

Session 9 How to Respond to Global Crisis (Joel 2:12-17)

I. CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. God has given the human race great dignity. We have free will, which means we have been given the ability to make real choices that make a real difference. We affect the quality of life by what we do with our free will. Our choices for righteousness or for sin will bring either blessing or evil to us and to those near us. If we choose righteousness, then we open doors of blessings to others. Our free will provides the legal entry point for both angels and demons to be much more active in the natural realm. When we live in righteousness, we open up legal access for angelic activity into the natural realm. When people live in sin, they open up legal entry points for demonic activity to be heightened.
- B. God governs the universe in partnership with His people through intercession. The majesty and mystery of intercession is seen foremost in Jesus' relationship with the Father. The Father's power is released to the nations as Jesus makes intercession for them throughout all eternity.
²⁵*He [Jesus] always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:25)*
⁸*[The Father said to Jesus] "...Ask of Me [intercession], and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession." (Ps. 2:8)*
- C. The prayer room is the governmental center of the universe. God has chosen to release His power through our prayers. Prayer transcends time and distance. Paul could change the church in Ephesus through his prayers while he was in prison in Rome. In the same way, we can change the cities of the earth through our prayers in our local prayer meetings.
- D. God has determined the primary events in His eternal plan (Jesus' second coming, Jesus reigning over the earth as King, Satan cast into the lake of fire, establishing the new earth, etc.). Regardless of what people do, God will accomplish the main events in His eternal plan.
- E. He gives His people a dynamic role in determining some of the measure of the "quality of life" that we experience in the natural and in the Spirit. We determine this based on our response to the grace of God in our partnership with Him, particularly in prayer, obedience, and meekness.
- F. He opens doors of blessing and closes doors of oppression in response to our prayers. There are blessings that God only gives as His people ask for them.
²*You do not have because you do not ask. (Jas. 4:2)*
²¹*"This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Mt. 17:21)*
- G. God is waiting for our persistence in prayer before Him. Isaiah taught that God longs to release His grace and power, but actually waits until He hears the cry of His people in intercession.
¹⁸*The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you...*¹⁹*He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. (Isa. 30:18-19; NASB)*

- H. God searched for an intercessor to stand in the gap between Himself and Israel, to pray that judgment be withheld. God did not find such a one; thus, He destroyed the land. Intercession changes the course of nations.

³⁰*“So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.” (Ezek. 22:30)*

- I. When God was angry with Israel because of her sin, Moses stood in the gap between Israel and God in prayer. God relented, or changed His plan, and did not destroy Israel.

⁹*The LORD said to Moses, “...Indeed it is a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them...” ¹¹Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “...Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people...” ¹⁴So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Ex. 32:9-14)*

II. CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. Corporate intercessory worship is the primary means God has chosen to release His government (power) in His relationship with Jesus and His redeemed. It is the highest expression of government in time and eternity, and the most powerful weapon that exists.
- B. God’s primary call to a nation in crisis is to gather in solemn assemblies (Joel 2:12-17).
1. **Corporate:** God requires that we gather for corporate prayer. It requires humility to embrace all that is implied in gathering corporately. The differences in worship and prayer styles, doctrinal emphases, and various personalities make humility a necessity for those who meet together regularly.
 2. **Intercessory:** Intercessory prayer is standing in the gap for others, and praying back to God the things He has promised to do for His people.
 3. **Worship:** God is looking for prayer that is based on worship. Prophetic music and singing unifies God’s people in a unique way. Through worship, thousands can remain in unity for sustained periods of time as they feel the same truths.
- C. Some “trust” the sovereignty of God in a non-biblical way by “trusting” God to do the role that He has assigned to us. This is not truly trusting God, but is presumption before Him. **We cannot do God’s part and He will not do our part.**
1. Some misapply the truth that if God wants something, then He will do it. This is true in some of the broad strokes of how He leads history.
 2. There are many things that God will not give us until we ask Him with faith and obedience. For example, God wants all to be saved, but it does not just happen, because God will not violate our free will—not even for our salvation (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

- D. Corporate intercessory worship releases blessing on the redeemed and judgment on the enemy.

