

Day 1 - The Impact of Apathy

Read: Joel 1:1-12

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

2 Hear this, you elders;
give ear, all inhabitants of the land!

Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?

3 Tell your children of it,
and let your children tell their children,
and their children to another generation.

4 What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten,
and what the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.

5 Awake, you drunkards, and weep,
and wail, all you drinkers of wine,
because of the sweet wine,
for it is cut off from your mouth.

6 For a nation has come up against my land,
powerful and beyond number;
its teeth are lions' teeth,
and it has the fangs of a lioness.

7 It has laid waste my vine
and splintered my fig tree;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
their branches are made white.

8 Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth
for the bridegroom of her youth.

9 The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off
from the house of the Lord.

The priests mourn,
the ministers of the Lord.

10 The fields are destroyed,
the ground mourns,
because the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil languishes.

11 Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil;
wail, O vinedressers,
for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field has perished.

12 The vine dries up;

the fig tree languishes.
Pomegranate, palm, and apple,
all the trees of the field are dried up,
and gladness dries up
from the children of man.

Reflection:

Over the next 8 days of our 504 Journey, we will be reading, meditating and praying our way through the Old Testament book of Joel. It was written at a time when the Jewish people had fallen far from the Lord. Over run with wickedness, God speaks to them through the prophet Joel, declaring that judgement was coming because of sin. But hope is not completely lost. Along with the message of impending desolation comes a promise that genuine repentance would lead to deliverance.

Today's reading is from the opening verses in the book of Joel. It is certainly not a set of verses that many people would post on Instagram or chat about with their small groups. We definitely won't have our kids memorize in Kids Blast. We prefer to meditate on scripture that are happy, with joy filled promises full of hope for the future. However, like our real lives, the Bible has messy parts. The people of Israel screwed up frequently, just like we do at times!

Just as marital infidelity causes devastating rifts between those involved, when people reject God the ramifications are terrifying. As we engage our fast this month we must be honest with ourselves. We must take time to reflect on the reality of our lives. Are there any thoughts, actions or attitudes in our lives that stand in opposition to the word and will of God? If so we must bring them to God and confess them completely.

Fortunately, unlike the people in the time of Joel, we don't need a temple and a priest to act as proxy in our relationship with God. The sacrifice of Jesus on our behalf grants us direct access to forgiveness and relationship with God. Hebrews 4:16 assures us of this. *"Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* What do you need to bring to the throne of grace today?

PRAY: Focus your prayer today on asking God to reveal anything in your life that needs repentance.

WRITE: Take time in your journal today to identify anything in your life that needs to be made right with God.

Day 2 - Call to Lament

Read: Joel 1:13-20

13 Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests;
wail, O ministers of the altar.
Go in, pass the night in sackcloth,
O ministers of my God!
Because grain offering and drink offering
are withheld from the house of your God.

14 Consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly.
Gather the elders
and all the inhabitants of the land
to the house of the Lord your God,
and cry out to the Lord.

15 Alas for the day!
For the day of the Lord is near,
and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.

16 Is not the food cut off
before our eyes,
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?

17 The seed shrivels under the clods;
the storehouses are desolate;
the granaries are torn down
because the grain has dried up.

18 How the beasts groan!
The herds of cattle are perplexed
because there is no pasture for them;
even the flocks of sheep suffer.

19 To you, O Lord, I call.
For fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness,
and flame has burned
all the trees of the field.

20 Even the beasts of the field pant for you
because the water brooks are dried up,
and fire has devoured
the pastures of the wilderness.

Reflection:

Throughout the Old Testament we read of numerous occasions when the Israelites gathered together to seek after God with deliberate intention. Often these times of pursuit included fasting. At times the people of God fasted out of sorrow and lament (Judges 20:26, 1 Samuel 31:8-13). Elsewhere we read of fasting as a result of guilt and shame from sin (1 Samuel 7:6, 1 Kings 21:27, Nehemiah 1:4-7, Jonah 3:5). We read of fasting for the healing of loved ones (2 Samuel 12:16), fasting for protection (Ezra 8:21-23, Esther 4:16) and fasting for mercy from God (Daniel 9:3) to highlight just a few

of the reasons the people of God chose to refrain from eating as a means of intensifying their hunger for God.

In today's passage, the people of Israel are being called together to "*consecrate a fast: call a solemn assembly... and cry out to the Lord*" (vs14). You will notice that there is not one single phrase in this entire chapter that references any individual person's sin. The people of Israel had all sinned. They had all fallen short of the covenant they made with God. The solution to such wide spread rejection of God, was for "*all the inhabitants of the land*" to gather together for a time of corporate fasting and repentance. This reminds us of the reading from Isaiah 58 on the first day of our 504 Journey. The people were pleading with God on behalf of others, and not merely focused on their own circumstance.

