

Joel series (Sept 2019)

'Rend your heart and not your garments'

Week 2: Joel 2:1-17

Last week we looked at Joel 1, and considered the locust plague that had devastated Israel. Joel called the people to mourn in response to this natural disaster. It is only later in Joel that we learn that it was God who sent this locust plague (2:25).

A warning (v1-11)

Joel describes the events of the coming Day of the Lord in terms of a locust plague. But as the crescendo builds from verse 1 to verse 11, the language becomes more and more militaristic, and the poetry here makes the image in our minds far worse than a locust plague. The warning climaxes in verses 10-11, with the Lord 'thundering' at the head of His mighty army.

1. Why was this image so devastating for Joel's original listeners?
 - a. Think about Israel's economy at the time, and the circumstances they found themselves in at the time of Joel's message.
 - b. Think also more broadly about God's covenant with His people.
2. How do we reconcile this image of destruction, at God's behest, with the image of a doting loving father that we usually have of God? (If we usually have that image!)
 - a. Perhaps a gentle correction of the image of God is needed: along the lines of CS Lewis in Narnia (is Aslan (Jesus) safe? No, but he's good).
 - b. Think also about how great the judgement and wrath turned aside by Jesus on the cross.

A response (v12-14a)

God desires turning or returning to him. The language of these verses does not necessarily mean sin on Israel's part and therefore demand repentance, although sin could be implied (see Deuteronomy 28:38). Even if sin is implied, it is not Joel's focus.¹ Because of God's character, v13, God desires 'all' of our

¹ You may also wish to compare God's self-description in Exodus 34 to Joel's quote of God's self-description in Joel 2:13.

hearts, and an authentic response, rather than a show ('rend your heart, not your garment').

3. How do we turn (or return) to God with 'all our heart'?
4. Why does God desire broken hearts?
 - a. You may wish to look up Psalm 34:18, Psalm 51:17, Isaiah 57:15 and Matthew 5:3-5.
5. What does authentic broken-heartedness look like?

An objection (v14b)

Some may object because locust plagues and a God thundering at the head of His army seem so distant to us in twenty-first century Australia. This objection could be solidified when one reads v14b, that God may leave behind a grain offering and a wine offering, because we don't now use such means to connect to God.

6. In what ways are we in a different position to the original hearers of Joel's message?²
7. In what ways are we in the same position to the original hearers of Joel's message?
8. You may wish to look at Hebrews 13:8, Revelation 9:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:32, and whether they help address the objection that Joel's message is irrelevant to twenty-first century Christians.

A people who respond (v15-17)

In these verses Joel seeks to gather the people of Israel to call on God to spare them. Notice that it includes all ages (v16a), that it's urgent (v16b),³ and that there's a concern for God's reputation (v17).

9. What does it look like for us as GWAC to respond corporately and urgently to God?
10. Is it appropriate, when natural disasters strike, to gather together and pray to God?
11. When natural disasters strike, should we be prompted to think of the coming time of final judgement, being Jesus' return?

² Assuming that Joel spoke to the people of Israel at about 500BC, after the return from exile in Babylon (after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah).

³ Brides and grooms are typically allowed to enjoy their honeymoon in peace.