

## ***THE DAY OF THE LORD, PART 2: "THE LORD'S WARNING & INVITATION"***

**JOEL 2:1-17**

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### **Personal Introduction**

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, I'm Jeff - one of the pastors at HMCC of Jakarta. And it's my privilege to be preaching the Word of God for us today.

### **Sermon Series Introduction**

If you weren't able to join us last week, we just started a new sermon series on the book of Joel called "The Day of the Lord," and we're currently in part 2, titled "The Lord's Warning & Invitation."

Before we get started, let me pray for us again...

### **Sermon Introduction**

We're approaching the midpoint of the year, which means that it's almost the end of the academic year for students and teachers. Now, I remember (when I was a student) that one of the things I liked the least was final exams. There were so many things that you'd need to study.

So I really liked it when my teachers would say, "You need to know this. It's going to be on the final exam."

- Because then you can note that down, and hopefully ensure that you'll get at least 1 question right.

When we're students, sometimes we think that our teachers are against us. But now that I think about it, that's actually far from the truth. My teachers didn't want to mess me up in the final exam. In fact, they just spent the past year teaching me what I needed to know in order to pass the class! And they've even warned me about what's to come!

It's because they care about me. And they don't want me to stray away from what's right, and put down the wrong answer.

Similarly, our Lord also cares about us, and also warns us of what's to come because He doesn't want us to stray away from the truth. He doesn't want us to stray away from Him as we continue to live in sin; rather, He wants us to turn away from our sins and return to Him...

### **The One Thing**

***The Lord warns us of coming judgment  
because He lovingly wants us to return to Him.***

## **Scripture Introduction**

If you have your Bibles with you, please turn to Joel 2:1-17.

In the previous chapter, the prophet Joel described a major locust plague that has completely destroyed all the agriculture of the land of Judah and has completely devastated the lives of the people there - from the drunkards to the farmers to the priests.

- Perhaps after all of the horrible things that he's already described in chapter 1, you'd expect for Joel to say, "It's ok guys! Things are gonna get better!"
- But unfortunately, that's not what's gonna happen... In fact, he warns the people that things are basically gonna get worse before they get better...

## **Scripture Reading**

So let's read Joel 2:1-17 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Blow a trumpet in Zion;  
 sound an alarm on my holy mountain!  
 Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
 for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,  
<sup>2</sup> a day of darkness and gloom,  
 a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
 Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
 a great and powerful people;  
 their like has never been before,  
 nor will be again after them  
 through the years of all generations.

<sup>3</sup> Fire devours before them,  
 and behind them a flame burns.  
 The land is like the garden of Eden before them,  
 but behind them a desolate wilderness,  
 and nothing escapes them.

<sup>4</sup> Their appearance is like the appearance of horses,  
 and like war horses they run.

<sup>5</sup> As with the rumbling of chariots,  
 they leap on the tops of the mountains,  
 like the crackling of a flame of fire  
 devouring the stubble,  
 like a powerful army  
 drawn up for battle.

<sup>6</sup> Before them peoples are in anguish;  
 all faces grow pale.

<sup>7</sup> Like warriors they charge;  
 like soldiers they scale the wall.  
 They march each on his way;  
 they do not swerve from their paths.

<sup>8</sup> They do not jostle one another;

each marches in his path;  
they burst through the weapons  
and are not halted.  
<sup>9</sup>They leap upon the city,  
they run upon the walls,  
they climb up into the houses,  
they enter through the windows like a thief.

<sup>10</sup>The earth quakes before them;  
the heavens tremble.  
The sun and the moon are darkened,  
and the stars withdraw their shining.  
<sup>11</sup>The Lord utters his voice  
before his army,  
for his camp is exceedingly great;  
he who executes his word is powerful.  
For the day of the Lord is great and very awesome;  
who can endure it?

<sup>12</sup>“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
“return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup> 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.  
<sup>14</sup>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?

<sup>15</sup>Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
<sup>16</sup>gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
assemble the elders;  
gather the children,  
even nursing infants.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
and the bride her chamber.

<sup>17</sup>Between the vestibule and the altar  
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep  
and say, “Spare your people, O Lord,  
and make not your heritage a reproach,  
a byword among the nations.  
Why should they say among the peoples,  
‘Where is their God?’”

This is God's Word.

## Overview

- I. **The Lord's warning: "Judgment is coming" (vv. 1-11)**
- II. **The Lord's invitation: "Return to me" (vv. 12-17)**
  - A. Return to the Lord with all your heart (vv. 12-13a)
  - B. Return to the Lord who is gracious and merciful (vv. 13b-14)
  - C. Return to the Lord together as His people (vv. 15-17)

### I. The Lord's warning: "Judgment is coming" (vv. 1-11)

Verse 1 says this:

"Blow a *trumpet* in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land *tremble*..."

Here, Zion is referring to the city of Jerusalem.

And imagine for a second that you're one of the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem during those times... Your job is to keep watch over the land. So as you look outside toward the horizon... if you see any hint of an enemy force coming towards the city, you and the other watchmen would have to blow your trumpets!

