

October 10, 2021

“Repent! For the Day of the LORD is Near.”

Joel 2:12-17

FCF: The false assumption all is well

PROPOSITION: (magnet) Let us repent
(anchor) for the Day of the LORD is near.**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

Now that the leaves are falling and summer beach trips are behind us, it’s probably okay for me to mention the Discovery Channel’s annual end-of-summer ritual, *Shark Week*. To compete, other channels air *Jaws*, the 1975 movie about a shark roaming the waters near a New England beach town. Some of you may know that director Steven Spielberg says the mechanical shark malfunctioned so much during filming that he wasn’t able to show it as much as planned.

But it didn’t matter. Spielberg realized it was far scarier to portray crowds of beachgoers enjoying a sunny day at the water with no idea a predator was near (**READ**): “It’s what we don’t see which is truly frightening.” The blissful but tragically false assumption that all is well.

This is the first of a two part series in the book of Joel. We don’t know much about Joel or his context. We do know that the Lord’s people were suffering under a plague of locusts and invading armies. It was the day of the LORD - a time of judgment with a promise of restoration.

SCRIPTURE READING: Joel 1:1-2:17**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION****SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

“Old Sow” is a whirlpool that appears along the northeastern shore of Maine - the largest in the Western Hemisphere. How does it come about? It’s a mix of tides and countercurrents. Add to that deep trenches and an undersea mountain and that all spells disaster for the unaware.

For example, in 1835, a schooner set sail with two brothers aboard. It went down in the whirlpool while their mother watched in horror from shore. In the 1940s, a freighter passed over the Old Sow at just the wrong moment. It opened beneath her bow, the ship dropped forward, and its propeller came out of the water. Steering was futile and the ship began to slide down. Finally, the propeller caught water and the skipper was able to steer the freighter to safety.

With the Old Sow, you have to know how to steer clear and get out - how to respond. That brings us to Joel and its theme - “the day of the LORD”. This is how the prophets spoke of the LORD’s entering human affairs to punish sin, pointing not just to a final day of judgment but to all such instances of His intervening, including what we read of this plagues and the invading armies. Both pointed to something far worse. Both a warning meant to bring a response. We still need to reckon with that Day and all such days. The day of the LORD is near. Let us repent.

The day is near. Let us repent. To get at this, let’s break it down. First, what such a response means. Second, why such times are needed. Third, how such a response is possible.

I. WHAT IT MEANS

First, what it means. How does the Bible define repentance? (**READ Joel 2:12-13a**)

A) Attrition

Biblical scholars speak of two kinds of repentance. We see it here. The first is attrition.

1. A false repentance

This is false repentance, a remorse driven by the fear of the consequences of being caught.

2. A rending of garments alone

It is the rending of the garments alone. In that day, such tearing was meant as an outward sign of repentance. But such things could be faked. Instead of the reality, it could be mere performance.

B) Contrition

The Lord is not interested in such theatrics. He wants not attrition but contrition.

1. A true repentance

This is true repentance. A deep remorse for sin, a grief for having grieved the heart of God.

2. A rending of the heart

It is no mere rending of cloth but the heart. It is a turning not just of mind but life. It includes a once-for-all turning and an ongoing turning to God from our self-dependent, self-determining, self-reliant, self-righteous ways. Martin Luther said ([READ](#)), “Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ, when he said ‘Repent,’ willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance.”

This is the definition of repentance. This is what it means, turning from sin to the Lord.

Illustration:

John Stott speaks of the “homing instinct” in his book, *The Birds Our Teachers* ([READ](#)):

Since 1954 I have had a cottage on the coast of Pembrokeshire in south-west Wales. Off shore are the islands of Skomer and Skokholm, on which more than 200,000 pairs of Manx Shearwaters (half the world’s population) are believed to breed. Manx Shearwaters are birds of the open ocean, which winter as far south as the coast of Argentina. They come to land only to breed, and lay their single egg underground at the end of a rabbit burrow. In 1952 one was taken from Skokholm and released inland in Cambridge, about 240 miles away; it was back in its burrow seven hours later. On another occasion a Manx Shearwater was flown 3,000 miles from Skokholm across the Atlantic, and released at Boston’s Logan International Airport. Twelve and a half days later it had returned to its burrow home, having traveled an average of 250 miles a day.

Would that we had as strong a homing instinct spiritually as birds have physically!

Application:

We must move beyond attrition to contrition, from false to true repentance. How can you know if you have truly repented? Ask yourself, “For what am I most sorry? Is it the loss of my crops, the onslaught of the locusts and armies? Or is it the pain I have brought to my Lord?” And, pushing further, “Have I moved beyond my bad feelings to a determination to turn my back on my sin, to walk with the Lord, and to take every practical step I need to take in that walk?”

May it be. Friends, the day of the LORD is near. Let us turn back to Him. Let us repent.

II. WHY IT’S NEEDED

Which then brings us to the second point - why such days are needed. There are two broad categories here - one that is true all the time and the other which is true some of the time.