As we reflect on this passage, consider how similar the issues we face in our societies are with those faced by the Israelites in the time of Joel. Most people were living far from God, making choices based on their own desires rather than God's intentions. There never seemed to be enough to satisfy. Fear and suffering seemed pervasively prevalent. Sound familiar?

PRAY: As you take time to pray and reflect today, ask God to give you His heart for our culture and our society. Ask him to reveal to you how you can pray for healing, restoration and revival in our city and world.

WRITE: Write down a few thoughts in your journal that God has impressed on your heart from today's passage.

Day 3 - The Day of the Lord

Read: Joel 2:1-11

1 Blow a trumpet in Zion;
 sound an alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
 for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,
2 a day of darkness and gloom,
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains
 a great and powerful people;
their like has never been before,
 nor will be again after them
 through the years of all generations.
3 Fire devours before them,
 and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the garden of Eden before them,
but behind them a desolate wilderness,
and nothing escapes them.

4 Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,
and like war horses they run.

5 As with the rumbling of chariots,
they leap on the tops of the mountains,
like the crackling of a flame of fire
devouring the stubble,
like a powerful army
drawn up for battle.

6 Before them peoples are in anguish;
all faces grow pale.

7 Like warriors they charge;
like soldiers they scale the wall.
They march each on his way;
they do not swerve from their paths.

8 They do not jostle one another;
each marches in his path;
they burst through the weapons
and are not halted.

9 They leap upon the city,
they run upon the walls,
they climb up into the houses,
they enter through the windows like a thief.

10 The earth quakes before them;
the heavens tremble.
The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.

11 The Lord utters his voice
before his army,
for his camp is exceedingly great;
he who executes his word is powerful.
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;
who can endure it?

Reflection:

Today's reading continues the ominous theme of consequence when the Jewish people choose to reject God's plan. Joel begins this chapter with a call for intercession. "*Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain*" (vs 1). He goes on to proclaim the "*day of the Lord is coming.*" This phrase shows up 5 times in the book of Joel and refers to the time when God would choose to allow the people to experience the consequence of rejecting him. The descriptions of this day are horrific. God's anger towards sin is so great that it causes "*the earth to quake and the heavens to tremble*" (vs 10).

We can easily lull ourselves into thinking God isn't really concerned with sin. Time passes in almost rhythmic predictability without apparent consequence. And yet, as this passage warns us, God is serious about sin. He will not leave it unpunished.

For those who have accepted the death of Jesus as payment of sin, there is tremendous hope. The consequence and judgement for our sin has been dealt with by Jesus. However, like Joel, we have work to do on behalf of those around us who don't know the truth and are living apart from the will of God. Let us continue on our 504 Journey, united together in prayer on behalf of those who remain far from God.

PRAY: Think of a few of your friends and family who do not know Jesus. Take time today to ask God to graciously humble and bring them to salvation. Intercede on their behalf, that the "*day of the Lord*" would not come to them without the saving grace of Jesus.

WRITE: Indicate in your journal who you prayed for today, Keeping a record of our prayers helps us remember to pray and celebrate when God answers

Day 4 - Consecrate a Fast

Read: Joel 2:12-17

12 "Yet even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments."
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
14 Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the Lord your God?
15 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;
call a solemn assembly;
16 gather the people.
Consecrate the congregation;
assemble the elders;
gather the children,
even nursing infants.
Let the bridegroom leave his room,
and the bride her chamber.

17 Between the vestibule and the altar
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep
and say, "Spare your people, O Lord,
and make not your heritage a reproach,
a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"

Reflection:

As we continue our journey through the prophetic words of Joel, we arrive today at our first glimpse of hope. Today we read the beautiful words that the Lord is "*gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love: and he relents over disaster*" (vs 13). Those are words that we must hold on to as we intercede for those around us throughout our 504 Journey. The character of God never changes and it is these characteristics to which we must cling and plead as we seek restoration for those ourselves, for those we love and for the world around us.

Our passage today, gives us clear and simple directions for how to appeal to the heart of God as we continue our journey. We read crystal clear guidance in verse 12, "*return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments...*" As we reflected a few days ago, God is not looking for compartmentalized spirituality, He is longing for us to be fully invested in Him.

The phrase "*return to me with all you heart*" leaves no room for anything else. The word for heart in the original Hebrew language is "*lebab*" and according to the Strong's Concordance refers to the "*inner man, mind, will heart, soul , understanding.*" The call here is to a life of full surrender. God doesn't want a show of spirituality on the outside. He is looking for a response from the very core of who we are; from our heart.

