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**“WHAT SHALL WE DO?” ~ Joel 1:15-2:17**

- ☑ 9/11 was the proverbial “tip of the iceberg.”

As the smoke cleared we held our collective breath, hoping we had seen the end of it. But those attacks were not the end of our trouble; they were the *beginning*.

What al Qaeda has left

our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have eaten;  
what our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have left  
our greed and bigotry and pride have eaten;  
what our greed and bigotry and pride have left  
ISIS and other extremists are eating.

Foreign adversaries have plagued us from the earliest days of our national existence – likewise, home-grown hatred and injustice. Nevertheless, September 11<sup>th</sup> brought those forces to the surface and intensified them.

The question is not *whether* catastrophe will strike us again; it is *what* and *where* and *when* and *how bad* will it be? Will this be the one to sink us?

‡ What shall God’s people do in the face of incessant, unrelenting, grinding calamity?

- Israel is compelled to wrestle with the same question when a swarm of locusts invades. Joel 1:4:

**What the locusts swarm has left  
the great locusts have eaten;  
what the great locusts have left  
the young locusts have eaten;**

**what the young locusts have left  
other locusts have eaten.**

- Wave after wave they come, insatiable mouths numbering in the billions or trillions. Joel 2:2:

**Like dawn spreading across the mountains  
a large and mighty army comes,  
such as never was of old  
nor ever will be in ages to come.**

A swarm this size is capable of wiping out an ancient civilization. Heaven forbid that it should coincide with other unfavorable conditions!

- This one does. It is accompanied by a drought and wild fires. Joel 1:12:

**The vine is dried up  
and the fig tree is withered;  
the pomegranate, the palm, and the apple  
tree –  
all the trees of the field – are dried up.**

- Joel 1:17: “**The seeds are shriveled beneath the clods.**”

- And Joel 1:20:

**Even the wild animals pant for you;  
the streams of water have dried up  
and fire has devoured the pastures in  
the wilderness.”**

‡ What shall God’s people do in the face of incessant, unrelenting, grinding calamity?

- ☐ Please turn with me to Joel 1:15-2:17.

{2 Tim 3:16-17} Though it was not written *to* us, this “**God-breathed**” Scripture was written *for* us. It “**is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that all God’s people**” (including us) “**may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**”

✎ First, Joel equips us to perceive and have confidence in God’s sovereignty in our catastrophe.

Have you noticed the terminology with which the prophet interprets the locust plague, drought, and fires?

■ Chapter 1:15:

**Alas for that day!**

**For *the day of the LORD* is near;  
it will come like destruction from the  
Almighty.**

■ Chapter 2:1-2a:

**Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
sound the alarm on my holy hill.  
Let all who live in the land tremble,  
for *the day of the LORD* is coming.  
It is close at hand –  
a day of darkness and gloom,  
a day of clouds and blackness.**

■ And then last three lines of 2:11:

**The *day of the LORD* is great;  
it is dreadful.  
Who can endure it?**

📖 This phrase (“**The day of the LORD**”) is used by seven O.T. prophets,<sup>1</sup> and the apostles Paul and Peter use

it in four of their epistles.<sup>2</sup> That does not include some equivalent expressions such as {Zech 14:1} “**a day of the LORD**” and {Jer 46:10} “**that day.**”

“**The day of the LORD**” refers to times when God decisively reveals that he is victor by defeating his enemies and vindicating his faithful ones. The phrase is used of events in the present, the near future, and at the end of history. It frequently has a near-far aspect, so even when it speaks of current events it often foreshadows the final “**day of the LORD**”.

The swarm, drought, and fire could end Israel as a geo-political entity. Yet, inspired by the Holy Spirit, Joel calls their coming “**The day of the LORD.**”

Israel has longed for that great day. They fully expect the Almighty to exalt them and judge their enemies once and for all.

{Amos 5:18-20} They have forgotten or misread or dismissed the warning issued by Amos:

**Woe to you who long  
for the day of the LORD!  
Why do you long for the day of the LORD?  
That day will be darkness, not light.  
It will be as though a man fled from a lion  
only to meet a bear,  
as though he entered his house  
[breathless from his escape]**

**and rested his hand on the wall  
only to have a snake bite him.**

<sup>1</sup> Joel, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah, Zephaniah, Malachi.

