

Scripture: Joel 2:12-19

Theme: Return to your Merciful God.

Text: Joel 2:13 -- "...Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful..."

Proposition: Dedication to God offers the only satisfying solution to life's disasters and threats.

Dates written

1954 or 5, originally

Rewritten--Nov. 11, 1972

Dates and places used:

Originally -- Wheatland, Wyoming

~~Wheatland Park, Wyo.~~ 11/12/72

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1954-1955 in Salt Lake City, Utah

### Introduction:

1. A man was driving his car along one of West Virginia's old and crooked mountain roads. Suddenly he had to ~~swerve~~ <sup>swerve</sup> severely to miss a car in the ~~left hand~~ <sup>right</sup> lane coming right at him, driven by a woman. As they passed each other, both on the wrong side of the road for the direction they were going, she shouted at him the word "pig." Instantly he shouted back at her, quite angrily, "old sow." Almost before the words were out of his mouth ~~his~~ car hit the biggest pig he had ever seen.

The lady had tried to explain and to warn him, all in one word, but, in a natural misunderstanding, he became angry instead, took his attention from what he should have been giving it to, his driving, and got into instant trouble.

2. The Old Testament Book of Joel, from which we read our Scripture for today, speaks of some trouble, some serious trouble, being experienced by the people of the time about which it was written. The prophet Joel was warning the people to whom the Book was addressed, as to the meaning of

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2. The Old Testament Book of Joel, from which we read our Scripture for today, speaks of some trouble, some serious trouble, being experienced by the people of the time about which it was written. The prophet Joel was warning the people to whom the Book was addressed, as to the meaning of

the trouble, as well as describing the trouble very graphically and in detail. He was telling them, also, how to get over the trouble. His account of the trouble and of the remedy is a short, three-chapter, Bible book, of great literary skill and of permanent value to millions of people since his time, besides to the people for whom he actually wrote it.

3. To understand a bit better the Book of Joel and to urge upon us the acceptance in our lives of its message are the purposes of this sermon. If you rather read the Book again yourself, you can do that now, during the sermon, and our purpose will have been quite well achieved. If you listen to what we have to say, we hope you find it interesting and inspirational. It is about the Bible Book of Joel, and comes from it.

I. A reading of Joel tells most of what we need to know about the contents and time of the Book. Add to that some conclusions or observations by full-time Biblical scholars and writers of literature about the Bible, and we perhaps can get a feel for what the writer was saying.

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A reading of Joel tells most of what we need to know about the content and time of the Book. Add to that some conclusions or observations of full-time Biblical scholars and writers of literature about the Bible, and we perhaps can get a feel for what the writer was saying.

1. Joel describes a plague of locusts quite graphically and literally. As you probably know, locusts are insects that devour about all the plant life in their way. They can appear in swarms almost as black as <sup>DARK</sup> clouds, and when they leave there is little by way of leaf, flower, bark on trees, or other vegetation <sup>rest</sup> behind them. Few, if any, of us have ever seen such a devastation, and we can be very thankful for it. I can imagine it a bit, because in my young years part of our country was hit hard by an infestation of Japanese beetles, which destroyed roots and otherwise attacked grass and shrubs in some parts of the country. I worked for one summer in a government effort to try to isolate this beetle to <sup>AREAS</sup> parts already infested, but we were not very successful. In the day of the Scripture writer very little was known about the usage of chemicals to repel and kill insects, so that practically nothing could be done to stop such a swarm. The people were helpless before them. Sometimes an infested field or forest would be set on fire to destroy the insects before they moved on to another field. This was seldom successful, and simply added to

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the horror of the plague. As the grass and vegetation disappeared from the land, due to the locusts, rains caused heavy erosion, and the land became impossible to farm, in many instances. The ~~total~~ water could not be kept in the hard ground, and would run off quickly, so that people had no water supplies, and thirst and drought resulted. Such is the type of picture that a locust plague of long ago presented. Such is the type of thing that Joel described strongly and graphically.

2. In making his description, Joel described the locusts sometimes as if they were enemy soldiers, attacking and setting fire to his homeland. They came like thieves, they got into windows like thieves, they stole and destroyed. He named them as if they were soldiers of Egypt, ~~and Persion~~ <sup>Edom, Philistia</sup> and Babylon, long-time enemies and destroyers within his land. ~~The~~ Much of the Book is given to this description of the locust plague and its comparison with other known sources of suffering and horror.

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contained in the Book of Joel. The prophet-writer obviously had an intimate knowledge of his land of Judah and of the capitol city of Jerusalem. According to the political and religious conditions indicated in the Book, the prophet delivered his message about 400 B.C.. He attributed great importance to the worship of God in the temple, but he probably was not one of the priests of the temple.

4. The occasion of the prophecy is an unparalleled locust plague, which Joel sees as judgment from God and as a warning and symbol of the final day of the Lord. The book itself may be divided into two main parts, 1:1-2:27 dealing with the present, and 2:28-3:21 dealing with the future. Part I describes the locust plague and accompanying drought, calls the people to repentance, and promises removal of the locusts and restoration of fertility and life to the soil and land. ~~I think that to outline this Part I can give us a sense of the feeling of this Book.~~

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5. Here is a summary, then, in our words, but we urge you to read the Book of Joel for itself.