PRAY: Pray the prayer King David prayed in Psalm 139:23, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!*"

WRITE: Reflect on your heart today. Have you fully surrendered your heart to God on this journey? Write your thoughts and reflections in your journal.

Day 5 - Our Merciful God

Read: Joel 2:18-23

18 "Then the Lord became jealous for his land
and had pity on his people.

19 The Lord answered and said to his people,
"Behold, I am sending to you

grain, wine, and oil,
and you will be satisfied;
and I will no more make you
a reproach among the nations.
20 "I will remove the northerner far from you,
and drive him into a parched and desolate land,
his vanguard into the eastern sea,
and his rear guard into the western sea;
the stench and foul smell of him will rise,
for he has done great things.
21 "Fear not, O land;
be glad and rejoice,
for the Lord has done great things!
22 Fear not, you beasts of the field,
for the pastures of the wilderness are green;
the tree bears its fruit;
the fig tree and vine give their full yield.
23 "Be glad, O children of Zion,
and rejoice in the Lord your God,
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;
he has poured down for you abundant rain,
the early and the latter rain, as before.

Reflection:

After several days of reading verses chronicling the lamenting and repentance, we finally encounter the response of God to the people's petition. We read that the Lord became "*jealous for his land and had pity on his people.*" Consider how remarkable that statement is. The humble and repentant cry of the people changed the heart of God.

Not only does the Lord relent in sending disaster and destruction upon his people, their prayers actually influence God to pour out blessing. In verse 19 we read God say to the people, "*I am sending them grain, wine and oil, and you will be satisfied...*" Later, in verse 23 we read that God is sending "*the early rain*", "*abundant rain*" and "*the latter rain.*" In an agrarian society rain was the ultimate blessing, as it was needed to ensure crops would grow. God is promising to bless their lives, their society and their economy. After much lamenting and repentance, God chose to graciously bless them abundantly rather than pour out his wrath as they deserved.

As we engage in our own period of prayer and fasting we should seek God with similar fervency and expectation.

PRAY: Ask God to once again withhold his wrath and pour out his blessing on us today.

WRITE: Consider rewriting verse 23 in your own words as it might refer to your life today.

Day 6 - Hope for the Future

Read: Joel 2:24-32

24 “The threshing floors shall be full of grain;
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25 I will restore to you the years
that the swarming locust has eaten,
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,
my great army, which I sent among you.

26 “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied,
and praise the name of the Lord your God,
who has dealt wondrously with you.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

27 You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel,
and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else.

And my people shall never again be put to shame.

28 “And it shall come to pass afterward,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
your old men shall dream dreams,
and your young men shall see visions.

29 Even on the male and female servants
in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

30 “And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and
columns of smoke. 31 The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to
blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. 32 And it shall come to
pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. For in Mount Zion
and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and
among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

Reflection:

In the hustle and bustle of our busy lives, we so easily forget how powerful God is. We often struggle and strive for meager gains, missing that our Father in heaven holds the power to unleash blessing beyond our wildest imagination. Today’s passage reminds us that when the people of God humbly and passionately seek Him first above all else, with repentant and hungry hearts, He responds with incredible blessing.

This scripture is full of extravagant language. Did you notice the words like “*full*”, “*overflow*”, “*plenty*” and “*satisfied*” as you read? We serve a God who desires to pour out His blessing upon us in miraculous and abundant ways. He wants you and I to “*be satisfied*” (vs 26) completely through our relationship with him. This echos the word of God in Jeremiah 31:25, “*I will satisfy the weary soul and every languishing soul I will*

replenish.” This theme repeats throughout scripture, constantly reminding us that we are wired to find our satisfaction in God.

PRAY: Ask God to help you find your satisfaction fully in Him. Ask Him to point out any area in life where you may be seeking satisfaction outside of your relationship with Him.

WRITE: In your journal make a list of the ways God satisfies.

Day 7 - Consecrate for War

Read: Joel 3:1-16

1 “For behold, in those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, 2 I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. And I will enter into judgment with them there, on behalf of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land, 3 and have cast lots for my people, and have traded a boy for a prostitute, and have sold a girl for wine and have drunk it.

4 “What are you to me, O Tyre and Sidon, and all the regions of Philistia? Are you paying me back for something? If you are paying me back, I will return your payment on your own head swiftly and speedily. 5 For you have taken my silver and my gold, and have carried my rich treasures into your temples. 6 You have sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks in order to remove them far from their own border. 7 Behold, I will stir them up from the place to which you have sold them, and I will return your payment on your own head. 8 I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hand of the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, to a nation far away, for the Lord has spoken.”