⁶Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, ⁷to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; ⁸to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; ⁹to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 149:6-9)

- E. Corporate intercessory worship stops the work of the enemy. King Jehoshaphat employed corporate intercessory worship when resisting the attack from the nations of Moab and Ammon. God responded by setting ambushes against Israel's enemies.

³Jehoshaphat...set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD...¹⁸All Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. ¹⁹Then the Levites...stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high...²¹He [Jehoshaphat] appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever." ²²Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. (2 Chr. 20:3-4, 18-22)

III. THE RESPONSE THAT GOD REQUIRES: SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES

¹²"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." ¹³So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. ¹⁴Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him...? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes... ¹⁷Let the priests...weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, "Spare Your people, O LORD..." (Joel 2:12-17)

- A. In Joel 2:12-17, God tells us what we are to do to receive His mercy and deliverance—we are to turn to Him in wholeheartedness. In a time of crisis, God requires that His people gather together for solemn assemblies; that is, to return to Him in wholeheartedness with prayer and fasting.
- B. A solemn, or sacred, assembly involves the leaders and the people joining together to repent and fast, and to pray for the intervention of God's power and mercy.
- C. We are to cry out for God's favor in solemn assemblies before and during a crisis.
- D. The response that God requires in a time of crisis is the same today as it was in Joel's generation. He does not leave us guessing as to what He desires from us. We can act with confidence.

IV. TURN TO GOD WITH WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

¹²*Now therefore, says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.”* ¹³*Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD... (Joel 2:12-13)*

- A. God wants our hearts and our love (Mt. 22:37). He requires that we respond to His love by loving Him. Turning to God in wholeheartedness involves repenting, fasting, and praying.
- B. Mankind’s very existence is on account of God’s love for us and His desire for a deep relationship with us.
- C. The place of safety in the time of judgment is in the midst of a company of people living in long-term, corporate wholeheartedness. As we respond wholeheartedly to Jesus’ work on the cross, we walk in God’s favor in a time of judgment.
- D. I want to be in the midst of a people who are developing a corporate, long-term history in wholeheartedness. I believe that corporate wholeheartedness is the safest environment on earth.

V. REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS

¹³*Rend your heart and not your garments; return to the LORD your God... (Joel 2:13)*

- A. In Joel’s day, people tore their garments to show their grief and desperation. However, what God desires is the tearing of our heart, which speaks of dealing radically with the matters of our heart.
- B. *To rend* means to tear something violently or forcibly. We tear our heart away from everything in our life that quenches the Spirit! Jesus spoke symbolically of this tearing, or radical obedience. ²⁹*“If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.” (Mt. 5:29)*
- C. Tearing our heart is intensely personal and painful. Some want the Spirit to free them from their sinful patterns and relationships, without it requiring any personal choices that tear their heart.
- D. We cannot pursue wholeheartedness in a casual way. Some hope for a wholeheartedness that is gentle, easy, and tame.
- E. Jesus tore His heart when He went to the cross. The Father’s heart was torn when Jesus went to the cross. It continues to be torn in His patient longsuffering with His people, as they refuse Him. He tears His own heart in His pursuit after us. He has proved that He does not love us in a detached, distant way. To fully enter into this love, our own hearts must be torn.

VI. REPENTING WITH CONFIDENCE IN GOD'S TENDER HEART: A 5-FOLD REVELATION

¹³**Return to the LORD...¹⁴ for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent...? (Joel 2:13-14)**

A. Joel summons the people to return to the Lord, giving **five reasons** why this is doable and wise. God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and He relents from doing harm. He desires to make a way of deliverance. The knowledge of God's heart for us gives us courage to tear our hearts in repentance. If we take one step toward Him, He will take ten steps toward us.

B. First, the Lord is gracious in that He evaluates us differently from the way everyone else evaluates us. He is not a harsh leader, like an angry coach or parent who despises weakness. God's style of relating is human-friendly. God's grace puts His requirements within reach, even in our weakness (1 Jn. 5:4; Mt. 11:30). Some do not turn to the Lord because they do not understand that He is gracious, and that He will make a way of deliverance for us. He remembers our frailty and that we are but dust.

