

Joel Sermon

Indiana Jones movie clip

Good morning and welcome to the second part of the Joel series.

Just like Indiana Jones had a choice to either fall to death, or to turn back and receive help from his Dad, so too are the Israelites faced with a similar choice, they are faced with total destruction and Joel calls them to turn back to God.

Last week we learnt that the Israelites (P) had two problems to worry about.

The first (P), was that the Israelites faced a plague of locusts. The message Joel gives to the Israelites is to trust God and to cry out to the Lord for mercy.

The second (P) problem they faced was even worse. The terrifying Lord's army is approaching. Last week Mark described this day as Judgement day.

Can you see the predicament the Israelites are in? Their relationship with God is broken, they can no longer offer sacrifices to God, because there is no grain, wine, or oil, and they have now received warning that an even worse time is coming.

Just like the locusts plague the only action that can give the Israelites any hope of being saved from judgement day is to turn back to God.

From verse 12 here in chapter 2, three important things need to be noted.

(P) First, why should the Israelites repent?

(P) Second, how are they to repent?

(P) Third, What is God's response?

(P) First, why should the Israelites repent?

(P) Joel writes in verse 13 Turn back to God for he is gracious, compassionate, slow in anger, and abounding in love, and he relents from sending disaster.

So the Israelites should repent because if they do because of God's character they can know that he will save, but Joel also reminds the Israelites not to take for

granted the mercy and compassion of God. You see that in verse 14 (P) – Joel writes the question “Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing.”

This reminded me of my times when I was teaching at Tyndale Christian School. One of my friends was coaching a cricket team and I saw the following events take place. The team of boys had been chosen, and they all trained hard and were looking forward to their game. A couple of days before this cricket carnival, two boys in the team seriously misbehaved at school. Their punishment was to be taken off the team. What was interesting to me, was that the boys had not expected this to be the punishment for their bad behavior. They were stunned when they were told that they were no longer on the team. They were in the cricket team, they were good players, they had a confirmed spot on the team hadn't they?

Joel is trying to get this message across, Although God does show compassion and forgive he is not obligated to show us compassion and forgiveness. and each time that he does show us compassion and forgiveness we must see it as an unexpected grace, one that is by no means deserved.

Why should the Israelites repent because of the character of God.

(P) And this brings us to the second point. How are we to repent?

Have you ever had to say sorry but not really mean it? I think we often see this clearly when we look at kids and how they apologise. I remember when I was younger, there were times where I did the wrong thing, and I was asked to apologise, and I use to say it like “I'm sorry”, have you heard that kind of sorry before? I was not really sorry. I then wondered do we grow out of this habit? or as adults have we learnt the art of hiding what our inner thoughts are?

Are there times in your lives when you say sorry to God, but in your heart you are not really sorry.

In the old testament the visible sign of turning back to God was the wearing of sackcloth, tearing of the clothes, fasting, mourning and wailing, putting ashes on your head. But just like children saying sorry, this could be done without really

meaning. So God says, make sure that it is not just an outward sign but an inward change.

God says, I need you to tear your heart. God wants all our love and he commands that we obey him in all areas of our life. We cannot fool God, he knows our heart.

So how were they to repent they were to turn back to God with their whole heart.

(P) And Finally, as the Israelites repented, How does God respond?

He responds to each of the two problems differently

(P)The first response relates to the locusts plague?

God gives a response that immediately affects the Israelites. God brings restoration back to the Israelites.

Can you see the reversal?

(P)In verse 10 chapter 1, it says The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed, the new wine is dried up, the oil fails. Locusts destroy everything in it's path.

But now in chapter two verses 18-27

(P) God sends them new grain, new wine, and new oil, He will send away the locusts and they will die, God will bring rain. The animals will have grass to eat, the trees will bear fruit, the Israelites will rejoice in God.

It's a total reverse of the locust plague. God's response is that he spared his people from the destruction of the locusts.

Now Is God's response to the Israelites in Joel, this immediate blessing, something that we should expect from God today?

No, in the time of Joel the Israelites were under the covenant at Sinai, in this covenant God promises certain blessing and curses based on how they related to him. God specifically outlines blessings for the Israelites if they follow him, and curses such as locusts if they disobey him.

But we don't live under the Sinai covenant, we live under the covenant that comes from Jesus. Our blessing, if we follow Jesus is eternal life, our curse, if we don't follow Jesus is eternal death. Heaven is the blessing and hell is the curse.

The problem is some churches today teach theology like the immediate blessings and curses that are found in Joel. Maybe you've heard of it, it has a couple of names prosperity gospel, or the "name it claim it gospel".

The general teaching is this

If you have a correct relationship with God and Jesus then God will reward you with material blessings, you'll get that BMW, you will have the pool and tennis court in the back yard,

But If any suffering or loss occurs in your life, then, well, sorry, there must be something in your life that you have not confessed and repented to God.

My Uncle went to a church with this kind of teaching, and he was doing well with his business, until one day, his business partner ran away with all the money, and left him bankrupt. At this time the people in the church started to question him, what have you done against God? What is wrong with you? They rejected him from fellowship.

Verity Whitelaw, who goes to our 5pm service has even mentioned to me in the past that a Christian friend of hers, said that she must have cancer because of a sin that she hadn't dealt with in her life.

