**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes 5-14-2023
Majoring in the Minors – Joel**

It is interesting the things you remember from growing up. Isn’t it? I remember attending so many classes and studying so many subjects, but I have forgotten so much of that information. Maybe you can identify with me there.

But I remember certain things. And one thing that I clearly remember from high school was something our principle did pretty much every day at the close of the morning announcements over the loud speaker. He said this phrase, “And make it a great day. Or not. The choice is yours.”

Hearing that day after day, the phrase stuck with me. And I think that’s because there is some truth in it. Our attitudes and how we respond to things are very important. We can choose what to make of each day we’ve been given.

**But more important than making every day a great day is making every day a God day.** Some days are bad days and there’s just no way of getting around it. We all have bad days, because we live in a very broken world. But even those bad days can be God days.

So again, while there is some truth to choosing to try to make every day a great day, it’s more biblically correct that we must choose to make every day a God day.

Every day is an opportunity to walk with Jesus. Every day is an opportunity to chose growing in God’s way and it pursuing godly living. The choice is ours to make each and every day.

As we turn now to the second of the minor prophets found in our Bibles, we come to the Book of Joel. I deeply believe that by heeding the core messages of the Book of Joel will help us make every day a God day.

Now Christians often hear readings from Joel at worship on one of two occasions. Does anyone want to guess when? On Ash Wednesday and on Pentecost. Today we will touch on why these two readings are so significant as we hear excerpts from both.

But before we turn to these readings, I will touch on the context of Joel a little bit. On this, there is really not much to share. This is because Joel, unfortunately, does not give us a lot of references to specific leaders and events that would help us to pinpoint exactly when this prophecy was written. As a result, some scholars have argued that it was as early as the 9th century BC and others as late as the 4th century BC as well as periods in between.

But whenever it was written, the things Joel highlights would have been very relevant at any of those times. Heeding the words of Joel would have helped the people of Israel to make it a God day.

Our first reading from Joel is the one we often hear on Ash Wednesday. Let’s hear it again and then unpack why it is was so important.

Please turn with me to Joel 2:12-17

**12“Even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.”**

**13Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.**

**15Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. 16Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the portico and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”**

The first theme from Joel is a call to repentance. Repentance is a huge theme in this prophecy. To repent is to turn from sin and to turn to the Lord.

While Joel does not describe the specific sin issues that needed to be repented of, the call to repent is all over the place.

This is also a corporate call to repentance. They were to gather together and mourn over how sin had so deeply affected them as a nation. And they were to rent their hearts and not their garments. In other words, it was about sincerely rather than putting on a pious appearance.

In the book of Joel, through very vivid descriptions, Joel describes a coming attack on the land of Israel. It is unclear if this attack is a plague of locusts, similar to one of the plagues that God sends against the Egyptians prior to the exodus of Israel from slavery in Egypt or if Joel is using this imagery to describe a human army that would likely soon be released to bring about God’s judgment against Israel for its sins.

But either way, the call to repentance follows this announcement. And it is not just to repent for one’s own sins, but also for the sins of others. It is to cry out to God for His mercy over a broken land.

So why is repentance important? It is because God’s heart is always merciful. While God is just and will bring judgment to people and to nations, God’s desire is that people and nations turn their hearts to Him through sincere repentance. God’s desire is always to pour out mercy rather than to bring judgment.

2 Chronicles 7:14 is a famous verse that says this as well. We are told, **“If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.”**

Friends, God is not far away. And repentance is one powerful way the Lord invites His people to make it a God day. To repent for one’s own sins, to the best of their understanding. And to repent for sins of others. To cry out for God’s mercy and help. So every day is a day to repent, whether it is for ourselves or on behalf of others.

Jesus said, **‘blessed are those that mourn, for they will be comforted.’** I believe what Jesus was largely referring to was God calling His people to mourn and grieve over sin and its devastating effects on people. On us. On others. Mourning should lead to repentance and prayer.

The other Scripture from Joel that we are highlighting also comes from chapter two, but it is very different in its tone. And this one we often hear read or referred to on Pentecost Sunday, the day Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit.

Let us now hear from Joel 2:28-29.

**“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.”**

This passage shows that God’s heart has always been to minister through everyone. God’s desire is that all of His people are hearing from Him and all of His people are speaking on God’s behalf to others.

God wanted the original readers to be excited that as much as God wanted to speak through prophets like Joel and others, God’s ultimate desire is that ALL HIS PEOPLE HEAR HIS VOICE and PROCLAIM HIS WORDS.

Friends, what is the big idea from these passages for us today? I believe that it is this ---- **every one of us is significant in God’s plan for this world.**

Every one of us is called to repent, both individually for our sins as the Holy Spirit lovingly convicts us. But also, to repent on behalf of others. Let us repent on behalf of this nation. Let us stand in the gap and pray for God’s mercy this land.

People often say ‘God bless America,’ but far fewer are crying out in prayer and repentance that America would bless God.

We need revival in this land. And it starts with the church. Let us pray regularly for America. God’s desire is to pour out mercy over America, rather than judgment.

This is not mean that we shouldn’t be joyful. We can and should have deep joy in Jesus, even as we mourn and repent for ourselves and others. It is not an either/or, but a both/and.

And finally, every one of us, every Christian, is called to hear from God and to speak in behalf of God to others.

This prophecy in Joel is so amazing and so empowering. It is a powerful example from Scripture that you are all ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Biblically, a minister is not a title for a pastor or priest, a minister is Christians seeking to hear from the Lord and to share God’s words to others.

God can speak to us in a variety of ways. Dreams and visions are mentioned in this passage from Joel. He speaks through His written word, or course. He speaks through sermons and through Bible studies and through small group conversations.

He wants to speak through you. You are one of His precious vessels in this broken world. Just as you make a difference through your prayers on behalf of others, your prayers of repentance and intercession, so also you make a difference in speaking God’s truth to others.

The prophecy of Joel reminds us that the people of God are called to be a family. Every one of us has an important part to play as we seek to be salt and light for Jesus in this world. Our vision is to be a light on a hill sharing the love of Jesus Christ.

I call us to repent as a church this week on behalf of America. There is a guided prayer page that is available in the lobby for each day this week. But let us pray for God’s mercy over our land. And as we do this, may we also remember that God’s Holy Spirit lives in each of us, not just to minister to us, but to minister through us as well.

I will close with the slightly revised words of my high school principal. Make it a God day. Or not. The choice is yours. Amen.

Resources:

David A. Dorsey’s handouts on Joel --- Prophets course at Evangelical seminary; [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)