<sup>2</sup> I Co 5:5; II Co 1:14; I Th 5:2; II Pet 3:10

**Will not the day of the LORD be darkness,  
not light –  
pitch-dark, without a ray of brightness?**

The Living God is abundantly kind and merciful, as Joel himself declares in verse 13. YHWH is faithful to his covenant and gladly forgives those who repent.

Yet a covenant with God has never given anyone a free pass to commit immorality, injustice, or idolatry. Sometimes, horrible suffering is the most effective and compassionate means by which the Father can liberate us from sin and conform us to the likeness of his Son.

■ It is God who has sent the locusts, the drought, the fires. How does Joel describe the swarm in 2:11?

**The LORD thunders  
at the head of *his* army;  
*his* forces are beyond number,  
and mighty is *the* army that obeys *his*  
command.**

? Is 9/11, with its continuing after-shocks, the day (or a day) of the LORD for our nation?

I cannot say “Yes” with certainty. I am no prophet, the U.S. is not Israel, and our nation has never been in covenant with God as Israel was.

Regardless, God is present during these events. God is active in them. God is working out his divine purpose through them.

✠ Lord, give us eyes to see and hearts to trust your sovereignty when blow after blow falls on us!

✎ Second, Joel calls and equips us to lament.

Our text last Sunday made this abundantly clear. From the first chapter of Joel...

- Verse 5:

**Wake up, you drunkards, and weep!  
Wail, all you drinkers of wine...**

- Verse 8:

**Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth  
grieving for the betrothed of her youth.**

- Verse 11:

**Despair, you farmers,  
wail, you vine growers...**

- And verse 13:

**Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn;  
wail, you who minister before the altar.  
Come, spend the night in sackcloth,  
you who minister before my God...**

📖 A lamentation is a dirge, a howl, a raw, visceral cry of grief. It is an earnest, heartfelt response to suffering, a hoarse prayer offered to God in desperate brokenness. There are many laments in Scripture. They are brutally honest, tinged with frustration, anger, and shame.

We U.S. Christians are not good with lament. To admit our basic helplessness is humiliating. It flies in the face of pervasive cultural and theological beliefs.

Yet lament is essential to three-dimensional discipleship. It is a powerfully way of seeking the Lord in times of pain and disaster.

✝ Lord, give us the will to lament before you when blow after blow falls on us!

✎ Third, Joel calls and equips us to repent.

■ Joel 2:13:

**Rend your heart  
and not your garments.  
Return to the LORD your God,  
for he is gracious and compassionate,  
slow to anger and abounding in love,  
and he relents from sending calamity.**

❓ Did God stir up al Qaeda to attack in direct punishment for specific national sins? I do not know.

But is there ever a time when we don't need to repent?

As lamentation is grief for the personal and corporate offenses done to us, so repentance is grief for our personal and corporate offenses against others.

Genuine repentance is not primarily emotional. It inspires us to confess our sin, make recompense if possible, change our behavior going forward, and work for justice and peace in communities and institutions.

Repentance begets humility. It deflates defensiveness and makes us teachable. It saves us from the compulsion to forgive only insofar as the offender deserves it, and to change only in proportion to the changes made by the other side.

✝ Lord, give us the courage to repent before you when blow after blow falls on us!

■ **Who knows? He may turn and relent  
and leave behind a blessing –**

**grain offerings and drink offerings  
for the LORD your God. (Joel 2:14)**

**“Who knows? He may turn...”?**

{1 Jn 1:9} The covenant which the Father has made with us through the blood of his Son Jesus is superior to the covenant under which Joel prophesied. Because of his death and resurrection, we can be absolutely confident that **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**

However, though God is quick to forgive, he has never promised to shield even devoted Christ Followers from the temporal consequences of their sins. Much less does he guarantee to spare larger groups and nations.

{Ps 51:4} Whether he prevents suffering or allows it to fall on us full force, God is

**Right in [his] verdict  
and justified when [he judges].**

{Job 13:15} **“Though he slay me, yet I will hope in him.”**

❓ What shall God's people do in the face of incessant, unrelenting, grinding calamity?

✝ By his grace we shall perceive and have confidence in God's sovereignty. We shall lament. We shall repent.

Joel 1:15-2:17 is the Word of the Lord.