

(NOTE: The following is not an exact transcript, but notes taken while listening to the CD.)

Joel 2:1-12 Revival in the church - God's Call For a Solemn Assembly 1/21/18

We are nearing the end of a short series on "More of God 2018." We want more of God in us, and this church, in 2018. This week, I want to look at what God will do for us if we will come to Him.

Shortly after 8 am last Saturday in Hawaii an emergency message was sent across television and radio reading, "BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL." It took 38 minutes before another message was sent, saying it was a mistake. During those 38 minutes there was great panic as thousands of people thought they were going to die. They parked their cars and tried to find shelter. Telephone lines were tied up as people tried to call their loved ones. One article mentioned that some parents woke up their children to talk to them about life and death. I would like to believe that a lot of people turned to the Lord during those thirty-eight minutes.

Joel 2:1 "Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: "

Joel 2:1 is a call to "Turn on the air raid system." Why? Because "The day of the Lord is coming." He says, "Sound the alarm." Why? The nation of Israel is in trouble! They are being defeated their enemies, they have experienced a terrible drought and now a massive invasion of locusts has left the land ruined. Joel calls it, "the Day of the Lord." The Day of the Lord is not a twenty-four hour period. It is the time leading up to and including the return of Jesus Christ to earth. In the book of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, Paul said the people were told they had missed the day of the Lord. But Paul wrote and told them certain things have to occur before that day comes. Their specific sin is not named in this book, but a careful reading of the book indicated that the people had slipped into a state of complacency and apathy about the things of God. We will look at that later.

God used the trials they faced as a nation to awaken the hearts of His people and to call them back to Him. The book of Joel is a book of judgment. But, it is also a book of hope. In this book, God's people are made to understand that even in the midst of divine judgment there is always hope if they will seek the Lord. These verses teach us that there is hope! It also reminds us, that with our God, It's Never Too Late. I want you to see that there is hope for our churches, our nation and our future. God doesn't discipline without offering a way out.

You may be thinking, "This has nothing to do with the church today. This is Old Testament and Israel. As I read about the judgment that fell on ancient Israel, I am reminded of where our nation and our churches are today.

There can be little doubt that we are facing the judgment of God in America. Yet, there is hope. God wants His people to seek Him. We are praying for more of the Holy Spirit in our lives and God is saying, "Seek Me!"

Like Israel, we live in a land that is under divine judgment. We look at our nation and at our

world and we wonder if there is any hope for the future. It looks hopeless. We wonder if there is any hope for revival. We wonder if there is any promise for us in these dark days. I want to show the truth of God's Word that accurately diagnoses the present danger that our nation is in, not from terrorists, but from God. I also want to show you from history the place that intense times of crying out to God have in the outpourings of the Spirit of God in revival. I want to show you from these verses the only hope for this church, the church in general, and for America.

You may be thinking, "The book of Joel has nothing to do with us, with the church. That is Old Testament. He is talking about Israel." Remember first that Paul said Israel has been given as examples (1 Corinthians 10:6-11) and "for our instruction" (Romans 15:4). Second, Israel was the "church in the wilderness" in the Old Testament. They were the "called out" ones. They were, and are, God's people, even as the church today.

Second, as we read of the judgment of God, we can't help but realize there is a judgment coming on America. God is going to judge every nation, including America. The Scriptures make it sound as if the judgment is knocking at the door, coming at any moment. One of these days an air raid may sound and we won't have thirty-eight minutes to make a decision. The question is, "What does God want of us? What are we to do?"

I want to show you there is hope for revival. Revival is not as much for the unsaved as for the saved, for you and me. It is for those who, like Hebrews 2:1 mentions, have slipped away from Christ.

In the history of God dealing with His people, when they cry out to Him, He answers and normally it is with an out-pouring of the Holy Spirit. If you want the Holy Spirit, God is going to require something of you. I am talking about revival.

