embraced, understood and learned from. So Joel's first imperative is to 'hear this' that is about to be spoken.

Then he goes to the second imperative which is found in Joel 1:5-7 which says [5] *Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. [6] For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions' teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. [7] It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white.* Joel tells them they are to 'awake' from their drunkard slumber, O drunkards.

He is looking at a phenomena that has occurred among God's people. God had blessed them vineyards and produce and they had taken the vineyards of God's blessings and made the fruit of the vine their god as they had imbibed themselves in their alcohol. This is not saying there is no place at all in the life of anyone for wine but this is very clearly saying that they are now engaged in the idolatry of this drink and it's proven by their drunken existence. They have anesthetized themselves in the midst of God's blessings. They have taken the blessing of fruitful vineyards and the fruit of the vine which would lead to the sweet wine and that has become the god of their appetite. So they have now become a nation of drunkards because they have been imbibing and putting their hope and all that they had within that. Now they can't do anymore because God's plague has just stripped their orchards and vineyards. Their idol has been cast down by the adversity of the Lord in the plague that has come. No more wine can be made if there is no vineyard. The locust, the drought, the famine and fire have removed it.

The third imperative comes in the Joel 1:8-10 which says [8] **Lament** *like a virgin* (a single woman anticipating her wedding) *wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth.* (Why is the bride wearing sack cloth and not a gown?) [9] *The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the LORD. The priests mourn, the ministers of the LORD. [10] The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.* His third imperative is that we are to 'lament.'

Then he tells us what we are to lament like. You are to lament like a virgin, which is a woman who has kept herself for marriage, but what now is revealed is her bridegroom has been cut off. Now she has no bridegroom so she has exchanged her bridal gown for sack cloth. This was the bride who was anticipating life, security, significance and that her existence would be

directly related, rooted in and embedded in her husband. When he was cutoff, now she goes to lament in sack cloth. Now he says ‘You were My bride and you did not put your hope in Me for you went after the gods of this world. You went to your crops, your wine, your fruit of the vine, your grain and now the day of adversity has come and there is no more wine, no more grain, no more fig tree for all of it has been removed. Instead of putting your hope in Me as your bridegroom you put your hope in all those things and now I have taken it away, the false lover, where you have put your soul, heart and hope. Therefore like a virgin who has lost her only hope in a groom you now lament because your hope is not in Me but in the things of this world that have been brought to you by My hand and so now I have removed it and your hope is gone. So what you have are not robes of joy but sack cloth.’

Then Joel gives a fourth imperative. This is found in Joel 1:11-12 which says [11] **Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. [12] 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.** The fourth imperative is to be ashamed and he now calls them the farmers who were the rich class because they were the ones producing the idols that everyone had put their trust in. He then tells the farmers, the tillers of the soil and vine dressers to be ashamed and wail. All of you who put your trust in what you were making off of the things you were producing that the people had turned into idols, be ashamed and wail. Not only has the Lord stuck down their idols and they are in lament, I have stuck down your idols which were your profits from producing idols for them.

What I’m about to say is not necessarily a point in the study but it’s one I want to make. Whenever you go against the idolatry of an age be assured that the battle is one of greed, the greed of men and women. For any woman who thinks that movements like Planned Parenthood are there for her well-being, I will assure you that they are not. It is an industry built upon death, sold with deceit to you. The industries of sin are industries and the reason they get so rooted in a society is people who sell them as idols for the people to buy in their idolatry are living off of its profits and they will fight to the bitter end for its existence. So it was with these farmers and vine dressers. The people had taken their product, not as a blessing from the Lord but as their life and their lord. Now it was wiped away. The people can produce it no longer because of the plague. Their idolatry has been exposed which was their industry of living off of the idolatry of others and their produce.

Joel gives a fifth imperative is ‘sackcloth/ashes’ which is found in Joel 1:13 and says [13] **Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.** It’s amazing how religious leaders will not speak to the sins of an age as long as the offerings are up or as long as the bottom line is there. There are various terms here that refer to the leaders, like ministers, priests, ministers of the altar and those are whom God put in place to teach, feed, lead, and shepherd His people. He calls them to put on sackcloth, wail, and lament because they would not speak against the sins of the people. God’s adversity has wiped out their idolatry but when God wiped out their idolatry He just wiped out all their offerings they are going to bring to the leaders. Now they have nothing to bring to them. Their sacrifices are no longer there. You leaders who would not speak to the idolatry because your bottom line was still being met, now God has erased their bottom line as He is dealing with their idolatry.

Then Joel goes to the sixth imperative which is to call for a fast and the seventh one which is to call for a solemn assembly and those are found in Joel 1:14 which says *[14] Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD.* We started with Joel addressing the elders and people, then we worked through every imperative and all the fears of society where God's people have been swallowed up in the idolatry of the age and now we are ending back up with the elders and people in the sixth and seventh imperative, speaking directly to them.

