

Readings

Scripture

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?

- Joel 2:12-14 (*English Standard Version*)

Reflection

The problem, C.S. Lewis insists, is us. And the crooked and perverse generation of which the psalmists and prophets spoke many thousands of years ago is our own, whenever we submit to systemic and individual evils as if doing so were our only alternative.

- Kathleen Norris, *Forward to Mere Christianity*

Come, let us return to the LORD; for he has torn us, that he may heal us; he has struck us down, and he will bind us up. After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him. Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

- Hosea 6:1-3 (*English Standard Version*)

The book of Joel is a tightly bound theological unit. Yahweh’s judgment, both in its present and apocalyptic forms, is transformed into salvation when his people accept his offer of grace and return to him with torn hearts and not just torn clothing (Joel 2:13). God not only meets his people’s material needs (Joel 2:21-27) but gives his very self as well (Joel 3:1-5). He opens to all the security of Zion. This is the message of Joel.

- Duane A. Garrett, *The Structure of Joel*, JETS 28:3, 1985 (p. 289-297)

Sermon Outline

Come Back
Joel 2:12-14

Return With All Your Heart
Brad Anderson

God graciously commands his people to return. (Joel 2:12-14)

What effect will God’s grace have on our divided hearts?

God’s grace will further wound our divided hearts... (Joel 2:12-14)

God’s grace will finally heal our divided hearts... (Joel 2:12-14)

Reflection Questions (taken in part from the Serendipity Study Bible for Groups)

- What is your favorite film or show about the future? Why do you like it so much? What disaster movies have you seen? What were the special effects like? What effect did they have on you?
- The book of Joel is short. Read the book in one sitting. What themes seem to eat at you? Which ones puzzle you? Which one dominates? What clues do you find as to its audience? Its argument?
- How comfortable are you talking about famine, plagues, and destruction in the past? In the present? In Joel? What bothers you about these topics?
- Are you ready to put on Joel’s “visionary glasses” to interpret history from an apocalyptic point of view (i.e., in terms of the end of all history)? How so? If it’s not “right here and right now,” how do you deal with it?
- With destruction near at the Lord’s hand, what does Joel expect? (Look closely at Joel 2:12-14)
- What does “rend your heart and not your garments” mean in Joel 2:13?
- Can repentance of heart be true without “fasting and mourning”? How? What would a spiritual fast entail today? How would that differ from a spiritual diet?