Joel shocked the nation of Israel when he ordered the blowing of the trumpet, which is akin to turning on the air raid siren. At that sound, everyone drops what they're doing to gather for war. What enemy was bearing down on them? What army threatens them? Once they gather, Joel explains who is breathing down their necks: God Himself is coming! (see Joel 2:1 – It is the Day of the Lord). God had seen Israel's sin and had come to fight against them. That's the biblical picture of God's wrath. Generations after Joel, the Apostle Paul picks up this theme in **Romans 1:18** and tells us that God is on the move, continuously, deliberately, like an unstoppable army. Far more threatening than any human danger is the unspeakably awesome wrath of God. **Romans 1:18** takes the truth in Joel and brings it to the church today.

Romans 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness..."

Romans tells us that God's wrath is revealed from heaven against all godlessness and unrighteousness of people. What is the wrath of God? The word used here describes a settled and abiding disposition against something. God's wrath is the responsive action of His perfect holiness against that which is unholy. The Romans passage speaks of the "passive" wrath of God. It is not as easily seen as the Great Flood and destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it is just as real. The passive wrath is demonstrated in verses 18-24 of Romans 1. You want to know why the world is in the condition it is in? It is the wrath of God being revealed from heaven on man.

God says, "You want to live that way. I will give you over to a reprobate mind to be even worse."

The verse says that man has suppressed the truth. Suppress means they hold it down. It is a picture of trying to hold down a small spring while fitting into a machine. It is extremely difficult. In Romans 1:18, Paul is saying the same thing as Joel except Paul is saying it is happening now. The "wrath of God is revealed." We have the truth, but we suppress it.

It's a disturbing thought to consider that our own Lord may be the One stirring up our enemies against us. We Christians complain about secular humanism, about the removal of critical spiritual elements from public schools, about removing Christmas and Easter decorations. We perceive ourselves to be victims and pray for the Lord's protection. And in one sense, this is right. We are living in the last day, when Satan and his demonic army is trying to destroy the church. But could it be possible? Could it be that maybe, just maybe, our Lord Himself is prompting these adversities against us, as He did in Joel's day? Are we not just victims, but part of the problem? We like to talk about the heathen pagans taking prayer out of school, changing the laws of marriage, and such things. But the question is, where has the church been for the last seventy-five years? You are complaining about these things, but where have you been? What has the church been doing? We pray for God's protection because we look like victims. But are we part of the cause?

Let me ask it this way: Why does God say in **2 Chronicles 7:13-14** say, 2 Chronicles 7:13-14 , *"¹³ When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or command the locusts to devour the land, or send pestilence among My people, ¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land."*

Look at the word "I" referring to God. "When I send pestilence on My people." It is against "My people", not the lost or ungodly. God does not say, "If I shut up heaven..." He says, "when." What does God say we must do? Humble ourselves, pray, seek God's face, and turn from our wicked ways. Then God will hear and forgive and heal the land. All of this is putting God first, returning to God. It means we must judge ourselves before we judge the world. That is why 1 Peter 4:17 says "the time has come for judgment to begin God's household...".

Several scientists put together something they refer to as the "Doomsday Clock", which represents the likelihood of global nuclear war. It changes depending upon the situations in the world. It is now three minutes to midnight. It can move backward when things improve. My question is not how those scientists see the world and the nuclear doomsday clock. My question is what God's doomsday clock looks like. **I wonder where the hands of the divine Doomsday Clock are for our nation?** How long do we have before judgment comes. God is on the move in wrath across this land. But listen to me: He would much rather turn the hands of the clock back. Even as Israel could repent, so the church can repent and escape judgment. How? Chronicles tells us, "If my people who are called by my name would humble themselves and pray....."

At the same time, God's Word makes reference to a cut off point, when God's patience and tolerance reaches its end. According to Scripture, God has established a legal limit to sin. We

do not know exactly where that limit is, nor do we know how close we may be to crossing that limit. When the sin of a nation or a person reaches that limit, God's mercy gives way for wrath. In Genesis 15:16, God said it was not time to judge the Amorites for their "iniquity was not yet full." Even though Israel was experiencing the judgment of God, there was still hope!

Joel 2:12 *Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn (Return) to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."*

Verse 12 declares the heart of the Lord: "Return to Me." "Return" implies that the sin of Israel, and the church, is a drifting away from God, a departure from God, an abandoning of God. Interestingly, we can turn away from the Lord and we can also turn back toward Him. But there comes a time when it is too late. "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning."

