

7/26/15

Joel 1: 13-20

The Right View on Life is a God-Centered View

A Call to Repentance

13 Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;
wail, O ministers of the altar.

Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,
O ministers of my God!

Because grain offering and drink offering
are withheld from the house of your God.

14 Consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly.

Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the Lord your God,
and cry out to the Lord.

15 Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty[a] it comes.

16 Is not the food cut off
before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?

17 The seed shrivels under the clods;**[b]**
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down
because the grain has dried up.

18 How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.**[c]**

19 To you, O Lord, I call.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned
all the trees of the field.

20 Even the beasts of the field pant for you
because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

(Pastor Prays)

You wouldn't know it now, but this part of the world -- Charlotte -- is steeped in Christian history.

In the 1700's the Ulster Scots migrated south looking for an American Promised Land and they found it here in the rich soil of the Piedmont. These new settlers were staunch Presbyterians with a high view of God and a low view of laziness.

So with their Protestant work ethic and providential aid, they carved out a community south of where we are right now. They established a church and built a major thoroughfare and called them both "Providence." And now multiplied thousands of people ride on Providence Road every day, never realizing that road is named in honor of a Holy God that helps His people in good times and bad, a God who reaches to His creation and works in the details of life – in good things and bad things – so that He might turn the hearts of people, sinning people, to Jesus Christ.

Part of what Joel is telling them is to look around and see that creation groans for a redeemer. Look around and see a *good* God, a God who hates sin to the point of punishing it but loves the world to the degree of giving His only son that whoever believes in Him would not perish but have eternal life. In the hardship, I want you to look for the hand of God. In the discouragement and depression, He's there. In the Book of Joel, the news of disaster is designed to bring about repentance, and repentance is a good thing. It makes you right with God and man. Could it be that the calamity God is taking you through is designed to do a work of grace that you don't yet understand? Do you remember in John 9 when Jesus healed a man who was born blind? His disciples asked him *who* sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus said it was *not* that this man sinned *or* his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in Him. We can thank God for the struggle because it's in our weakness that we are made strong. And in Joel 1, the prophet helps us get a God-centered view on life.

The Right View on Life Is a God Centered View

How do you do this? It is a *learning* process:

Learn to Listen to the Right Voice

Isn't that how the book opens? In v. 1, Joel says, "I have the word of the Lord, a message from God." Then in v. 2, Joel uses 2 imperatives: *hear* this and *give* ear. In other words, God has something to say and you need to hear it.

But there are so many voices, aren't there? Inside and outside our lives. The information never stops and this information has a voice. It's in our sitcoms, it's in our music, it's in our Twitter feed – and these voices, like rushing water over a river rock, they affect us. It wears us down. How many times do you have to be told "you're not any good" before you start believing it? How many times and ways do you have to hear that there is no hope, that the world is dark and people don't care, until you start to

think that? So our young people *injure* themselves, while parents *medicate* themselves leaving the grandparents to *question* themselves. So Joel rattles the cage, calling you to stop all that other stuff. You've listened to the voice of others and it deluded you. You listened to your heart and your heart confused you, maybe to the point of making you hurt yourself either through destructive behavior or something darker. I'm asking you in the words of Joel to *hear*. Psalm 139:14 says you are to Praise God, for you are fearfully and wonderfully made, made in God's image.

But there is bad news. Although you are fearfully and wonderfully made, Romans 2:23 says "All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God." That means without exception, every person ever born was born a sinner. It's why we do the things we do and make the choices we make. Romans 6:23 says the wages of sin is death. Because of sin, we live in a fallen world and our bodies decay and we die. Paul speaks of spiritual death here as wages of sin. Spiritual death equals separation.

But the good news of Romans 5:8 is that God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. According to Isaiah 1:18 "though our sins were like scarlet, they will be white as snow." That only happens if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe God raised Him from the dead. I want to plead with you:— *hear* the voice of God. C.S. Lewis said God *whispers* to us in our pleasures, *speaks* in our conscience but He *shouts* to us in our pains. I would add that He *calls* to us in our lostness through Christ. Look to the cross and believe. It's important that you listen to the right voice.

The second point is built on the first. So, first learn to listen to the *right* voice.

Learn to Take the Right Action

The right action begins in v. 5. Joel says, "Awake you drunkards, weep and wail all you drinkers of wine." This is an impassioned call to pay attention, to think about your strategy before God. Take your situation to heart and by God's grace, take the appropriate steps.

So many times, hardworking decent Americans are drunk on some intoxicant that keeps them from actually seeing the truth, so a successful career becomes an intoxicant that keeps you from seeing that, before a Holy God, you are poor, wretched and blind. Or maybe you have fallen in love and that love feels so real and good. But if it keeps you from seeing the love of God in Christ, it's a shallow substitute and a weak crutch that will collapse under the weight of your sin.

That word "awake" is a call to shake off the embalming fluid of cultural Christianity and embrace the dynamism of the cross. And when you do, something happens. There are several descriptions of how we respond to the truth of God's word. In v. 8, "Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth." That is sobering imagery. It's the idea of a young couple that is engaged but not yet married and something tragic happens. The prospective groom is killed and the prospective bride can only weep. Joel

is saying that when you are awakened to your sin and you understand that you have offended to the horrific degree a Holy God who has done nothing but love, provide, protect and sustain you, when you realize the reality of your situation, you get done with excuses and explanations. In fact, in v. 11 Joel says, "Be ashamed and wail."

The idea of shame or being ashamed is almost lost in our society and almost always misapplied. Biblical shame is the open realization that you have been wrong and done wrong and now you realize it and you hate it and so you find yourself as described in v. 13, "put on sackcloth and wail. Pass the night in sackcloth." In v. 14, we are told to consecrate and fast, to call a solemn assembly. In v. 14, we are admonished to cry out to the Lord, meaning to offer a prayer of confession. It's the right response to shame and guilt. Don't let guilt and shame paralyze you; instead let guilt and shame be the prison guards that escort you to freedom in Christ.

Listen to the hope of forgiven shame as Paul describes it in Col. 2: 13-14: **13** *And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, In v. 14 we are told, "by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."*

And so this morning, I would invite you to bring your guilt and shame and sorrow and sin and nail those things to the cross of Christ. The cross where Jesus forgives sinners.

(Pastor Prays)