A) Our Development

The first reason for such days is our development. That is to stir, awaken, and mature us.

1. An ongoing need

This is ongoing and continual. It is true for all God's people all the time. For each one of us.

2. The points of need

Think about it. There are times He needs to get our attention, to claim our affection.

Illustration:

C. S. Lewis addresses this in one of his classic works, *The Problem of Pain* ([READ](#)):

The human spirit will not even begin to try to surrender self-will as long as all seems to be well with it. Now error and sin both have this property, that the deeper they are the less their victim suspects their existence; they are masked evil. Pain is unmasked, unmistakable evil; every man knows that something is wrong when he is being hurt...And pain is not only immediately recognisable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shovelling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world...

That megaphone to rouse, to stir and awaken, is one of the reasons such days come into our lives.

B) Our Discipline

But there is yet another reason. There are times we need a straightening and correcting.

1. Not always the case

Not that this is always the case. Not every hardship or difficulty should be taken as discipline from the Lord. This was the foolish and terrible mistake of Job's friends and the Pharisees.

2. But sometimes it is

That said, sometimes it is the case. That's what we see with the plagues of locusts and invading armies. And, again, even these were meant to point to something far worse. Sometimes we need a severe mercy sent for our sin-sick souls. God will bring this ([READ Proverbs 3:11-12](#)).

Development and discipline - this is why such seasons come into and upon our lives.

Application:

How can we know if our hardships and difficulties are for our development or discipline? What can we make of the loss of a job, plans gone sideways, a breakup, a wayward child, or the onset of cancer? How can we know? It takes prayerful discernment best done in community. It really does. And still, whatever the answer, we have the assurance that the Lord is sovereign and committed to our good. No matter whether development or discipline. He is bound to our good.

Friends, the day of the LORD is near. Let us turn back to Him. Let us repent.

III. HOW IT'S POSSIBLE

Which brings us to the third point - how this is possible. As we contemplate a response of repentance, what hope to we have? What grounds are we given? ([READ Joel 2:12-14](#))

A) The Merciful Ways of God

The first thing we see as the grounds of our repentance are the merciful ways of God.

1. His character

That is, His character, who He is, how He has revealed Himself to us ([READ Exodus 34:5-8](#)).

2. Our assurance

What assurance this is. Because of who God is, we can know that when we turn back to Him we will not be met with a scowl but an embrace. “I’m so glad you’ve come back. Welcome home!”

B) The Finished Work of Christ

That’s the first ground. The second we have is the once-for-all finished work of Jesus.

1. The imagery of the plagues

This is the fulfillment of the plagues of locusts and the armies, what they are pointing towards. This was a time of tremendous devastation and suffering. Yet a warning of something far worse.

2. The sufferings of Jesus

That is, the ultimate day of the LORD, the final day in history. But here’s the thing. In the midst of history, Jesus experienced the judgment of that day. The wrath of God due to us was poured out on Him. So that day now promises to be not the day of our destruction but our deliverance.

C) The Ongoing Work of the Spirit

That’s the second ground. And there is a third - the ongoing work of the Spirit.

1. His promises to be with us

The Lord promises to be with us. That’s another theme in Joel and we’ll get to that next week.

2. A twofold reality

But there is a twofold reality we need to consider here. Think with me. The same sin-sickness making our repentance necessary also makes it impossible. That makes sense but it’s sobering. But the same Jesus who endured the penalty for our sin has sent His Spirit to help us turn from it.

And that’s good news. The work of the Triune God is how repentance is possible.

Application:

Which leads to three questions worth our considering and praying over. Do you know the extent of the Father’s mercy to you? Have you embraced the finished work of Christ for you? Are you continually relying upon the ongoing work of the Spirit in your life? Pray over those.

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CONCLUSION:

We’ll end with some “Show and Tell.” But let’s reverse that. I’ve already done a bit of telling so let shift to the showing. Think of John Bunyan’s classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. In one scene, Christian and Hopeful are walking on the King’s Highway to the Celestial City. The path, once smooth and easy, has become rough and hard. They come to a place called Bypath Meadow. They climb over a fence into the meadow and the new path becomes easy again.

But only for a time. Soon the new path became rugged and steep. A terrible storm breaks overhead. Exhausted by the effort to continue, Christian and Hopeful lie down and fall asleep. Suddenly they are awakened by the owner of the meadow, the Giant Despair, who drags them to Doubting Castle and throws them into a dungeon where he taunts, beats, and starves them. Hurt and confused, they despair. But, finally, Christian and Hopeful begin to pray. Then Christian

remembers that he is carrying in his pocket a key called Promise. Immediately, he uses it to open the doors of the dungeon and the gate of the castle. They are free and soon on their way again.

Can you place yourself in that story? Have you detoured to Bypass Meadow? Have you found yourself filled with and locked away in doubt or despair? The warning and invitation are held forth even now. May we hear and heed it. For the day of the LORD is near. Let us repent.

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