

7/19/15

Joel 1:1-12

Strong People Cling to a Stronger God

The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

An Invasion of Locusts

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.

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.

8 *Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth*

for the bridegroom of her youth.

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.*

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.*

(Pastor Prays)

Several months ago while planning the series of preaching through Acts, I planned a mini-series in the summer months in the Book of Joel (3 chapters over 4 weeks) and I never dreamed it would be so relevant and fit so accurately right into the context of our collapsing culture.

The question is asked in v. 2b “Has such a thing happened in your days or in the days of your fathers?” In other words, what’s happened in the context is a locust plague that has swept across the fertile lands of Israel and everything is lost, and this destruction serves as a picture (a metaphor) illustrating the state of affairs we live in. We have so many mass shootings we aren’t ever really shocked anymore. Planned Parenthood – a Hell-fueled organization – was represented in a video as profiting off the sale of body parts from aborted babies. I won’t go into any more detail except to say that a country that can ignore that video and not get bothered *deserves* what it gets.

On top of that, God’s design for marriage between a man and a woman has been breached and the aberration is now the law. And if *that’s* not enough, *Vanity Fair* has Bruce Jenner on its cover. The one-time Olympic Champion in a *dress* trying to become a *woman*. All of that not to mention, raising kids and paying bills and dealing with the day-to-day junk. How do we do it? How do we get retrofitted and equipped for the future so that we can wake up each morning with confidence, hope and genuine joy? Surprisingly, I think Joel can help us. Look, the world is sinful. It always has been and the longer we are alive the more sinful the times will become. Sin has compounded interest. It gains momentum as it rolls downhill. How do we face reality without feeling overwhelmed? That’s where this little book of Joel helps us.

Strong People Cling to a Stronger God

You Need to Center Your Life on God

Remember, this is the description of a judgment from God. There's been a locust plague in v. 4., as in Exodus when God sent the plague on Egypt, except this time it’s not on God’s *enemies*, it’s on His *people*. Look how it starts in v. 1, describing the author: “The Word of the Lord came to Joel the son of Pethuel” and that’s all the bio we have. It’s as

if he is saying "Who cares about me? I want to point you to God." Even his name "Joel" means "YHWH is God," the covenant God who seeks His people and, by grace, saves His people and, in the New Testament by the blood of His son Jesus, redeems his people.

In v. 1, Joel's father's name is *Pethuel*, meaning "Vision of God." Don't you think it interesting that in the *very first verse* the tone is set? This book is about God. It is "theo-centric," centered on God. Most of the problems we face stem from the fact that you have are not centered on God, that you have rejected God or forgotten God, that the overriding passion of your life is something besides a living, breathing relationship with Christ.

We even substitute good activity for God. At Hickory Grove, it would be so easy to get caught up in activity. Being *busy* with "church things" doesn't make you a born-again child of God. So often, Christ is a crutch when you're wounded or a net when you fall or a payday loan to go to when you're in a jam. And we've missed the real point.

For so long, American culture was friendly to Christians because it helped with the common good. Now the common good has no use for the church. Believing the Bible has gone strangely out of style. We've *used* God for so long we've forgotten how to *know* him and *seek* him, to *praise* and *worship* him, to be *obsessed* with him and make him the "pearl of great price." Where are the Elijah's in the pulpit and Stephens in the pew? Strong people cling to a stronger God, and some of you need to abandon the false Gospel of "niceness" and come to the Cross of Christ, falling on His grace and mercy. You need to center your life on God.

You Need to Embrace the Authority of the Bible

It's right there in v. 1: "The Word of the Lord that came to Joel." This is not some guy's opinion, it's God speaking, and if He speaks, our obligation is to listen... regardless. The punch in this whole book is that judgment of God is inescapable. Look who it's addressed to v. 2: the elders, people past middle age in their 60's to 70's, wise leaders, consistent. It is addressed to the drunkards (in verses 5-7); this is the young party crowd, TGIF, YOLO "you only live once," BYOB crowd *before* they become the AARP crowd.

In verse 11-12, he addresses the farmers, the working crowd, responsible, dedicated, people who show up to work on time, dependable. In v. 13 he speaks to the priests, the leaders.

So do you understand that *nobody* is exempt? The bible is not just for *believers*. God's law applies to *all* his creatures. He is teaching that *all* have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God, that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Look, now is not the time for Christians to sand down the corners of the Biblical truth. Now is the time for believers (remembering that the Word of God is sharp as a two-edged sword) to become men and women whose minds are saturated with the Bible, whose hearts are controlled and informed by God's Word. This Word points toward the Living Word, Jesus Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith.

Hebrews 4:12 says, "*For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" Paul writes to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:15-17, "*and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **16** All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, **17** that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.* If you don't have the authority of God's word guiding you, you have nothing to cling to in a raging sea of danger and doubt and depression.

Tomorrow I preach the funeral of a beautiful young woman, a mother, wife, daughter, and sister, tragically taken from us, leaving a grieving family behind. You think I have magic words to say? I can only cling to this Word that tells me, "God is near to the broken-hearted," that "A bruised reed He will not break and a smoldering wick He will not quench," that as believers, we don't weep as those who have no hope, but as those with a peace that surpasses all understanding, guarding our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. And if you don't have these truths to cling to, you have no hope and are at the mercy of a random world of evil.

Let me plead with you, to open this book and see like St. Augustine heard. Pick it up and read. Start with the New Testament, with a pencil in your hand. Ask God to open your heart to His Word before you read. Ask God to aid you to live His Word after you read. As you put your life under the authority of God's Word, you will have a growing sense of the *bigness* of God and your own *smallness* and *insignificance* and your *sinfulness* in that insignificance.

But this only stands to show that even when you are an insignificant sinner, he even died for those sinners, Jesus said "I came not to call the righteous but sinners, all *kinds* of sinners." There is a remedy for your sin. As the book of Joel explains, there is judgment, a judgment we all are under a judgment that has one revealing repentance. Turn away from your sin and place your faith in Jesus who died on the cross in the place of sinners. Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe that God raised him from the dead and be saved.

(Pastor shares the Gospel and Prays)