

## Joel Part 2

Last week I continued the sermon series on the Minor Prophets, moving onward from the prophet Hosea to Joel. Some people might ask why to preach the Minor Prophets. Preaching from them is both a joy and a challenge. However, they can also comfort and encourage us. Fundamentally, preaching from these books is not different from preaching from any other section of Scripture. We need to listen to the prophets in their world, paying attention to how they used language and the historical context they addressed while at the same time attempting to hear how they handle our world. These sermons are not meant to be repetitive but to facilitate engagement with the inspiration of God's Word that mirrors the original power and urgency.

Let's pray. Father, we come this morning with joy and eagerness to learn more about the outpouring of your spirit upon the prophets. We seek to not only worship you, for our very lives depend on when the day of judgment comes. When that day comes, we pray that we will be the ones who have seen the one revealed to us in Jesus Christ, the one who can offer us that sure salvation. In the name of Jesus, we pray, Amen.

Let's begin with a quick review of the Book of the prophet Joel. Joel is unique among the prophets, for there is no indication of when the book was written nor about who he was. Joel was a fiery preacher, and Joel appears familiar with many other scriptural texts in his writing and never accused Israel of any sin. However, like other prophets, he announces that judgment is coming to confront Israel's sin, never saying why. Still, in my opinion, we already know about Israel's rebellion worshipping other gods and goddesses. Joel was a biblical author immersed in earlier biblical writings, and his reflection on them helped him make sense of the tragedies of his day and gave him hope for the future. Joel's writing remains relevant to us, for perhaps the most significant contribution of Joel is his promise of the outpouring of God's Spirit upon all believers. The fulfillment of Joel's prophecy became true since the Holy Spirit's arrival on the Day of Pentecost.

In chapters 1 and 2, Joel focuses on the Day of the Lord. The theme appears crucial to all of the prophets, describing events in the past when God appeared in a powerful way to save His people or confront evil. Think about the plagues and judgments in the book of Exodus that God sent upon Egypt to free the Israelites from slavery. Remember? Those plagues included the turning of water to blood, frogs, lice, wild animals, boils, thunderstorms of hail and fire, locusts, darkness, and the death of the firstborn. These past events point to a future when God would again confront evil among his people and the nations, defeating the evils of sin and saving the world.

So, chapter one is about a past day of the Lord where a recent disaster, a locust swarm, devastates Israel, recalling the day of the Lord against Egypt. However, now, the disaster plagues Israel. Joel calls on the elders and priests to lead the people in repentance and prayer. In chapter 2, Joel announces another Day of the Lord, only this time; it is the future. An imminent disaster is coming to Jerusalem through the imagery of locusts as God's army, like a cavalry of soldiers destroying everything in their path. Joel says, "The day of the Lord, who can endure it?" Joel calls on the people to pray and repent. Rend your hearts, not your garments, and return to God. Joel tells the people to stop their selfishness, for their repentance is just a show to get out of trouble, and God is not interested in fake promises. God forgives with mercy and love and is more powerful than wrath, so Joel asks God to spare his people.

In the book's final section, Joel sees an image of the future day of the Lord. So Joel writes three poems matching God's three-part response, expanding into a promise that one day in the future, the Spirit of God, His personal Spirit of life, will fill all people, found in the promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Ezekiel about the future, a restoration of the entire world, a new Eden. God's spirit would come to transform and empower His people so that they can love and follow him. Joel's book ends with God's forgiveness and mercy, the Day of the Lord.

We do not need the prophets to tell us that people do not change. We still have the same struggles and commit the same sins that have happened long before our time on earth. Sure, the age we live in is different from Joel's day. People are basically the same, so the point of all the minor prophets serves as a reminder to this culture of what will happen if we do not return to God. However, I believe the locust plague Joel recalled was real, affecting the land, and then takes that event drawing his lesson into an application. If repentance were not forthcoming, there would be a far worse invasion of their land, encountering an invaded attack of the nations.

I have been praying for those who have not returned to the church since the end of the pandemic. Most of you here wonder where they are, and I can only assume some have wandered, losing their dedication to faith and fellowship. Those who have not returned contribute to the de-churching of America, seeking who knows what. Only 18% of those claiming as Evangelical Christians now go on occasion to church. Once every six weeks. The Spirit of the Lord has not fallen upon everyone; if it did, we would see the Spirit's evidence among those who are not here. I want to read from 2 Timothy chapter 4. **"I solemnly urge you in the presence of God and Christ Jesus, who will someday judge the living and the dead when he comes to set up his Kingdom: <sup>2</sup>Preach the word of God. Be prepared, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. <sup>3</sup>For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup>They will reject the truth and chase after myths."**

The Spirit says we are to worship God. I feel like Moses in the book of Numbers chapter eleven, when Moses said to Joshua, **"I wish that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his Spirit on them."** The people of Moses complained constantly because they were not being fed what they wanted. Cry me a river, for the truth hurts. So, the wind of the Lord went out and drove quail in from the sea, bringing them down all around the camp as far as a day's walk in any direction. While the meat was still between their teeth, and before it could be consumed, the Lord burned against the people and struck them with a severe plague." Why? They craved other food! I will give more thoughts on this later.

We talk about the Day of the Lord in our time, at least we should, and the second coming of Christ referred to in 2 Peter 3 and Acts chapter 2. However, here in Chapter 2, this differs from what Joel is talking about. If the people would take a call to repentance seriously, God would shower his blessings upon them. Follow along with me as I read from Chapter 2, verses 25-26. "I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm the great army I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed." Additionally, there would be a spiritual blessing later, as we read previously in verse 28.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of Joel is his promise of the outpouring of God's spirit upon all believers. Joel's prophecy of Pentecost comes to this completed picture—verse 28. “And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people (meaning all believers). Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, and your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.” On the day of Pentecost, people witnessed that sign where they spoke in languages not studied. Peter says these men are not drunk, but from what the prophet Joel said would **happen. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, prompted by God to speak the right word at the right time in the right time. The Holy Spirit reminds me to speak these words to those of you here today.**

Peter says, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming, The Day of the Lord will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness” (2 Peter 3:10-13).

When the time comes for God to make His judgment, there will be no escape. Remember Moses and the people who complained? The same people God struck with a plague. The God of judgment promises that day will come, as we read from 2 Peter. Some people will be ready; some will not. When God decides, we will all stand before Him. Peter tells us that having been given the gift of the Spirit of God, we are to use the gift. We should use it to “call upon the name of the Lord.” That means we are to worship God, as Abram did in Genesis 12:8, always calling on the name of the Lord for our lives. When the day of salvation and judgment comes, it will not be those who suddenly turn to God in desperate attempts to have their eternal lives spared. Instead, throughout their days, it is those who have seen God as their one security and way.

It is in his name on which we are to call. Only the God of the Scriptures, fully and finally revealed to us in Jesus Christ, can offer us that sure salvation. He is the Lord and no other. He is enough. He is the center. He is the source of life and hope. We call on him, on his name, or we cannot call at all. This world's petty powers and useless idols have no protection to offer us. **“For there is no other name under heaven given among men and women by which we can be saved” (Acts 4:12).**

In closing, to call on the name of the Lord means also to tell others what he has done, to be his witnesses throughout the earth. This is the task the apostle Paul has in mind when he quotes Joel 2:32 in Romans 10:13. How can people call on the name of the Lord when they have never heard of his deeds and words? How can people hear without someone to tell them? So those who have been given the Spirit of God are to tell others the glorious good news—that others too may be saved, that others too may escape God's final judgment on their lives and enter into his eternal kingdom through the forgiveness and love of God shown forth in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. Amen.