The people must act quickly. "Even now," not tomorrow when it will be more convenient, when their schedules will be clearer, their finances in order and personal lives more presentable, "even now," in the final seconds before the door closes entirely.

What does God want from us? "Return to me with all your heart," he says. We are to return to God so that God will return to us. James would say, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you." God wants His people to seek His face once more. He wants them to get hungry for Him one more time. God calls His people back to a place of closeness and holiness. So what does it mean to return to God? And how do we do this with all our heart?

It is God's plea and call for repentance on the part of His people. Few want to hear it, but genuine repentance is the only hope we have! God is still looking for a people that are sorrowful over their sins. He is still looking for a people who are honest, open and repentant before Him. He is still looking for a people He can bless. His blessings are only for those people who will be honest about their condition and who will deal with their sins His way.

The only hope our nation has of being saved from the judgment of God is for God's people to seek the Lord in genuine repentance. When the church comes home, America will be affected. Until God's people repent, there will be no power, no glory and no hope for our nation. As long as the church continues to walk in rebellion against God, the world will mock us and our God. When we repent and are restored to a place of blessing, the world will be forced to acknowledge the God Who dwells among us. The only hope the church has is repentance. The only hope America has is repentance.

That is the pressing need of our day. We live in a generation that puts everything ahead of God. We live in a generation that yields itself to everything but God. We live in a generation that has essentially abandoned God. **We need to come home!** The people of God need to reach a place where He is our first priority. We need to come to a place where nothing matters but His will for our lives. We need to come to a place where we are willing to separate ourselves from our sins and dedicate our lives to Him. We need to reach a place of total surrender to God. It is more than a doctrine. It must be an action on our part.

Joel 2:15-16 “¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶Gather the people, Sanctify the congregation, Assemble the elders, Gather the children and nursing babes; Let the bridegroom go out from his chamber, And the bride from her dressing room.”

Vv 15-16 What **The answer? A call for a solemn assembly.** With rapid-fire, Joel urges us to gather for prayer. He is crying out, “Stop everything! Waste no time! Do this!” Throughout Scripture God prescribed Solemn Assemblies. It is setting our ordinary concerns aside, we assemble for special prayer where our personal repentance becomes a church urgency. No one is excluded. We do not divide into age-groups. No one is exempted. Even the couple on their honeymoon are to put private pleasures aside to seek the Lord at this special prayer meeting—almost inconceivable in our day when self always comes first! But God calls us to gather as his people, not to amass our strength as a military army, but to humble ourselves together before our Lord. A solemn assembly is appointing a time for unusual prayer and repentance, creating a special event with a special purpose. It is what the Scripture is calling us to do.

As God's people, we have a choice. We can either see the pending danger and return to the Lord before He brings judgment, or we can wait until after the disasters to cry out for mercy and repent. If we are going to see the revival we need, we are going to have to change our ways. We are going to have to get back to God. We are going to have to wake up, clean up and get back to God. Until the church repents, there will be no power in the church. We are praying for the Holy Spirit in this church, but there is no power, no Holy Spirit, until there is true repentance. Oh, the Holy Spirit is here, but He is inactive because of our apathy.

Paul’s advice to the Romans will still work today: **Romans 13:11-14** “¹¹ And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. ¹² The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. ¹³ Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. ¹⁴ But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.”

The church is a sleeping giant, lulled to sleep by Satan. He tells us everything is okay, all is well, you are doing a great job.” All the while, he is laughing at our weakness. I am reminded of two war movies of the Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbor. The leaders rejoiced at the destruction. But one says, “I fear we have just awakened a sleeping giant.” It turned out to be true of course. Paul is saying in the Romans 13 passage, “If you only knew you really are. Awaken out of sleep.” When saying, “our salvation is nearer than when we first believed”, Paul is speaking of the future salvation when Jesus returns.

I am not trying to scare anyone. If we want the Holy Spirit, and I am sure all do, we must respond to the warning. If we don’t do something in 2018, we will find ourselves in a worse condition in 2019. It is time to come home to God. We, the elders are scheduling a “solemn assembly”, time of prayer, once in the morning and once in the evening for the church. We will announce the days and times next week.