

Rend your Hearts
Joel 2:12-19

Matthew 13:10-30

Hebrews 10:1-22

Psalms 40:1-8

This morning we are going to be continuing in the second chapter of the book of Joel. Last week we left off at verse 12, looking at the first part of this book which shifted from talking about the current issue of the day, the swarming locust who devoured everything and subsequent fires burning up the remaining leaving the land desolate, the people tormented and the animals suffering. Then here in chapter 2, he pointed to something greater, a greater day of the Lord, a greater day of judgment painting a picture of not just Israel, but the whole world would be caught up in judgment, as he wrote in verse 2 here of chapter 2, "A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns, the land is like the Garden of Eden, and behind them a desolate wilderness, surely nothing will escape them." God coming in judgment of the world, with both death, and redemption in his wake for though he has come to judge the world, he has also come to gather his people to himself. This is the time of the wheat and the tares which we read this morning, "let them both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, first gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

The image we get in Joel, of the Lord's army coming in judgment is this moment of harvest, of gathering, and of burning the great day of the Lord when he comes and gathers his people to himself, and judges the sin of mankind. So that brings us to our passage this morning, in chapter 1 we see the destruction of the locust, and a call to repentance, a call to return to God. Though we are not given a hint or a reason here of the falling away of Israel of the time, we can see that God is judging them for it, and has brought desolation upon them so that they may seek him, and repent. In chapter 2, we see this larger issue, of the coming day, and Joel saying that now is the time to repent, as he says in verse 11 "For the day of the Lord is great, and very terrible, who can endure it? And the answer to that question is what we are going to read this morning, picking up here in verse 12. (read 12-27)

As we can see in our passage this morning there is much talk about the redemption of the land. Throughout this book there is the weaving back and forth between the current and the future as most prophecies seem to do. There is always a current issue, and a message about how this is a reflection of a future time as well. Here in verse 12 is a turning point of the prophet's message. Up until this point it has mostly been all doom and gloom, the pending judgment, the desolation of fire, but here he turns from destruction, to redemption. He asks, who can endure such a day, well the answer is, no one, so repent, and pray that God may relent. And this isn't just some mere ritualistic repentance, or an outward show but it is a complete and total change beginning with the heart, and expressing it outwardly. "Turn to me with your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning." The heart must be first, otherwise all other things have no meaning, the fasting, the weeping and mourning should be the natural outflow of a broken heart who sees their own failure, their own sin and rebellion against God and cries out for forgiveness, for mercy, that he may relent from his judgment upon their sin.

This rending of the hearts, this internal repentance has always been the point, it is the thing that everything else points to, the law points to the fact that no man can live worthy of God, no man can keep the law to its requirements. For the law isn't about action, it's about intention and purpose as we learn from Jesus' sermon on the mount, or as Paul writes throughout his letters, that the law was given to make sin exceedingly sinful, it was not given for redemption, but to point to the need of redemption, and the sacrifices did not forgive the sins of the people, the shedding of animal blood could never atone for the sins of mankind.

They were to point to the need of another, of the true lamb of God, of the one who was coming whose blood would wash away the sins of his people. Without this deeper meaning all these things become empty ritual, their power was the message, not in the process, they were the early gospel message pointing to the need for the promised Messiah, the messenger of God who would come to deliver his people not from Rome as some believed, not from physical oppression, but from sin and the spiritual oppression of Satan. We can come to him, because that is his desire, verse 13, "For he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness and he relents from doing harm." God uses such things as disciplinary, to drive his people back to him, when God deals with his people, he deals with his people as a father with a child, the goal is to teach, the goal is to bring repentance, this rending your heart, is a heart that is broken for the moment of rebellion against the father. Sometimes when we were kids, the greatest punishment was simply the fact that we disappointed our parents, that we let them down, and such things cause a sadness, a regret. So when we are confronted with our sinfulness, with our own rebellion against God, it should produce in us a great sadness and regret, not that we got caught, but that we did so in the first place.