What a depressing teaching. What happens when a sincere Christian goes to a church with this teaching, and they meet disaster through illness, unemployment, or death of a loved one, what help are they to find? God never promises his followers a detour around life's battles.

Christians can face good times and bad times in this life, but to translate that as blessing and curse from God is not always correct. Blessing is not always a "reward" from God. Heaven is the one reward God has promised that we are waiting for. And bad things that happen are not curses. The only curse is hell in

eternity. Christians face good times and bad times because the world that we live in is sinful.

What about the second crisis? (P) What is God's response to the Israelites, in regard to judgement day?

God promises here in verse 28 that he is going to pour out his Spirit on all people

The image that comes to mind of God pouring out his spirit (P) is like a fireman's hose, a powerful stream of water just pouring out on everything. The spirit is being poured out on all people, Men and women, young and old, even social standing doesn't stop the Spirit from being poured out onto the slaves.

Friends we must realize that this is a brand new phase in God's dealing's with his people, what is going on here is significant.

I remember when I was at school in year 12 we had a common room. It had microwaves, fridges, sandwich makers, dishwashers, couches to sleep on, desks to sleep on, I mean work on. This privilege was just for year 12's, but imagine that now in 2009, the common room is open to all students at school, even the small year 7 kids get to use the microwave to heat up their lunch.

You see that is the kind of thing that's happening here in God's promise of the spirit. Previously in the old testament God's spirit was limited to only a few people, not everyone had God's spirit. It was selective, people like Kings, prophets, they had God's spirit, but the average Joe and Jane never received the spirit personally"

Here in Joel, the message is a promise for the Israelites. (P) There will come a time when ALL people will receive the spirit so that in verse 32 all people who call on the Lord will be saved.

When is this going to happen? (P) Well in verse 28 we read and afterward, I will pour out my spirit on all people. And also in (P) verse 29 I will pour out my Spirit in those days. We are now in those days.

What comes to my mind when I read this passage is Pentecost, when the Holy spirit comes onto Jesus' disciples. We see this in Acts 2, Peter himself uses Joel words to show that God's promise to the Israelites has started to be fulfilled. Peter's message is the same as Joel's message but with the promise having been fulfilled. Acts 2:38 says

"Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."

Paul even uses a section of Joel's message to explain what it meant for the people to have the Spirit in them.

Romans 10: 12-13

For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

The Holy Spirit is now being poured out on all people and this allows all people to be saved.

Because friends, Salvation does not naturally belong to us gentiles, Jesus Christ is first and foremost the savior of Israel, and yet Salvation does belong to us, for by the grace and mercy of God, Jesus Christ is not just Israel's savior but actually the savior of the whole world. If you confess with your mouth that "**Jesus is Lord**," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, friends you will be saved on the day of the Lord.

But hang on a minute, weren't we just talking about the Holy Spirit, how have we jumped to Jesus Christ? Well that's part of the role of the Holy Spirit isn't it? Remember how last year we learnt that one of the (P) Holy Spirit's role is to be a spotlight on Jesus, the Spirit focuses our eyes onto Jesus.

The same message that Joel gave to the Israelites is the same message that we find in the New Testament.

You see, all of us are facing God on the day of judgement. No one can endure it. Our disobedience towards God puts Jesus onto the cross.

So, What is our response today in light of the final Judgement day?

How do we turn back to God with our whole heart?

It means a couple of things...

It means confessing our sins. That's what we do each week when we come to church. We say sorry for our disobedient thoughts, words and deeds and we also say sorry for the things that we have failed to do.

It means we need to be sincere when we say sorry. I find it helpful to try and think of specific things when I confess, so that my attitude towards sin doesn't become complacent.

With the help of the Holy Spirit we can make an effort to try not to sin again and remove the temptations that are in our life.

I'd like to share with you one of my sins that I struggled with while living at home with my family. I used to get angry really quickly towards my parents, say things that I didn't mean, we'd end up in huge fighting matches. I hadn't realized this was a problem, until I had been challenged by the word of God at a Christian camp. It was from Galatians 5. The passage talks about how we are to no longer let sin live in our lives, but that our lives should be filled with love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, self control.

How was I to get rid of this anger in my life?

The first thing that I found helpful was to pray and ask God to help me change my heart.

I also confided in a good friend, someone who I could trust.

They prayed for me and with me, helped me with useful strategies to prevent me from getting angry quickly.

And Friends, We need to not just turn away, but we need to turn to God.

We can do that by reading his word, as the new year starts, why not commit to reading the bible each day. As I read Galatians 5 it helped me to understand what I needed to repent from, reading the bible is key for us

Are you continuing to live with Christ Jesus as Lord in every area of your life, in your work place, at home, when you're out with friends, are you living with Christ Jesus as Lord?

For when we turn back to him with our whole heart, God rejoices

Let's pray

Lord Jesus, we confess that our hearts are not as responsive as it needs to be to follow You. We are tired of backsliding into sin. Lord, please cleanse us from our sin of thought and deed. Please allow Your cleansing blood to flow through our hardened heart. Please restore our sensitivity to sin and help us to see sin as you see it. Jesus, please give me the strength and commitment to move forward confidently and walk with You in obedience. Amen."