

Session 24

How Then Shall We Live?

(Parts 2 & 3)

A. Introduction

1. In light of the coming End-Time eschatological crises, one of the most important questions for God's people to answer is, "How then shall we live?"
2. The book of Joel in the Old Testament gives us the most comprehensive set of instructions on how God wants His people to respond in times of crisis, for both individuals and for the corporate Body of Christ, and the End-Time crisis is no exception.

B. Why the Book of Joel?

1. The book of Joel itself is set in a time of crisis for the ancient nation of Israel. As a nation, Israel was facing unprecedented crisis after multiple waves of locust invasions had decimated her agriculture and economy (Joel 1).
2. It was the sovereign hand of the Lord that orchestrated the locust invasions. God was trying to get Israel's attention because He wanted them to turn back to Him.
3. Through prophet Joel, God made known the reason behind the current crisis Israel was in, and His heart's desire for them to turn back to Him so that a further crisis — military invasion — could be averted (Joel 2:1–17). However, as history attests, Israel did not respond and they were invaded by Babylon.
4. Joel also prophesied about the crisis and the far future "Day of the Lord" (which we addressed in Session 4) that would take place at the End of the Age (Joel 2:18 – 3:21).
 - a. God will break in with His Spirit and glory in the midst of the intense pressure and darkness of the End of the Age.
 - b. The Day of the Lord will indeed be "great and very terrible" (Joel 2:11).
5. Thus, it is crucial for us to look at how God wants us to respond from His Word, and especially the book of Joel during times of crisis. These principles are timeless and relevant for us today.

C. The Call to Hear

1. The first exhortation in the book of Joel is “hear and give ear” (Joel 1:2–3). This means to pay close attention and learn by what happened to Israel in times of God’s judgments (Joel 1:1 – 2:9).
2. The call to “hear and give ear” means that God wants us to learn from history and to hear what Joel said. In our context, we do this by understanding the book of Joel. It is a call to hear God’s heart as we prepare for future glory and crisis.
3. We must realize that this hearing does not come automatically just because we are Christians. It requires an intentional and deliberate cultivating of a lifestyle that God is calling us to.

D. The Response that God Requires

1. The Joel 2:12–17 gives the most comprehensive set of instructions as to how God wants us to respond in times of crisis, for both individuals and for the corporate Body of Christ.
2. This is God’s primary call to a people in crisis. It is the most practical thing we can do before and during a crisis. God releases His favour and protection in response to prayer and repentance.
3. This is the clearest passage in the Scripture that describes what God desires of us in times of crisis. As the global drama unfolds at the End of the Age, the Body of Christ has a plain roadmap. God is asking His people for a specific response in light of the eschatological crisis ahead.
4. These verses parallel passages such as 2 Chr. 7:14 and Jesus’ exhortation in the Gospels to “watch and pray” in context of the End-Time crisis (Matt. 24:42, Lk. 21:36).

E. The 5-Fold Response that God Requires from Joel 2:12–17

1. Develop an understanding of the severity of the End Times (Joel 2:1,11)
 - a. God calls His people to awaken and tremble in response to the warning regarding the coming Day of the Lord (Joel 2:1).
 - b. He also exhorts us to understand the Day of the Lord that will be “great” and “very terrible”, and to also seek wisdom as to how we can be people who are able to endure it (Joel 2:11).

2. Turn to God with wholeheartedness (v.12)
 - a. God wants our heart more than anything else. He wants all of our love (Matt. 22:37). This reveals His heart for us — He requires us to respond to His love for us by loving Him in return.
 - b. What is it like to turn to Him with all our heart? We are to turn from sin and flee from all that is contrary to what He wants. Turning to God with all our heart involves repenting, fasting and praying. When we turn to Him, we position ourselves to receive His favour.
 - c. The place of immunity from God's judgment is in corporate, long-term wholeheartedness for God. The only place of safety is in the midst of God's people living in obedience to Him. In this way, we receive God's favour and are kept in a place of safety. This is God's zeal for His people.
3. Rend your heart and not your garment (v.13a)
 - a. Traditionally, the Jewish people would tear their garments to show their grief and desperation. To rend means to tear something violently or forcibly.
 - b. What God desires is a rending of the heart which speaks of dealing radically with the matters of our heart. This is the most challenging aspect of Joel's exhortation. We must separate ourselves from anything that displeases God.
 - c. We must tear our heart away from sin. Jesus speaks symbolically of this radical tearing in Matthew 5:29. He was talking about a radical pursuit of obedience that painfully tears the heart in the process. In other words, forsake all compromise!
 - d. It can be painful when we are confronted with the root systems that support sinful bondage in our lives. Sometimes, it hurts to press through until we get a breakthrough, yet this is the way to freedom. This tearing of the heart is typically the part that is most overlooked in the process.
 - e. We cannot pursue wholeheartedness in a causal way. Sometimes, we hope for a wholeheartedness that is gentle, easy and tame. However, that is not the case. It can be painful but the Lord will help us and He will empower us!
4. Repent with Confidence because of God's tender heart (v.13b–14)
 - a. Joel summons the people to return to the Lord. He gave a five-fold revelation of the Lord, which is the reason why returning to God is the

wisest thing to do. We must know that the Lord desires to make a way of deliverance for us. The knowledge of who God is and His heart for us gives us confidence to tear our hearts in repentance. If we take one step toward Him, He will take ten steps towards us.

b. The five-fold revelation of God:

i. The Lord is gracious.