The book of proverbs iterates many times, that a father who loves his children, will scold them, will hold them accountable, will teach, and will guide them in the right direction. Proverbs 13:24 says, "He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly." 22:15 says, "foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, the rod of correction will drive it far from him." We are small children, and sin and foolishness is a part of who we are but God's discipline drives it from us, as we are reminded of his faithfulness, of his forgiveness, and of his mercy when we repent. Proverbs 23:13-14 "Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod he will not die You shall beat him with a rod and deliver his soul from hell." In today's society such a statement sounds like justification for child abuse, that is the way that I think many would read this but that is not what is being said here. Without discipline, without the correction of bad behavior, a child grows up continuing in such. Solomon is not advocating for the beating of your child in abuse, but rather the disciplining of bad actions. Doing so trains them to be respectable and honorable adults, learning the consequences for actions, and the ramifications of sinful behavior.

So as we read passages like this in Joel, the author is imploring the people repent, you have done wrong, you know you have done wrong, God has sent discipline upon you, and this realization that you have caused such anger to such a loving father should cause you to turn and repent. I think that this is often lost on Christians today, the Holy Spirit works within us conviction, God doesn't always need to send a trial, he doesn't always need to send an overwhelming army against us, for the Holy Spirit speaks to us, convicts us, shows us our sin and that alone should drive us to repentance knowing that we have fallen short of the fathers expectation of us. So many don't give the spirit the recognition he deserves, and instead place before themselves laws and rules to regulate their life, to keep them pure, or sinless...but as we see with the old testament law, in the confession of Paul, it only drove him deeper into his own sin, for law made way for pride believing he could keep it flawlessly, when in his heart he was full of rebellion against God. Again God is not as concerned with what is going on physically in your life as much as internally, his concern is your heart, your desires, those secret things and out of a heart that is focused upon God, will then in turn produce the actions and life reflecting that inward reality. So much of religion today is the opposite, purify the body, make the outward appearance and action look holy, yet the inside, the intention, the heart is full of rebellion. For such an outward focus is not resting in God, it is an attempt to earn his salvation and love.

There is basically 2 perspectives here in this book, the perspective of the people, who were in the midst of suffering, and the perspective of God who knew exactly what was necessary to bring them back. We have a finite view, and understanding of the world around us, of what is going on in our own lives, as we live in time, moving through day by day not knowing what each day holds ahead of us. But God is outside of our concept of time, time as we know it is his creation, he himself is the beginning and end, he knows out waking up and our lying down, he has known us before the foundation of the world as Paul stated in his letter to the Ephesian churches. So verse 14 we see a question from the human perspective, "Who knows if he will turn and relent." From mankind's perspective, we don't know, how could we know, we don't know what the next hour is going to be, let alone the next few days, or months, or years. But God knows, and this is where divine sovereignty and man's choice exist, it is the sort of 2 sides of the same coin, we make choices and decisions and they are presented to us, but God has presented them, and knows the outcome.

To the people of Judah, this plague of locust just happened, they showed up and ravaged the land, but as we see Joel likens them to God's army, he sent them to bring judgment upon the people so that they would repent, so that they would return to him, and he know exactly what it would take. Our God is not a God who sits in heaven hoping for outcomes, he is a God who makes outcomes sure, he is a God who is in control and nothing befalls you that he first, is not aware of, and second has not allowed. I have said this many times before over the years, trials and hardships don't always have to be a punishment, sometimes we can have a tendency to think that something is happening to us as a punishment...and yes, sometimes that maybe true, but that does not always have to be the case. Sometimes it is for us to learn, sometimes it is for us to grow, sometimes it maybe for the benefit of others around us who witness our faith through such things, and sometimes it is God's way of calling his children, like with the locust, he knew what was needed to bring his people back to himself, he knows exactly what we need to bring us closer to him.

If we sit and think about it, we can all think of ways that God has used things within our own lives to bring us to where we are today. Proverbs 16:9 captures this realty in one sentence, "A man's heart plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." Often times I know a phrase, or I know a part of a verse in scripture but I don't know exactly where it is located, I will do a google search for the phrase to find where it is located, but google being what it is now always gives AI overviews of the verses..and they are usually pretty spot on, for this verse in Proverbs it says, "This phrase means that people naturally think, set goals for themselves and map out their own lives, but God holds the ultimate control and guides the final outcome. Human choice and divine power work together. Humans have minds to think, and freedom to make choices and set goals, but God sees the big picture and changes directions, opens doors, and closes paths to match his will. This proverb is to teach us to hold our plans loosely, it invites us to trust in God when things change and to rely upon him in all things."

