

## God's Gracious Invitation

Joel 2:12-17

**Point: Though God judges for sin, He does provide a way out.**

**12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."**

**13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; Return to the LORD your God, For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.**

**14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him— A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?**

**5 Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly;**

**16 Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room.**

**17 Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, Weep between the porch and the altar; Let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD, And do not give You're heritage to reproach, That the nations should <sup>[b]</sup>rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?' "**

In Joel (Yahweh is God), we read of a devastating locust swarm that invades the nation of Judah, but Joel indicates that this "natural disaster" is nothing compared to the coming "great and terrible day of the Lord" (2:11).

**Joel 2:1-2... <sup>1</sup>"Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. <sup>2</sup>A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness...a people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there be any such after them."**

What Joel described here was a literal invasion of the Assyrians coming in judgment against the nation, but it pre-figures what will happen in the future...and even worse invasion!

God plans to judge His people for their sin, but they still have time to repent.

**Interesting: While other prophets condemned the nation for specific sins such as idolatry or injustice, Joel did not mention the specific sins committed; he just called for repentance.**

Although no specific sin is mentioned, the need for repentance is mentioned. The nation had failed God again and again.

The fact that in our passage God tells them exactly what they need to do indicates that their approach to the Lord was outward and not inward ... it was not with a sincere heart.

The “**Day of the Lord**” refers to a when God’s character – mighty, powerful, holy, and terrifying His enemies – is clearly seen. It is a time of His wrath and judgment.

However, in our passage, we also see other aspects of God’s character: He is **gracious**, and **merciful**, **slow to anger**, **great in kindness**, and **relents from doing harm**. (v. 13).

## **I. God’s Call**

Joel had already used eighteen imperatives in **chapter 1** in calling the people to assemble, and verbs that speak of mourning such as “**weep**” (v. 5), “**wail**” (v. 5, 11, 13), “**lament**” (v. 8), “**mourn**” (v. 9-10), “**be ashamed**” (v. 11), and he had called for the people to wear “**sackcloth**” (v. 8, 13)

In our passage God speaks to directly to the people through the prophet.

“**Turn**” (v. 12) ... a change of direction.

“**Heart**” (v. 12) ... the center of will, thoughts, desires and decisions.

**They were to turn to the Lord in all sincerity and hold nothing back.**

More than emotional ... it is volitional.

It is also demonstrable ...

**“Fasting” (v. 12)** ... Denying self to seek God. Sometimes when we are overwhelmed by something we are not hungry and will forgo food.

**“Weeping” (v. 12)** ... wailing, deep emotional despair...

**“Mourning” (v. 12)** ... denotes public or private mourning expressed through lamentation, wailing, and ritual actions. It covers grief for death, calamity, or sin and is often accompanied by sackcloth, ashes, fasting, and loud cries; an expression of humiliation.

**James 4:8-9... <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double minded. <sup>9</sup> Lament, mourn, and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom.”**

Jesus affirms the blessedness of those who mourn (**Matt 5:4**)

**“Rend your heart, and not your garments” (v. 13)** ... The tearing of the garment was a public sign of stress or grief.

The Pharisees of Jesus day put on outward displays of being spiritual by prayer and fasting, but they only shows. God is not looking for outward displays that look good. What God is calling for is a deep, inner brokenness and not religious theatrics.

**We can tear your clothes but keep your pride ... we can cry about our behavior one day and still cuss the next ... we can act nice on Sunday and show out on Monday. We can lift our hands and praise God with our lips on Sunday and lie and gossip and complain on during the week ...this is rending our garments but not our heart.**

## **II. God’s Character**

**13 ... For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness; And He relents from doing harm.**

These words go back to God's words to Moses in Exodus ...

**Ex 34:6 ... And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,**

**"Gracious" (v. 13) ...** Used only of God.

It is never used of casual kindness; it speaks of heartfelt, covenant-loyal mercy that moves toward the needy and undeserving.