- God is gracious in that He evaluates us differently from anyone else. He remembers our frailty and that we are but dust (Ps. 103:14).
- God is not a harsh military leader or an angry coach who rejects any form of weakness. His requirements are within the reach of the weak. He will make a way of deliverance for us (Ps. 103:10).

ii. The Lord is merciful.

- God delights in showing mercy. He delights in watching the heart responses of His people as we encounter His relentless mercy (Mic. 7:18).
- God enjoys what is awakened in us when we understand that He gives us a new start after each failure (Lk. 15:1–24).

iii. The Lord is slow to anger.

- God is slow to anger. Jesus spoke of this to the Church in Thyatira in Revelation. He gave them time to repent of their immorality (Rev. 2:20–22).
- God is never quick to judge but gives time for people to repent. He is patient and often gives us ample time and warning to turn from our wicked ways (e.g. read the book of Jeremiah).

iv. The Lord is of great kindness.

- When we know that He is of great kindness, then we have the confidence to press through the hindrances and repent fully (Eph. 2:12; Heb. 4:16; Jer. 9:24).
- Knowing that He is of great kindness will give us courage to tear our hearts because we know that God desires to restore our fellowship with Him.

- v. The Lord relents from doing harm.
 - This does not mean that God randomly changes His mind. Rather, He honours the free will of man without violating His justice.
 - God is willing to relent or to cancel the decree of judgment. Judgment comes because people refuse to change or repent. When people repent and turn to God, He will relent. Instead of releasing the judgment which they deserve, He will send blessing!
 - God will release pockets of mercy during the End-Time shakings as His people turn to Him in the way that He is looking for.

- 5. Gather the people to pray and sanctify the congregation (v.15–17).
 - a. We are to blow the trumpet and call a sacred assembly. The elders are called to assemble and to gather the people; even the children are to be part of this gathering. Since no one will be exempted from the coming crisis and judgment, no one is exempted from crying out to God for mercy.
 - b. We are to consecrate a fast. Fasting positions our hearts to experience the grace of God in a greater way.
 - c. **Blow the trumpet** — boldly proclaim the coming judgment and the call for sacred assembly;
 - d. **Consecrate a fast** — put fasting on the schedule and take it seriously;
 - e. **Call a sacred assembly** — call for gatherings that are sacred in their priority of seeking the Lord;
 - f. **Gather the people and sanctify the congregation** — leaders sanctify the people under their care by laying aside ministry programs to make seeking God the top priority in terms of where their time is spent.

- 6. Joel describes the wholehearted response that God desires by emphasizing the necessity of earnest prayer. We are to cry out for His visitation of mercy with earnestness (Joel 2:17).
 - a. This does not simply mean organising more prayer meetings, but is about coming together to pray as a result of turning wholeheartedly back to God.
 - b. These sacred assemblies have to stem from a place of wholeheartedness.

(For a more in-depth 52-part study through the book of Joel, visit www.joel2lifestyle.com.)

F. Conclusion

1. We have entered a new season in God's divine calendar. His glory and judgment will shake everything that can be shaken. We are in a unique period for which we have no frame of reference, and we need to seek God's heart and wisdom from His Word on how to respond and live.
2. God wants a holy spiritual environment of faith and revelation to be established in the Church. Prayer with fasting and wholeheartedness must be an integral part of the spiritual culture of the End-Time Church.
3. When we respond in this way that He is looking for, God promises to in turn respond to us. Joel 2:28–32 prophesies of the great End-Time outpouring of the Holy Spirit that God will pour out as His people return to Him wholeheartedly in fasting and prayer.

G. Exhortation

1. Knowing and understanding the End Times is ultimately about a Person — Jesus — who is returning, and about His heart and redemptive plan for human history and mankind.
2. It is not about predicting the precise timing of events or His return, but about seeking and knowing the heart of the One who is returning soon.
3. If we truly know God's heart pertaining to the End Times, it will give rise to a response from us, because the main reason that the Lord wants us to know is to give rise to preparation for what is to come.
4. The ultimate test of whether we understand what the End Times is all about is whether we desire and yearn for Jesus to return, and whether we intentionally prepare and make ourselves ready for His Second Coming.
5. May the Lord grant us clarity and depth in understanding His heart regarding the End Times, how He requires us to respond, and create in us a deep longing for the return of Jesus, our Bridegroom, King and Judge!