¹⁰**He has not dealt with...nor punished us according to our iniquities. (Ps. 103:10)**

¹⁴**For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. (Ps. 103:14)**

C. Second, the Lord delights in mercy. He enjoys it when we discover that He gives us a new start after each failure. Truly, there is no one like God in showing mercy (Isa. 55:7-10)!

¹⁸**Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity...because He delights in mercy. (Mic. 7:18)**

D. Third, the Lord is slow to anger and takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 33:11). God is not easily provoked by our weakness. He longs to forgive all who ask for forgiveness.

¹¹**Say to them: "As I live," says the Lord GOD, "I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." (Ezek. 33:11)**

¹⁴**God...devises means, so that His banished ones are not expelled from Him. (2 Sam. 14:14)**

E. Jesus spoke of His great patience to the church in Thyatira. He gave them time to repent of their immorality, and He does the same for us.

²⁰**"Because you allow...Jezebel...to teach...My servants to commit sexual immorality...²¹I gave her time to repent of her immorality...²²Indeed I will cast her into a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent." (Rev. 2:20-22)**

F. Fourth, the Lord has great kindness. When we believe in God's kindness, we have confidence to press into full repentance. Our repentance will never be met with rejection. This gives us the courage to tear our hearts, knowing that God desires to help and restore our fellowship with Him.

⁴**Do you despise the riches of His goodness [kindness], forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness [kindness] of God leads you to repentance? (Rom. 2:4)**

³⁵**Your right hand has held me up, Your gentleness has made me great. (Ps. 18:35)**

G. Fifth, the Lord relents from doing harm. He desires to cancel the judgment that a nation deserves.

VII. THE LORD RELENTS FROM SENDING JUDGMENT

¹³*Return to the LORD...for He is gracious...He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:13)*

³⁰*“I sought for a man...who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.” (Ezek. 22:30)*

- A. God desires to relent, or to cancel the decree of judgment, instead of issuing it.
- B. There are two stages in God’s decrees: First, the decree is **decided on** in God’s court. Second, the decree is **issued** as God releases angels to execute the judgment. A decree can be canceled.

¹*Gather yourselves...²before the decree is issued...before the LORD’s fierce anger comes upon you...³Seek the LORD...it may be that you will be hidden in the day of...anger. (Zeph. 2:1-3)*

- C. In response to our prayer, God changes what He releases in a nation or in our personal lives. A disaster that is decided on in God’s court may be changed (Gen. 18:22-32; Ex. 32: 9-14; 2 Sam. 12:15-23; 24:10-14; 2 Chr. 34:22-28; Jer. 18:7-10; 51:6-8; Ezek. 18:21, 22, 28; 33:10-14; Dan. 4:29; Amos 5:1-3,14-15; 7:1-6; Zeph. 2:1-3; Hab. 3:16-19; Jon. 3:4-10; Mal. 3:16-4:6).
- D. One of the great examples of God’s willingness to relent is found in the destruction of Sodom. Upon learning of God’s intention to judge the city, Abraham asked the Lord if He would relent and save it if there were only fifty righteous people in it. The Lord told Abraham that He would. Abraham pressed the question to forty-five people, then forty, then thirty, then twenty. Finally, Abraham said, “If there were only ten righteous, would You spare the city?” The Lord said that He would spare the city if only ten righteous people were found (Gen. 18:22-33).

There are three steps in our partnership with God. First, **God initiates** what He wants by declaring it in His Word and stirring our hearts. Second, **we respond** in obedience and prayer to God’s initiative. Third, **God answers** our responses by releasing more blessing, which He would otherwise have withheld if He had not heard our cry. Our prayers really matter.

VIII. WHO KNOWS? —THE “PERHAPS OF GOD”

¹³*So rend your heart...for He is gracious...and He relents from doing harm. ¹⁴Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him—a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:13-14)*

³*Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth...seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be [perhaps] that you will be hidden [protected] in the day of the LORD’s anger. (Zeph. 2:3)*

- A. There is what I refer to as “the perhaps of God” in God’s plans. Perhaps God may respond to your prayers and hide or protect you and your geographic area in a time of judgment.