So the call goes out here, Joel telling the people of Judah, cry out to the lord, rend your hearts, repent so that if he is willing God may relent. But God knows his people, God knows they will cry out to him, he knows that they will repent for that is the very reason he sent the locust upon them. The perspective that we should have as we look at this account, and as we reflect upon our own lives, or maybe as we endure our own trials is that we should ask God, what are we to learn from this. Nothing is random, and nothing is without purpose the driving force I think behind most things is to bring us to Christ, it is to drive us closer to him, to seek after him whether that be in salvation itself, or as believers for strength and deliverance.

Verse 15-17 is instruction to gather together, to pray, to worship, to cry out to God in this time of calamity as a nation, as a people. The idea of a community in Christ can not be understated either, we are not to forsake the gathering together, the reality is we need one another. There is a dual call here, Joel first calls the people to repent, and then he calls them to gather together and repent together, this effects both individuals, and the community. They are to cry out in remembrance of God's promises to them, to the promises of the land he has given them verse 17 Joel writes, "Let them say, 'spare your people o Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach. That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, where is your God?'" The priests here are making an appeal that God would relent because of their witness to the outside world. The pagan unbelievers from other nations could look upon Israel and say, look how their God destroys them, we should take advantage of this time to add their own land to ours. The cry from Israel is literally, do not let the suffering you have brought upon us, cause the outsider to disrespect you. The idea here, is that God will not only relent, but will follow with blessings as they turn to him, to show the outsider that God is indeed with them, and that he is a God who keeps his promises, and cares for his people.

It can be so hard to have this type of mindset, especially when you are right in the thick of whatever maybe going on in your own lives, or around us even corporately as believers. But this should be our prayer as well, do not let what you have promised be mocked, remember your people, deliver your people so that you may be praised. I don't know how many of you have been following what has been going on in places here in Michigan like in Dearborn which is not a predominately Muslim community, with Muslim leadership, and even majority influence over the police department. They have been emboldened now being a majority in that town, there is beginning to be some oppression of other views outside of Islam. The call to prayer blasts across the town, many residence complaining that it violates the noise ordinances...but those complaints are ignored. A local pastor confronted the township over such things in a meeting and was told by the mayor, he is not welcome in "their town" They have legalized religious sacrifices, and there have been accounts of animals being beaten and abused in the streets before being sacrificed, and now the latest...the mosques are suing the churches to silence ringing their bells because sharia law requires that nothing is louder then the call to prayer.

Churches have been mysteriously catching on fire not just here in the US, but across the world at a rate that has not been seen before. We may feel a little isolated from it here, but there is a spiritual war rising, with the rise of extreme atheistic communism in our own country, the rise of Islam who is taking advantage of our political climate to gain power there is a real threat toward our ability to speak openly, especially in some places in this country...I say all this, not to become overly political, but because of this very prayer in Joel, and I think it should also be our prayer as we meditate upon what is going on in the world around us... Lord, do not let your promises be mocked, do not let them bring a reproach upon your name. Joel it was the plague of locusts, the destruction of the land, for us today it is a growing threat of secularism, a blatant resentment for life itself, as states are passing laws allowing for abortion up the moments just before birth, as many celebrate the death of a political enemy and call for the death of many more, we may want to bury our heads in the sand but there are some evil forces taking root within our own nation. Joel implores the people to cry out to God to redeem the land itself, I don't think its far off to do the same, to pray for our country, to pray for those who make decisions that can impact our daily lives, and our ability to openly worship, and minister the gospel.

But we know in the end, God will not be mocked, we know that God will take care of his people, and we know that God is the final judge. So though we see a rise of such things, and we see what seems to be even a rise against even the idea of Christianity, we should not be discouraged for in it all, God is in control. As Joel writes in verse 19, “The Lord will answer and say to his people, Behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations.” Ultimately in the end, it is about redemption, it is about our reliance upon him as we continue in this faith, as we run the race of this life toward the prize. May we never lose focus of what truly matters, may we never lose sight of Christ, through all things trusting and leaning upon him.