

"JOEL, WALK THRU THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for Sermon: Joel 1:1-4; 2:1-2; 12-13; 25-29

Introduction.

Good evening, we start this evening with breaking news, this just in from our reporter in Israel.

“An invasion of locusts ravaged the land of Israel this week leaving no green thing alive. The thoroughness and savagery of the insect army was beyond any similar invasion in the memory of the oldest citizens of the land. As an eyewitness put it:

Joel 1:4 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.

“Wave after wave of insects have attacked the foliage, laying waste the grape vines, splintering the fig trees, stripping their bark ... Palm, apple and pomegranate trees are all withered, as are the fields of wheat and barley. [No one is spared, everyone is impacted, the tillers of soil, the vine dressers and the harvesters.] The plague has created a religious crisis as well, because the priests have no food or drink for their daily offerings in the Temple” (David Hubbard, *Themes from the Minor Prophets*, p. 28-29).

On a bit of a lighter note one witness observed it was so bad even the drunks had nothing to get drunk with (Joel 1:5).

New reports of calamity have been around for a very long time. Year after year, century after century, calamity upon calamity, the news never changes. Two-inch letters scream at us from the front-page announcing trouble and tragedy somewhere in our world. The evening news leads off with the worst of breaking news from reporters all over the world.

Joel

Who is this reporter from Israel anyway? His name is Joel which means “Yahweh is God.” His father’s name is Pethuel. That’s it, no other facts. He may be the

least known of all the prophets of Israel. There's no reference to kings or times or places. He seems to be familiar with priests and temple activities which suggests he may even have been from Jerusalem.

He's the prophet of the Day of the Lord, five times he announces the coming Day of the Lord (Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14).

Joel is the prophet who by special revelation from God teaches us about calamity, what they are, where they come from and how we should respond to them.

What are calamities? What should we understand about and learn from disasters?

How are we to think about them? Where do they come from? Does God send disasters?

Is it just chance, accident, fate, one of life's mysteries? Bad things happen. Is it mother nature, atmospheric conditions, climate change, tectonic plates? Is it demonic, forces of evil, the power of Satan?

Yes, bad things do happen and often they seem to arise out of the forces of nature. And we who believe in the Bible know behind all this are spiritual forces of sin and evil.

But there's more to it. Joel 1:15 announces:

Joel 1:15 Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

Does God send disaster? Is God the cause of great troubles that come?

Whenever some great calamity strikes our world and the pictures are posted on the internet, down in the comments section below there are always the compassionate souls who write "God bless you and we are praying for you and God is with you." And always there are those who then lambast the saints with vile words saying "what do you mean you are praying for them and God is with them. It's plain to see there is no God or this wouldn't have happened. What kind of terrible God do you believe in anyway? Give up this foolish nonsense of a God."

But human opinion is not the only evidence to be considered. What does Scripture say?

Jeremiah 23:12 ... for I will bring disaster upon them in the year of their punishment, declares the LORD.

Isaiah 45:7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things.

Lamentations 3:37-38 Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?

[38] Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?

God is not an absentee landlord. He didn't create the universe and then retire to Hawaii. Not only did He create everything, but He's in constant, active control of everything He created.

God is in control of locusts, plagues, armies, angels, kings and presidents; heat shields on space shuttles, terrorists bombs, airplanes that fly into buildings, flash floods, cancer cells, bacteria, babies who die in their cribs, birthday parties that get rained on, car parts that break on vacation, deaths of famous people like Ozzie Osborn and John MacArthur.

Our insurances companies agree, floods, earthquakes and hurricanes are called "acts of God."

Calamity teaches us to recognize the hand of the living God, Joel 1:19-20.

Calamity teaches us to recognize the power of God, Joel 2:11.

Calamities are God's warnings, God object lessons or children's sermons. God sends warnings, seismic events, things to wake us up and get our attention.

Calamity teaches us to recognize that there is a coming Day of the Lord in which God's final judgment will come.

Calamity teaches us to recognize that God is about more than just our comfort and happiness.

Joel's name says it all, Yahweh is God. He is sovereign, He rules and reigns over all things. He controls the tsunamis of nature and the personal tsunamis that crash on the shores of our lives.

Job knows this firsthand. He lost everything.

Job 1:21 He said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.”

Job 2:9-10 Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” [10] But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

How to cope with calamity.

How do we deal with the calamities that warn us of the coming day of the Lord?

C.S. Lewis famously wrote in his book *The Problem of Pain*, “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

Every trial and trouble and difficulty is God’s messenger and it’s saying something if we will stop and listen. When God speaks He expects us to *respond*.

Joel emphasizes the importance of the response and how wholehearted it must be.

Note the nine responses in Joel 2:15-16:

Joel 2:15-16 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly;
[16] gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders;
gather the children, even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

Note the urgency. There is something worse than locusts, they are only the shadow, the foretaste. The day of the Lord is coming and it may include a vast military invasion, Joel 2:1-11.

And of course in Scripture the great and coming day of the Lord also always points forward to Jesus and His return ushering in the great judgment and final reckoning for all humanity. Who can endure that day? Joel gives the answer.