- B. God desires to turn from judgment and leave a blessing. He prefers to transform a would-be ***disaster zone into a revival center***. The Lord relents from judgment in geographic areas according to the response of His people.
- C. In Joel's day, in light of the Babylonian invasion that Israel faced, God called them to cry out to Him that He might provide "pockets of mercy" in the midst of the invasion.
- D. Joel spoke of the blessing that the Lord might leave behind in the grain and drink offerings. He was saying, in essence, that if the Babylonian invasion happened, the crops would be utterly destroyed. Then there would be no grain or wine for the offerings to the Lord.
- E. David knew about this "perhaps" of God after he sinned with Bathsheba. She bore a son. Nathan prophesied to David that the baby would die because of his sin. David knew the baby might die, but he also knew that God's mercy was so great that "perhaps" He would spare the child.
¹⁶David pleaded with God for the child, and David fasted and went in and lay all night on the ground...¹⁸On the seventh day...the child died...²⁰David...anointed himself...and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped.²¹His servants said, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food."²²And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?'" (2 Sam. 12:16-22)

IX. GATHER THE PEOPLE AND SANCTIFY THE CONGREGATION

¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes... (Joel 2:15-16)

- A. How should we respond to the danger that we see arising in the earth? The Lord has given us a clear and effective plan through the prophet Joel. It will take faith to carry it out.
- B. We are to blow the trumpet in Zion, to call a solemn assembly. We assemble the elders who will then gather the people to pray and fast.
- C. ***Blow the trumpet in Zion***: Boldly proclaim the coming judgment and the solemn assembly.
- D. ***Consecrate a fast***: Fasting positions our hearts to experience the grace of God in a greater way.
- E. ***Call a sacred assembly***: Gatherings that are ***sacred***—to our heart and in our schedules.
- F. ***Gather the people and children, and assemble the elders***: The children are to be part of this gathering (we urge children to not fast food). No one was exempt from crying out to Him, because no one was exempt from the coming Babylonian crisis that was to affect the whole nation.

- G. ***Sanctify the congregation:*** Leaders sanctify people in their congregation by laying aside ministry programs and activities to make seeking God together the top priority during that special season. The people were to see the meetings as sacred. This refers both to having a sacred attitude in the prayer meetings and to treating the assembly as sacred in terms of prioritizing our time in order to attend. In other words, they were to approach the assembly with a serious attitude—an attitude of it being important to their schedule.
- H. Joel used three words to emphasize the sanctity of their gathering. He urged them to consecrate times of fasting, to see the gathering (assemblies) as sacred, and to sanctify the congregation.
- I. One dictionary defines *sacred* as something dedicated to God for religious purposes or dedicated reverently and exclusively to a single use because it is worthy of great respect; or as something a person holds to be important, and thus, has a transformative effect on their life and destiny. To be *sacred* is in contrast to being *secular* (such as sacred music); it is to reverently dedicate.
- J. Seeing an activity as sacred can be applied in two ways. First, it can be seen as holy, or directly connected to God in a unique way, such as the sacred Scriptures. Second, it can be seen as very important to us, not something we take casually or see as optional. We follow through on our commitments to God when we see them as being important to God. Thus, they are sacred or important to us.

X. GIVE YOURSELF TO EARNEST PRAYER

¹⁷Let the priests who minister to the LORD, weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD, and do not give Your heritage to reproach, that the nations [Babylon] should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’” (Joel 2:17)

- A. The response God requires involves offering earnest prayer for mercy, that we might be spared.
- B. Joel called the priests to lead the people in offering two prayer requests.
 - 1. First, “Spare Your people!” This is a prayer that God would stop the judgment altogether.
 - 2. Second, “Do not give Your heritage to reproach that the nations should rule over them.” They were to pray that God would stop the Babylonian military invasion so that a wicked nation would not rule over Israel. “Why should they say among the unbelieving peoples and nations, ‘Where is your God?’” In other words, they were to pray that unbelieving Gentile nations would not mock Israel because God was no longer in their midst to bless and protect them.
 - 3. Some commentaries see the military invasion of Joel 2:1-9 as merely a reiteration of the locust invasion of Joel 1. However, in this prayer, Joel points to a crisis involving a military invasion rather than a natural disaster brought on by locusts. This prayer was not asking God to stop locusts from devouring their crops.

