

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: JOEL.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Joel 1:1, 13-15; Joel 2:10-14, 27-32

Introduction.

Tornados in Oklahoma.

Earthquakes in Chili.

War in Africa.

Terrorist bombing in Iraq.

Avalanche buries dozens in Afghanistan.

A tsunami in the Indian Ocean claims the lives of nearly 300,000 people, the deadliest disaster in our lifetime.

April 15, 2012, the 100th anniversary of the sinking of the unsinkable Titanic.

Year after year, century after century, calamity upon calamity, it never ceases. 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. MSNBC, Yahoo News, and Google News all fill our computer screens with dire predictions and disastrous outcomes.

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. (ESV)

“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 our reporter observed it was so bad that even the drunks had nothing to get drunk with (Joel 1:5).

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. The early Hebrews placed the book after Hosea suggesting an earlier date.

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 be understood about and learned 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, 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 that behind 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. (ESV)

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 this them. It's plain that there clearly 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."

After the Indian Ocean tsunami, one commenter said, "On the abundant available evidence does it not seem that, if there is or was a God, it is now malevolent, mad or dead?"

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. (ESV)

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. (ESV)

Isaiah 31:2 And yet he is wise and brings disaster; he does not call back his words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. (ESV)

Psalms 135:5-7 For I know that the LORD is great, and that our Lord is above all gods.
[6] Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps.
[7] He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth,

who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses. (ESV)

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? (ESV)

Psalms 115:3 Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. (ESV)

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. He maintains, regulates and determines everything all the time and nothing takes place without His deliberation.

God is God and in control of locusts, plagues, terrorists bombs, armies, angels, amino-acids; heat shields on space shuttles, airplanes that fly into buildings, cancer cells, babies who die in their cribs, birthday parties that get rained on, car parts that break on vacation, deaths of famous people like Chuck Colson, and pitchers who pitch perfect games and home plate umpires who call balls strikes.

Our insurance 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.

Our character means more to God than our comfort. Our eternal future matters much more than our temporal pleasure.

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 first hand. He lost everything.

Job 1:21 And 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." (ESV)

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. (ESV)

How to cope with calamity.

How do we deal the calamities that warn us of the coming day of the Lord? When they come which they inevitably will, and when we even learn from them, then what?

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. (ESV)

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

Repentance.

The prophecy of Joel is a wakeup call to repentance. 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.

Repentance, 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 or a new perspective 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 that we have caused our Heavenly Father great displeasure. We look at the cross and we see the Son of God dying such a horrible and painful death in our place, we are the cause.

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 but 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 versus 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, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. (ESV)

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. (ESV)

When was the last time you truly repented and shed tears over you 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 that Joel has to say about what God will do.

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

Sin is sin and its effects remain in us and this us, but God breaks its power and restores personal holiness and joy to the point that 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.

Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. (ESV)

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. (ESV)

Some fear the last day.

Some try hard not to think about it.

Some think they are good enough to survive on their own merits.

Some think it's all good, all paths lead home, God is love and God is good.

But those who call of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be saved.

Jesus is the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near.

Joel 3:16-18.

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 that nothing, nothing can overwhelm you or surprise you or separate us from you and your love for us in Christ Jesus.

And Father after the example of David and the testimony of your Scripture again and again, it is right for us to pray for you 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.