Repentance.

The prophecy of Joel is a wakeup call, a radical call to a radical repentance. Repentance is the only way to avert final judgment and total destruction. There are only two kinds of people, repentant and unrepentant.

Think for just a moment about what God has put in His Word. Blessings and curses, promises and warnings, God's yes and God's no. But what do we read and want to hear? Why do you think Praise 106.5 is just positive and encouraging? Is that a health diet, a biblical balance?

What do good parents feed their children? A balanced diet, fruits and vegetables, and sweets and dessert. Parents say yes and no. Parents who don't discipline their children don't love them. God loves His children and He gives equal measure of promises and warning, positives and negatives. That is a divinely balanced Biblical diet of truth for the good of our souls.

Beware if your Scriptural diet, or what you read or listen to is only positive, loving, gentle, kind, soft, flattery, what you want to hear. Our sinful hearts need hard truth, God's firm discipline.

True repentance involves our whole minds, hearts and lives.

The essence of repentance is a radical change of mind, heart and will. This is only accomplished by the inner work of the Holy Spirit.

True repentance is a change of *mind*. We have a change of mind about sin. We think differently than we did before. Before we thought sin no big deal, or at least not as big a deal as lots of other people's sins.

Now we see it as an offense against a holy God. Now we hate it, loath it. Now we see it the way God sees it. Now we see even the smallest or most insignificant sin as an expression of contempt toward God, an act of idolatry and adultery.

True repentance is a change of *heart*. We are truly sorry and sad. Our hearts are broken and contrite. We grieve that we drove the nails into Jesus' hands. We grieve that we have grieved and quenched the Holy Spirit. We grieve we have caused our Heavenly Father great displeasure. We grieve we are the cause of Jesus' suffering and death on the cross.

Joel 2:12-13 captures this aspect of repentance, “*rend your hearts.*”

True repentance is a change of *life*. We don’t just repent *of* our sins, we repent *from* our sins. We don’t just hate them, we don’t just grieve them, we repudiate them, we forsake them, we turn and run from them, never wanting to return to them.

Joel 2:13 captures this aspect of repentance, “*return to the Lord.*”

True repentance is Zacchaeus verses the Rich Young Ruler.

Isaiah 55:7 Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him.

Why am I preaching repentance to believers? Isn’t it just pagans who need to repent? Have you ever noticed that most of the calls to repentance in the Bible are to those who belong to Israel or to the church?

1 John 1:8-10 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

When was the last time you truly repented and shed tears over your sin? Not for getting caught, but for what they did to our Father in heaven and to His Son and to the Holy Spirit.

Heaven rejoices over the repentance of one sinner.

The response of the Lord.

In response to our response notice all Joel has to say about what God will do.

I will restore what the locust has eaten, Joel 2:25.

Sin is sin and its effects remain in us and with us, but God breaks its power and restores personal holiness and joy to the point people can even say they are glad for the past for it has produced the fruit of holiness, peace, deliverance, and hope and joy they never before dreamed possible.

Even the locusts become grace, as is every warning of God. Jonah's whale is grace, Peter's rooster is grace, Paul's thorn in the flesh is grace, the cross is grace, all the warnings of the Bible are grace, all the judgments of God and the calamities of God are grace to those who heed them.

God is there in judgment (locusts) and He is there in restoration (restore what locust destroy).

I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, Joel 2:28-29.

God is the God of salvation who pours out His Holy Spirit on all flesh. The essence of salvation is the present and abiding power of the Holy Spirit. The deliverance from sin and the indwelling of the Spirit.

Which is the greater miracle? The destroying locust or that God completely restores all the locust had eaten? God sending disaster or God sending His Holy Spirit?

Joel anticipates the Pentecost blessings of God. And what happened when the Spirit fell? 3000 people repented and believed.

It shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved, Joel 2:32.

In Romans 10, Paul insists that the fundamental Christian confession is that Jesus is Lord (Rom. 10:9). Everyone who trusts in Him will never be put to shame (Rom. 10:11; Is. 28:16). This is our faith; this is our life.

Here we are again in the OT preaching the Gospel. Return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and forgiveness (2:13).

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

Joel 3:14-16 For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

15 The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.

16 The Lord roars from Zion, and utters his voice from Jerusalem,

and the heavens and the earth quake.

But the Lord is a refuge to his people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.

Jesus is the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near. Heed the warnings of God.

Prayer: Father, hear our prayers and our cries for mercy. Increase in us faith, deepen in us trust, and widen our hope, confident that you are God and you are completely in control of all things at all times and nothing can overwhelm you or surprise you or separate us from you and your love for us in Christ Jesus. Father after the example of David and the testimony of your Scripture again and again, it is right for us to pray for your judgment on all evil and wicked men who persecute your Son and the members of His body. Put all the enemies of your Anointed One under His feet. By your just judgments send clear warning that all are without excuse if they don't repent. And comfort and save those who suffer for the sake of Jesus and deliver them out of the hand of their enemies. Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. Amen.