- C. We may use a secondary application of this prayer by asking the Lord to spare the Church from spiritual barrenness and powerlessness so that unbelievers would not mock God's people, as if God were not real. We beseech God to vindicate His people for the sake of His name! He delights in bringing glory to Jesus' name by answering the prayers of the saints for Him to show His power.
- D. Unbelievers reason that if there is no power in the Church, then God is not listening to our prayers. It logically follows that if God does not listen to us, why should they? We cry out that God would take away our reproach by empowering us.

XI. THE RESPONSE GOD REQUIRES

- A. The central idea of Joel 2:12-17 is that God wants to deliver His people. He desires to show compassion and to release His power. Therefore, He has given us clear instruction. Joel 2 offers us the clearest direction in the Scripture as to how we receive God's mercy when facing a crisis. God wants us to have faith and confidence in time of crisis.
- B. God is looking for a specific response from His people in time of trouble. Joel 2:12-17 tells us exactly what we are to do to receive His mercy and deliverance.

XII. EXAMPLES OF RESPONDING TO GOD IN HUMILITY AND AVOIDING JUDGMENT

- A. King Josiah sent word to Huldah the prophetess, asking her to inquire of the Lord for him. She pointed out that God promised through Moses to destroy Israel if they rejected God (Deut. 28:47-64). Josiah humbled himself and received Huldah's word.

*²³Thus says the LORD God...“Tell the man [King Josiah]...²⁴‘Behold, I will bring calamity on this place...all the curses that are written in the book [Deut. 28:47-52]...²⁵because they have forsaken Me...Therefore My wrath will be poured out on this place...’”²⁶But as for the king...speak to him, “Thus says the LORD...²⁷‘Because your heart was tender...and you humbled yourself before Me, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I have heard you...²⁸Surely...you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place [Jerusalem] and its inhabitants.’”
(2 Chr. 34:23-28)*

²⁹Then the king sent and gathered all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. ³⁰And the king went up to the house of the LORD, with all the men of Judah...³¹Then the king stood in his place and made a covenant...to follow the LORD...with all his heart...³²He made all who were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin take a stand... (2 Chr. 34:29-32)

- 1. The primary prophet in Josiah's day was Jeremiah, who prophesied the Babylonian invasion of Israel. Josiah received his ministry. The Lord had been warning Israel about the coming Babylonian military invasion for several decades through prophets like Joel, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, and even as far back as Isaiah (over 100 years earlier).

2. Josiah responded to these prophecies. He led a spiritual reform before the Babylonian captivity. God saw his wholeheartedness (2 Chr. 34:27) and responded by delaying the judgment of the Babylonian invasion until after Josiah's lifetime. Josiah died in 609 BC, possibly around the time of Joel's ministry. The invasion began in 606 BC.
- B. King Jehoshaphat called the people to cry out to God in a corporate solemn assembly with fasting and prayer. God delivered Israel from the military attack by Moabites and Ammonites.
- ³Jehoshaphat...set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD...²¹...He [Jehoshaphat] appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: "Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever."²²Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. (2 Chr. 20:3-4, 18-22)*
- C. Ahab was one of the most evil kings in Israel's history. He humbled himself in a time of judgment and received mercy. This is an amazing example of how far God's mercy will reach.
- ²⁵There was no one like Ahab who sold himself to do wickedness...²⁶He behaved very abominably in following idols...²⁷So it was, when Ahab heard those words, that he tore his clothes and put sackcloth on his body, and fasted and lay in sackcloth, and went about mourning. ²⁸The word of the LORD came to Elijah saying, ²⁹"See how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the calamity in his days. In the days of his son I will bring the calamity on his house." (1 Kgs. 21:25-29)*
- D. Manasseh was also one of the evil kings in Israel's history. He humbled himself and received God's mercy during a time of judgment (2 Chr. 33:9-13). Earlier in Manasseh's life, the Scripture describes him as being under God's judgment (2 Kgs. 23:26).
- ¹²When he was in affliction, he implored the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, ¹³and prayed to Him; and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. (2 Chr. 33:12-13)*