Joel gives them two commandments. Number one is to call for a fast. Then the seventh is to call for a solemn assembly. It is not the worship assembly. It is a solemn one that is one of confession of sin and repentance, beginning with the elders and then spreading through all the people, encompassing the tillers of the soil, the young women who have their hope in the wrong place and the men who have their hope in the wrong place. They are all to be called to a solemn assembly and to fast as they would put on sackcloth as I have called you to do and sit in the ashes of repentance. Why does He call for a fast and a solemn assembly? The hope is that they will call upon the Lord. Let's look at the next verse.

Joel 1:15-17 says *[15] Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. [16] Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? [17] The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up. [18] How the beasts groan! The herds of cattle are perplexed because there is no pasture for them; even the flocks of sheep suffer.*

All of the things you have looked to and worshipped have been stuck down by the Lord in the Day of Judgment and adversity telling you there is a greater day. These days of adversity are pointing to the day of the Lord and a final and ultimate destruction but we're not at that day yet. So call for a fast and a solemn assembly. Call for the people to call upon the Lord. He has been patient. He now is disciplining you. His patience in the past and His discipline in the past is calling you to call upon Him. Where else will you call? He has struck down all your idols. You who would trust in the fruit of the vine, it's gone. The product of the fields is gone. I have sent My own army, an army of locusts. Its teeth are as lion's teeth and it is devouring everything. In its wake come more locusts, fire and destruction. I have taken down your idols and what you have trusted in. You will either die with it underneath My judgment in the day of the Lord or in this day you will call upon the Lord.

Joel 1:19-20 says *[19] To you, O LORD, I call. For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and flame has burned all the trees of the field. [20] Even the beasts of the field pant for you because the water brooks are dried up, and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.*

So what is Joel saying to us in this first chapter with these commandments? Here are three takeaways from the text, for God's people having been blessed by God but have put the blessings in the place of God as idolatry and have forgotten their God, all the way from the leaders (those whom God had called to lead them) down to every sphere of society. The first takeaway is the days of adversity from the Lord are designed to remind us of the inevitable and terrible Day of the Lord. Every time you see the tragedies of this age they stand in the hand of the sovereign God to remind you that there is a day that is coming and after that Day there will be no rebuilding, no reclamation or repentance. The heavens and the earth will be rolled up like a scroll. Satan, sin, death, hell and the grave will be cast along with all who have rejected Christ

with the wrath of God. As God's judgment sends everyone who has rebelled against Him, assassinated His glory, have trampled under his feet the blood of His Son and have insulted the Spirit of grace to damnation the shout will be to the glory of God, in that Day.

It is in that Day that we want to be found, having called upon the Lord and turned from the idols of this age in order to put our trust in Him. How can we do this? The reason that in the day of adversity when you see the futility of the idols of this age and God shows us the sins of our idolatrous heart, we call upon the Lord for salvation if we don't know Him or for restored intimacy if we have wandered away from Him. The reason we can do that and escape the day of wrath is because 2100 years ago God sent His Son to the cross and that was the day of the Lord, not the Day of the Lord that is coming yet where He will bring judgment but it was the day He bore our judgment. It is that day that gives us our hope to call upon Him in repentance in this day.

Here is the second takeaway from this text. Days of adversity and/or patience from the Lord call God's people to repentance. I believe we have been in days of extraordinary patience in this nation as His church. I am amazed at God's patience with us. We have lost impact and influence. We haven't turned to the Lord and His Word. We turn to sociology and psychology, not theology. We have turned not to God's intervening sovereign grace but to our ingenuity and the result is that we have adopted methods that obscure the Gospel message or the call of the Gospel message. We have adopted messages whereby we desiring to be loved by the world, accepted and affirmed, have removed the very Message that would send them to Christ for salvation.

The reason people come to Christ is to be delivered from their sins and it's because we have identified sins. As we have identified sins we declare those who have not turned from those sins that the wrath of God is upon them. Every great awakening always preaches the Gospel of Good News by beginning with the bad news. There is no gospel. We don't come to Christ simply because we find the church lovely. I hope and pray the church is lovely for we need to be loving but people don't come because of that. Our meanness and lack of loveliness may shut down the opportunity to speak but people are converted when they realize they are under the wrath of God because of sin. Is there any hope? The hope is not the church or the Christian but the hope is the One that the church and Christian point people to and that is Jesus. What a Friend for sinners! So we have turned to everything other than the Lord in these days and therefore we are continuing to see the loss of impact and influence because we have turned from faithfulness to the Lord and the love of the lost with the full, whole counsel of God with the message of the Gospel.

