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“Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning” (Joel 2:12).

Repent!

Central Truth: The prophet called for a wandering people to turn back to God.

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Topic: Repentance; Revival.

Have you ever witnessed revival? Have you seen a whole community turned because of the work of God among them? Have you seen the destiny of a nation dependent upon revival? It has happened, it is possible; and it must happen again.

God has given us sufficient information in the Bible for us to desire, seek, identify, and profit from a real revival of true spiritual religion.

The prophet Joel is “God's messenger of revival” among the Old Testament prophets. A great drought had struck the land. When hope seemed in sight, a plague of locusts beyond anything known before swept across Palestine. The prophet called the nation to repentance and prayer for God to avert the inevitable judgment of famine. That deliverance in nature's tragedies pictured a spiritual deliverance God has for those who come to Him. So beginning with the natural, Joel moved to the spiritual and called his nation to repentance.

This study could be profitable in view of our historical interest. But it will be most profitable if we look upon its spiritual impact in view of our need for real revival.

Revival is a great Bible theme. It is mentioned 680 times in the Old Testament and 61 times in the New Testament. It is the soul's first step of return to God. That is why we preach, “*Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*” (Matthew 3:2).

I. THE CALL TO REPENTANCE (Joel 2:12, 13)

A. Repentance is required. “*Turn,*” God calls (verse 12). It is an imperative verb. There are no options. One must either turn or rebel further against God and increase the sin. “Do it without delay,” God insists.

Turn and *repent* are from the same word in the Hebrew language. When God says, “*Return unto me, and I will return unto you*” (Malachi 3:7), the appeal is, “you repent and I will draw near.” The turning of repentance is the turning from sin to God. “*Cast away from you all your transgressions, . . . and make you a new heart and a new spirit*” (Ezekiel 18:31). The turning from sin must be accompanied by a turning to God. “*Take with you words, and turn to the LORD: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously*” (Hosea 14:2). God now commands all people everywhere to repent—turn from sin to Him (Acts 17:30).

B. Repentance is God-ward. His appeal is “*Turn ye even to me*” (verse 12). It is possible for one to try to turn from sin to the church, to a cleaner lifestyle, to solemn resolves for reformation. But none of these is acceptable. God's call is, “*Turn to me.*” Sin causes a sense of separation which makes one want to draw back from God. Don't do it! All hope is in Him. Come to Him and find the truth of Psalm 86:5, “*Thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee.*”

C. Repentance is internal. “*Turn . . . with all your heart*” (verse 12). The “*heart*” means the inmost center of personality. It is the mind, emotion, and will. To repent means to have a different mind, to think differently about God and sin. To repent means to have sorrow that one has sinned against God, sorrow so that the love for sin dies in the heart. To repent means to move by one's own will (not from another person's pressure) in repudiation of sin and surrendering to God. It is a spiritual transaction between God and a human being. What happens in the heart then is manifest in attitude and actions.

D. Repentance is sincere. Fast, weep, mourn, rend are the verbs God uses to describe the sincerity of repentance (verses 12, 13). The sincerity of one's repentance is based on his view of the holiness of God and the sinfulness of sin. He who is truly sincere will “*bring forth . . . fruits meet for repentance*” (Matthew 3:8). When one sees his sin as inexcusable and God's holiness as violated by it, his repentance will be true.

II. THE BASIS OF REPENTANCE (Joel 2:13, 14)

A. Repentance is based on the gracious nature of God. *“He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness”* (verse 13). Hasten to Him and unburden your heart.

God is gracious, but He is not weak and sentimental. *“God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble”* (I Peter 5:5). He stands firm against sin, but He *“pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression”* of the person who comes to Him for forgiveness (Micah 7:18). He delights for sinners to come. Jesus said, *“Joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth”* (Luke 15:7). Look at God's forgiveness upon the repentance of the pagan city of Nineveh and rejoice in the grace of Him with whom we have to do.

B. Repentance is encouraged by the wonderful works of God. *“He will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him”* (verse 14). The *“blessing”* He will leave behind Him is the blessing of revival: forgiveness, assurance, power, fellowship with God and humanity, and the joy of a spiritual harvest being reaped.

What will God do if you come to Him for help? *“He giveth more grace. . . . He will draw nigh to you. . . . He shall lift you up”* (James 4:6-10). What more do you need? What more could you want? Those are the promises of revival!

You can come to God with confidence. Consider His grace manifest toward you up to this time. Know that He loves you still and desires to bless you more. Look at what He has done and what He promises to do for you. Know that His purposes do not change and His promises never fail. Come to His throne of grace now!

III. THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE (Joel 2:15-18)

Here is the heart of this call to repentance and revival. Prayer is the way by which we communicate with God. There has never been a great revival without earnest prayer. To His covenant people who need revival, God issues a call to prayer.

A. Prayer is required. It is to be public and corporate. *“Blow the trumpet in Zion”* refers to the ancient method of calling an assembly of the people by a trumpet signal. *“Call a solemn assembly”* shows the time to seek God in repentance, for revival is a time of great solemnity and must be approached with reverence and awe. If you need revival in your church, gather the people to seek the face of God. He promises, *“Ye shall seek me,*

and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 27:13).

B. Prayer is universal. Every one of the covenant people is to seek God in prayer. Observe the list of people involved in Joel 2:16: congregation, elders, children, nursing infants, bridegroom, bride, priests, and ministers of the Lord. That is everyone in the whole nation.

God is not impressed with numbers. One sincere saint can have more power with God than a hundred half-hearted ones. But when a nation (or a congregation) prays, God promises to listen. United prayer makes a difference with God. Pray privately and with your fellow Christians.

C. Prayer is to be sincere. The brokenhearted weeping over spiritual need is to be led by the spiritual leaders. *“Let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar”* (verse 17). This is like saying, “Let the pastors, the ministers of the Lord, weep between the foyer and the pulpit.” Judgment must begin at the house of God (I Peter 4:17). When the leadership is right, the people will follow.

A popular religious song says, in part, *“I’m so tired of being stirred and not being changed.”* Stirring comes from the emotions; change comes from the will. Sincere prayer includes both emotions and will; so, it produces change.

D. Prayer is to be right. Its motive is to seek the honor of God. Joel prayed, *“Give not thine heritage to reproach, that the heathen should rule over them: wherefore should they say among the people, Where is their God”* (verse 17)? His concern was not for material things, but primarily for the honor of God. He did not want God's name reproached (which always happens when His people act unworthily); instead, he wanted God to *“be known among the heathen”* (Psalm 79:10). Our praying, the same as our living, is to be *“to the praise of his glory”* (Ephesians 1:12). There is no higher motive.

E. Prayer will be effective. *“Then the LORD will be jealous for his land, and pity his people”* (verse 18).

God often waits for His people to pray that He might bless them in response to their requests. That way their needs are met and they grow in grace by learning to trust Him.

God promises, *“He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him”* (Psalm 91:15).

Often He is so ready to answer prayer that He does not wait for us to ask. *“Before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear”* (Isaiah 65:24). His personal promise to us is, *“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.*

For everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Luke 11:9, 10). Are you a person of prayer? Without prayer, revival is impossible.

IV. THE BLESSINGS OF REPENTANCE (Joel 2:18-21)

A. God's loving-kindness will be shown when we repent. Joel turns from lament to rejoicing, saying, *“Then will the LORD be jealous for his land, and pity his people”* (verse 18). Their burdens were intended to turn them to God. When they had turned, He promised to undertake for them and give them deliverance from their problems. What a merciful God!

B. God's material blessings will fall upon a penitent people. *“I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith”* (verse 19).

The promise indicates that God controls the production in the field, as well as all other matters of nature. I would like to see the fulfillment of the promise upon our nation which God spoke through Malachi: *“I will . . . open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it”* (Malachi 3:10). Religious devotion is no sure way to material prosperity, but God has promised to provide for His dear children.

C. God's protection will be enjoyed when repentance is complete. He promised through Joel to remove the military power which was a menace to Israel at that time. He would take away the invader, judge him for his sins against God and humanity, and protect His people from their foes. Apply that promised protection to God's watch-care over His children. Here is our assurance of victory over the devil.

D. God's joy will be experienced by a purified people. *“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice: for the LORD will do great things. . . . Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God. . . . Ye shall eat in plenty, and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God . . . and my people shall never be ashamed”* (Joel 2:21, 23, 26).

All that is possible when real repentance fills your heart. Let us seek such a personal renewal in our own hearts and in the life of our church. Let us seek God in repentance and ask for real revival *“with fasting; and with weeping, and with mourning”* (Joel 2:12).

Questions

1. In what way is Joel the Old Testament “messenger of revival”?

2. What does repent mean?
3. What are the three elements of repentance?
4. What is meant by, "Repentance is God-ward"?
5. How is God's grace a call to repentance today?
6. How does James 4:6-10 call us to repentance?
7. How is prayer related to repentance?
8. How can we make our prayers sincere before God?
9. What blessings does God give upon repentance?
10. How can you put this study to practical use?