9 Proclaim this among the nations:

Consecrate for war;

 stir up the mighty men.

Let all the men of war draw near;

 let them come up.

10 Beat your plowshares into swords,
 and your pruning hooks into spears;
 let the weak say, “I am a warrior.”

11 Hasten and come,
 all you surrounding nations,
 and gather yourselves there.

Bring down your warriors, O Lord.

12 Let the nations stir themselves up
 and come up to the Valley of Jehoshaphat;
for there I will sit to judge

all the surrounding nations.
13 Put in the sickle,
for the harvest is ripe.
Go in, tread,
for the winepress is full.
The vats overflow,
for their evil is great.
14 Multitudes, multitudes,
in the valley of decision!
For the day of the Lord is near
in the valley of decision.
15 The sun and the moon are darkened,
and the stars withdraw their shining.
16 The Lord roars from Zion,
and utters his voice from Jerusalem,
and the heavens and the earth quake.
But the Lord is a refuge to his people,
a stronghold to the people of Israel.

Reflection:

The first few chapters of Joel carried a strong warning and call to repentance. The past two days gave us incredible insight into the gracious and merciful nature of God when His people seek him in repentance and with their whole hearts. Our passage today pivots from God's desire to bless His people, to his commitment to protect them.

With warring nations pressing in on all sides, the people of Israel were constantly at risk of invasion. At times, because of their rebellious hearts, God allowed His people to be conquered. However, God can just as easily protect His people, and desires to do so if they would allow Him to truly be their God. In verse 9 we find strong bellicose language prompting the people to prepare for battle. The people are commanded to "*Consecrate for war.*" This stands in stark contrast to the earlier commands to "*consecrate a fast*" (1:14, 2:15). Clearly, there is a shift in focus and attention for the people of God occurring in this chapter.

As we continue our 504 journey together, we will need to take different postures in prayer, shifting our focus at times, to address different needs in our lives and world. Like the people of Israel, we will at times need to prepare for war. While we won't pick up physical weaponry on this journey, we will at times be prompted by God to engage in spiritual warfare through pray, against the enemy. As the people of Israel faced opposition on all sides, we face opposition as well. Satan and his forces seek to "*steal, kill and destroy*" (John 10:10) your life, your family and those around you. We must take time to consecrate ourselves for the spiritual battle God has for us to fight. As you prepare to fight, remember the truth found in Romans 8:37, "*...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*"

PRAY: As you pray, take the posture of spiritual warfare. As you pray, identify specific areas in your family that you need to pray for as a warrior.

WRITE: In your journal write down the names of people and issues in your life that you need to fight for in prayer. Declare the power of God to reign in each area of your life.

Day 8 - Victory is Assured

Read: Joel 3:17-21

17 “So you shall know that I am the Lord your God,
who dwells in Zion, my holy mountain.

And Jerusalem shall be holy,
and strangers shall never again pass through it.

18 “And in that day
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,
and the hills shall flow with milk,
and all the streambeds of Judah
shall flow with water;
and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord
and water the Valley of Shittim.

19 “Egypt shall become a desolation
and Edom a desolate wilderness,
for the violence done to the people of Judah,
because they have shed innocent blood in their land.

20 But Judah shall be inhabited forever,
and Jerusalem to all generations.

21 I will avenge their blood,
blood I have not avenged,
for the Lord dwells in Zion.”

Reflection:

As we read the last several verses in the book of Joel, we discover exactly why God chose to work in a miraculous and powerful way when His people called out to Him with repentant and penitent hearts. “*So that you shall know, that I am the LORD your God*” (vs 17). As we learned over the past several days, God relented in sending calamity and provided blessing, protection and refuge for His people. It is important to understand however, that God didn't do any of this merely for the benefit and pleasure of the people. He did all of it to bring glory to Himself and to ensure that the Israelites were restored in relationship to Him.

As we seek God through our 504 journey, we must never lose sight of the fact that his response will be for His glory. When we ask him to heal our relationships, protect our families, or bring revival to our land, we do it with hearts seeking to honor God. When we seek to have a closer relationship with him, we benefit greatly, but ultimately it is to bring Him greater glory. Prayers that are focused on petitioning God to bring healing and restoration bring Him honor and position our hearts to receive the blessing he already wants for us.

This doesn't mean that God always answer our prayers with a "yes", rather it means that our hearts, if focused on seeking to know and glorify God, will be aligned with His will and our prayers will nestle deep into the heart of God, catching his attention, just as they did in the book of Joel.

PRAY: Ask God to help your prayers be focused on knowing Him better and bringing Him more glory.

WRITE: Take time to write a commitment in your journal to honoring God in all you do.