When we face a catastrophe or tragedy, what is the first thing we do? We think we need to get God off the hook here. We feel we have to tell people that God didn't have anything to do with the catastrophe. Abraham Kiper said "If there is anything in this world that is out from under the sovereign hand of God then you don't have a God and I would forget Christianity." God is not simply out here trying to juggle the mutated spawns of chance collisions and catastrophes in this world. It is clear that Joel sees these things, not as something to apologize and remove God from under the scrutiny of His people, but to tell them that God is shouting to you in your pain. God is bringing you an unmistakable message.

Why did Joel see that? One reason why is that he knew his Bible. He interpreted what was happening from the Bible. Let's look at Deuteronomy 28. God had already warned of days like this and what would happen. Here is God's warning to His people whom He was about to give the land to. This is Moses' closing words to the people, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Deuteronomy 28:15-20, 36-41 says [15] *“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you. [16] Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. [17] Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. [18] Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. [19] Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. [20] “The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me.*

[36] *“The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. (That is about to happen to Israel and that’s called Assyria and Babylon but what will He do before that?) And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. [37] And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away. [38] You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. [39] You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. [40] You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. [41] You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity.”* And he goes on.

Joel is interpreting this as God using these things to discipline His people who have forgotten Him. It is as a father disciplining his children whom he loves that they might remember Him, return to Him and pursue Him. Jesus does the same thing for us. Let’s look at Luke 13. Here Jesus has asked a question about two tragedies that had occurred during His life on earth. The news was out and the people were wondering and asking questions about it.

Luke 13:1-5 says [1] *There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. [2] And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? [3] No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. [4] Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? [5] No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*

Jesus is telling them *“Are you asking me during these two tragedies whether these people were at fault or was someone else at fault as to why they happened.”* When these things occur your question should not be about them but it should be about you. The days of adversity are telling you that unless you repent you will likewise perish. Days of adversity are pointing to the ultimate Day of the Lord and calling you in this day to repent and return to the Lord. For some that would be for their conversion and for some of us it would be because we have forgotten the Lord and He is disciplining us that we would return to Him.

Let’s look at Romans 2:4-5 which says [4] *Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? [5] But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.* Look at God’s patience and kindness. In Luke 13 when the towers fell and the Zealots were killed by Pilot you are asking yourself about them when you ought to be asking yourself about yourself. Your question should not be ‘why did it happen to them?’ but it should be ‘why did it not happen to

me?’ There is one answer to this and that is the patience and kindness of God which like adversity is designed to bring us to repentance, to call upon the name of the Lord.

The third takeaway is the days of adversity from the Lord is reminding us of the Day of the Lord and bringing us to repentance that every day would be lived for the Lord and not forget Him but love Him and serve Him. If you know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, even though under our watch, the church of Jesus Christ walks away from the Lord, in that final Day you are forgiven and you’ll go to glory, praise His name! But on the way to that Day there will be days of patience from the Lord and days of adversity from the Lord and both are calling you and me to repentance because of God’s goodness to us at Calvary and what Christ did for us. We flee to Him. We flee from our idolatry. We lament it and put on our sackcloth and ashes and turn from it and we call upon the Lord.

God, be gracious to us! Restore us that we might walk in Christ and for Christ. Thank You for the day of the Lord at Calvary when He bore my judgment. Thank You for the days of patience with me. Thank You for the days of adversity where You are getting my attention because I am starting to wander from You. O God, those days are there whether patience or adversity to call me to repentance so that each and every day I might live to the Lord who loves me and who has loosened me from my sins.

Pastor, are you telling me that God brings judgment upon His people? Yes and no. God does not bring condemning judgment. He will bring corrective judgment among His people and His church. He can and does remove the lampstand. He can and does write ‘Ichabod’ over the door. Will that happen in the church in this nation under our watch? The answer is not found in our ingenuity or in our creativity. As much as I love both of those the answer is found in calling upon the Lord, confessing our sins, knowing He will forgive us, cleanse us and crying out to Him ‘O Lord renew a right spirit within me.’ Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together in this historic, almost raw, challenging text of Scripture where Joel is clearly affirming the day of grace is still here but also warning us that what we sow, we reap. Father, I beg You, I plead with You, that You would bring to us that glorious, Gospel truth that shows our sins that we will repent and call upon You. Those who have not yet called upon You in salvation that may be reading this, may they this day say ‘no’ to the vanity of the idols of this world that in one moment are swept away. Father, for those of us who have begun to embrace the blessings and forget the One who has blessed us, help us to repent and return to You. We who are the apple of Your eye, we whom Your Son bore the cup of wrath of eternity for, may we not grieve You or quench Your Holy Spirit in this day. May we surrender and welcome You. Do a work in Your church. Do a work in this church. Do that work in me, I pray in Jesus’ Name, Amen.