

"Return!"

Joel 2:12-17

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Our relationship with God is our right in Christ Jesus. Prayer flows out of relationship. While the Psalmist helps us make our hearts known to God, the Prophet makes God's heart known to us.

The book of Joel was written at a time of unprecedented calamity. He writes of another calamity that was to come, one far worse – a vast and powerful army that would wipe out everything. God Himself would command that army (Joel 2:11).

3 things Joel teaches us about the COVID-19 calamity

1. Every calamity, including COVID-19, is under God's sovereignty – Joel unmistakably saw God as the chief architect behind every calamity (not man, not Satan)
2. Don't be quick to connect every calamity, including COVID-19, to God's judgement – Joel interprets the calamity as God's judgement from Deut. 28:38; Where do we interpret God's judgement from (Job, Rom 1, 1 Cor 11, Heb 12)?
3. Every calamity, including COVID-19, mirrors God's impending final judgement – a calamity that brings about thousands of deaths should lead us to remember the coming day of God's judgement.

While there is great horror in the final judgement of God (Joel 2:11), God cries out to us to return to Him (v12).

3 Questions on God's Cry to Return:

1) What does it mean to return?

v12 – Through a calamity, God was showing His people how far they were from Him. He looked beyond the religiosity of His people; their hearts were still far from Him (v13a). There is a lament on God's heart; the Father longs for His little children to come to Him. To return is to truly repent. Repentance is not just about turning away from sin; repentance is about returning to the Father.

2) Why should we return?

In light of God's hot fury, it is holy fear that drives us to holy self-preservation. But Joel calls us to return to God because of who God is – beautiful, desirous and glorious (v13b). We can return to Him because He will gladly receive us! It is the nature of God to relent over disasters (v14), and this is why we pray! Our God is a God who relents, and He desires whole-heartedly for us to return. God's kindness is meant to lead us to repentance, so return to Him for He loves us!

3) How are we to return?

3 Practical Considerations:

#1 Return with hope

We need to repent with hope (v15). Hold fast to His character and steadfast love and recount the wonderful things God has already done for us.

#2 Return in community

v16 – Joel calls for the entire community to come together. We need to make this our top priority! Busyness is not an excuse. Returning to God is not to be done alone; it is to be done in a community.

#3 Return through Christ

v17 – First and foremost, it is Jesus who occupies the space of honour (between the vestibule and the altar). Jesus is at the right hand of God and intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). We should return through Christ and not through our own efforts! His power is made perfect in our weakness.

At the cross, Jesus died as both the Psalmist and Prophet. He stood on the side of both men and God. He brought our lament before God and by enduring the cross until death, he made loud the lament on God's heart to us. Return!