An unprecedented calamity has resulted from successive waves of locusts. Since food and the means of sacrifice have been destroyed, all peoples are called upon to mourn. The priests are exhorted to summon the people to the temple for a national repentance. This calamity is a warning of the approaching day of the Lord. As food and water are cut off by drought, the prophet and even the animals cry to God for relief. The alarm must be sounded to warn of the approach of the day of the Lord. The locust host is like fire in its devastation. They attack the city of Jerusalem like an army. This attack is a foretaste of the day of the Lord, and like it, is a divine judgment. The people are called upon to return, not only formally but spiritually, to the Lord. All classes of people are to be summoned and led by the priests in prayer for the removal of this national calamity. The Lord promises removal of the locusts, plentiful rain and abundant food for man and beast as proof of his presence and favor. It is from this first part of Joel that our Scripture comes, from the call to prayer to which the priests are urged. Verse 13 of chapter 2 summa-

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rizes this call in a few words: "return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful."

6. Part II of Joel beginning with 2:28, predicts the outpouring of the spirit, the signs of the day of the Lord, the deliverance of the faithful in Jerusalem, the judgment of the nations, and the blessings of Judah. God's spirit will be poured out on all ages and classes of his people. Wars and astronomical disturbances will warn of the coming of the final day of the Lord. The faithful in Jerusalem will be delivered. The ~~the~~ exiles in Judah will be restored, but the pagan nations will be gathered and judged for their ~~cr~~atitudes to God's people. The plundering and enslaving by Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia will be revenged. The pagans are assembled for the final battle with the hosts of heaven. The Lord and his angels will execute judgment on the heathen amid the darkening of the heavenly bodies and the shaking of earth and sky. The Israelites, however, will be protected by the Lord, who henceforth will preserve his holy city from being destroyed again. Judah will be blessed with abundant fertility but Egypt and Edom will be desolated

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and astronomical disturbances will warn of the coming of the final day of the Lord. The faithful in Jerusalem will be delivered. The exiles in Judah will be restored, but the pagan nations will be gathered and judged for their crimes to God's people. The plundering and enslaving by Tyre, Sidon, and Philistia will be reversed. The pagans are assembled for the final battle with the hosts of heaven. The Lord and his angels will execute judgment on the heathen and the speaking of the heavenly bodies and the speaking of earth and sky. The Israelites, however, will be protected by the Lord. No benefactor will preserve his holy city from being destroyed again. Judah will be blessed with abundant fertility but Egypt and Edom will be desolated.

because of their aggressions against Judah. Judah and Jerusalem will remain forever; and innocent Israelite blood will be vindicated; and the Lord will dwell in Zion.

7. Such is a summary, <sup>almost</sup> verse by verse ~~almost~~, of Joel. His is an effective book, making usage of literary metaphor, repetition, contrast, and alliteration. Much of what is there parallels passages in other books of the Bible. Some of what he writes about the future, in part II, obviously did not come to pass as he said it would, though some did. His words have some meanings for people of all times, if they will accept it, but the Book also has been used for widely varying interpretations and forecasts of the end of the world. Some of the things in the Book apply mainly to Jewish people, but some of it is applicable to us today. Among the ever-true ~~emphasés~~ <sup>emphases</sup> for believers in God are some truths we want to consider now.

II. Joel points out some everlasting truths worth thinking about any time.

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1. A contractor was driving past  
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some distance from where they were supposed to be working. He stopped the car and went over to them. "What's going on here?" he demanded.

"The trench caved in," one of the men replied, "and that's stopping us from digging."

"Does the foreman know about this?" the boss asked.

"Well," said the workman, "If he doesn't, we'll tell him as soon as we dig him out."

(from Funny N Funny World, 8/28/72)

2. There are some things we need to know about Joel, in summary, which are everlastingly true, and now is the time to say them.

3. One of them is that it is necessary to repent to God for wrongdoing.

4. Another is that any ultimate salvation that comes to people is by the ~~graze~~ and free will of God, not earned by people, and can only be secured through placing faith in God unreservedly.

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5. Joel emphasizes the importance of the formal worship of God. He regards regular performance of public

worship as extremely important. When the locusts caused great destruction, for him one of the terrible things was that there were not animals and other materials available to sacrifice to God upon the altars. But even though he emphasizes formal worship, Joel also perceives that the essence of true religion is not in outward rites but in inner attitudes.

6. Joel's concern with the day of the Lord considers ~~the~~ the terrible things happening in his day only as forewarnings of the final and ultimate day of the Lord to come; as many people so interpret the signs of our day. Ultimately the Lord will rule over all, and mankind will be a moral group of persons.

7. The outpouring of the Spirit of God is to be in the future, as Joel sees it. Paul and other early Christian readers saw this as prophecy of the Spirit of the Lord come back to them after Jesus' ascension. This is the forerunner of "the Spirit" or "Ghost" in our description of ~~the~~ God as "Father, Son and Holy Ghost." Perhaps this is the most significant contribution of Joel, his promise of the outpouring of

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Conclusion:

1. A summarizing paragraph of Joel's meaning could go like this: "Joel maintains a balance between the outward and the inward elements of religion. God reveals himself not only in his powerful and moral control of nature and history, but also through his ~~own~~ spirit within. On man's side of religion formal worship is given due importance, but inner repentance and faith are stressed as man's primary obligations. In the ultimate kingdom of glory the outward environment will be cleansed and perfected, but the central feature is the presence of God in the midst of his ~~own~~ faithful people.

2. If you and I would recognize this presence of God, we but have to yield to the invitation, or warning, of Joel: "return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful.."

3. When we accept this advice, we will experience what millions of others have found, that dedication to God offers the only satisfying

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