**"Merciful" (v. 13) ...** Compassionate; The word conveys the warmth of parental compassion, a mercy that is neither detached nor reluctant but eager to relieve misery and restore fellowship.

**"Slow to anger" (v. 13) ...** "long of nostrils" – picture the flaring of nostrils when one is angry.

**"Of great kindness" (v. 13) ...** (*chesed*) There is no one word that can completely describe it.

It speaks of speaks of lovingkindness, steadfast love, covenant loyalty, mercy, faithfulness, loyal devotion.

**"Relent" (v. 13) ...** Our English word relent means "to become less severe, harsh, or strict usually from reasons of humanity; to cease resistance.

God is not indecisive – He does not change His mind. God's relenting is I keeping with His other qualities of graciousness, compassion, and mercy.

His forgiveness is in keeping with His character.

**"We don't repent with the idea "God is so mean that if I don't return to Him, He will destroy me." Instead, the idea is "God is so gracious**

and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness that He will spare me from what I deserve if I turn back to Him.” Ultimately, it is His goodness that leads us to repentance” (Rom 2:4). - Guzik

The prophet does not presume upon God’s mercy we can always depend on His character.

I mentioned this past Wednesday night God’s lovingkindness which is the basis of our appeal to Him and not our behavior or worth. God forgives and restores because that is who He is and what He does to those who repent and turn to Him.

We know that God is just but He is also compassionate ...He cares of us.

While we know that there are consequences to our actions, we can also know that God does desire to “leave a blessing” (v. 14).

### III. God’s Convocation

Joel might have been the one calling for this meeting, but it was for the purpose of corporate repentance.

“Blow the trumpet” (v. 15) ... ram’s horn or shofar. It was used to announce war, proclaim a feast or announce a special gathering. It was used here to call for a special gathering not to celebrate but spiritual urgency.

As he had already done in **1:14**, Joel calls for a fast and a sacred assembly ...

“Fast” (v. 15) ... a sign of humility and mourning

A fast comes when we desire God more than we desire our necessary food...it is a time of intense prayer and seeking God!

**It is difficult to concentrate on spiritual matters while indulging in physical pleasures.**

**“Sacred assembly” (v. 15)** ... a meeting that was especially set apart for God. Sacred assemblies for the purpose of prayer, repentance, and spiritual renewal were a normal response in times of national crises (**2 Kings 23:1-3; Ezra 9; Psalm 44, 60; Jer 6:26; 36:9**)

Knowing things were not right, and knowing nothing short of an all-out return to God would cause God to **“relent”** from further judgment, Joel called for a big-time prayer meeting!

They were to bring the **“elders,” “children and nursing babes,”** as well as the **“bridegroom and the bride” (v. 16).**

Why bring a nursing child? Why disturb the bridegroom and his bride when they were supposed to have a yearlong “honeymoon” and not even be called to go to war (**Deut. 24:5**).

**Sin infects the whole community. Because of the sins of the people, all were in danger of experiencing God’s judgment. What was needed was more than a “devotional time” or quiet reflection. It was time the people as a whole came before the Lord to seek His forgiveness**

**True repentance does not carry on business as usual.**

**“Weep between the porch and the altar” (v. 17)** ... They were stand between God and the people.

**This is what Jesus our great High Priest does for us today!**

They were told what to do and what to say. They were told to weep and cry out to the Lord for Him to spare His people (**v. 17**).

## **Conclusion**

**Verse 18 -19** tell us when the people repent God will bless them ...

**18 Then the LORD will be zealous for His land, And pity His people.**

**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.**

God promised to send the former and the latter rains (2:23). He promised to restore what the crawling, consuming, and shewing locust had eaten (2:25).

God is gracious and loving. It is He that calls for repentance, and it is in His “**goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering**” (Rom 2:4) we are able to repent.

**We need His mercy, and He has offered it if we will but repent and trust Him. What He desires to bless us with is far greater than any pleasure that would steal His blessings.**