- It signals to the others in the city that there's incoming danger!
  - It signals to the people in the city that they need to prepare themselves - they need to take refuge behind the city's walls and prepare for defense!
- Now, if you're one of the inhabitants of the city, the sound of the *trumpet* may cause you to *tremble* in fear... because you know that something big is about to go down, and there's a chance that you may not survive what's coming!

Now, similarly, the prophet Joel serves as the Lord's watchman - speaking on the Lord's behalf - and sounding a warning of an upcoming disaster (so that the people may have time to prepare themselves)!

- So verse 1 basically informs us that the next verses would contain a warning - God would be warning His people (through the prophet Joel) that something big is about to happen!

<pause>

But notice the timing here. If we remember the context of what happened previously in Chapter 1, then we know that Joel is *figuratively* blowing the trumpet here, while the people of Judah are already facing a nationwide disaster!

- So it's not like he's blowing the trumpet when everything was well and good - but multiple swarms of locusts have already devastated the people's land and their livelihood.
  - So this is more like Joel is blowing the trumpet when enemy forces have *already* broken through the city gates, and what he's signaling is that an even *greater* force is coming!
  - Things aren't about to get better! They're about to get worse!

So imagine... the prophet Joel, in that moment of time, is literally living through this great locust plague; he's seeing swarms and swarms of locusts that could've literally blocked the sun, and causing darkness. And while he's seeing those things with his own eyes... he's given a vision by God of what's coming in the future. And he sees a day of even *greater* darkness that's still to come.

- And this is what Joel warns us about at the end of verse 1 - the day of the Lord is coming! It is near!
- So Joel is ultimately pointing the people of Judah to the final Day of the Lord (the day of final judgment).

And what we'll observe in the next verses is that he'll describe this coming day of judgment using the imagery of locusts (because that's what he's currently seeing).

- So let's keep that in mind, as we go through these verses.
  - Joel won't *literally* be describing locusts (as he did in Chapter 1), but he's going to be using the *imagery* of locusts to vividly describe what the final day of judgment is going to be like).

So another thing to keep in mind here (before we dive into these verses) is that the Bible actually consists of different genres...

- Some genres are to be read and understood more literally - Like the Law of Moses, and the gospels, and the letters to the churches.
- But, on the other hand, other genres are not to be read as literally. For example, the Bible also consists of poetry, songs, prophecies, and apocalyptic literature (about the end times). And though some parts are to be taken literally, these writings also consist of more figurative language.
  - And the purpose of figurative language is to convey an idea in vivid ways; they're not always meant to be taken literally.
    - For example, a common idiom that I've heard in the US:
      - "I'm so hungry, I could eat a horse"
        - It doesn't literally mean that you're gonna eat a horse, but it invokes this vivid feeling that you're so starving that you can eat anything and everything!

So with the use of figurative language, it's not meant to be taken literally, but the key question is: what is the main idea and the emotions that's being vividly described? So what does Joel want the people to know about this coming day of judgment using the imagery of locusts?

Well, if we take a look at verses 2-9, we see that what Joel is highlighting is that **this coming day of judgment would be unstoppable and inescapable** (just like an unstoppable and inescapable army of locusts).

- No one can stop it, and no one can escape it!

<pause>

Look at verse 2 - This day would be a day of darkness and gloom. It would be like nothing that the people have ever seen before, and there will never again... be anything like it in the future!

Then notice how the locust plague is described metaphorically here as a great and powerful people; and as a mighty, invincible army that cannot be stopped.

Imagine the scene and the emotion that Joel is vividly describing here...



- Look at verse 3 - Joel describes some sort of fire in front of these locusts. So imagine that you're standing in front of a line of fire that's devouring everything in its path (in front of it... land like the Garden of Eden. Behind it... utter desolation and destruction). Everything that the fire has touched is completely destroyed.
  - Imagine seeing this coming towards you... As you look left and right, you see no way to escape, as you look up (the sky is completely dark and gloomy - even the sky is making you feel trapped).
- Look at verses 4-5 - Then imagine *hearing* the swarms and swarms of locusts coming towards you. You can hear the swarm loudly like the rumbling of chariots and war horses, and like the sound of fire burning through grass and trees.

Now, where do you think you'd be able to go to escape what's coming? Perhaps you can go back home - where it's usually safe?

Look at verses 6-9 - Not even your home would be a safe place of comfort...

- These swarms of locusts are described to be like an army of soldiers marching towards its target, not straying away from its path, they're going to burst through the city's defenses and invade your private quarters - they'll run upon the walls, climb up into the houses, enter through windows like a thief. Nothing escapes them!

No one can escape this *total* destruction!

- Can you imagine the total sense of anguish and desperation that Joel is describing here?
- He's describing that the day of final judgment is going to be just like this... it would be unstoppable and inescapable. ALL will be judged for what they've done! And there's not a place that you can go to escape this coming judgment.

- Just like how you wouldn't be able to escape this locust plague that's horribly unstoppable and inescapable!

<pause>

Look at verse 10 - What Joel is describing intensifies quite drastically. "The earth quakes before them; the heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining."

- Now this doesn't sound like a mere locust plague anymore. It's clearer now that this is sounding more like the end of the world; this is apocalyptic language as used in the book of Revelation (Rev. 6:12-13; Rev. 9).

So as the people of Judah were listening to this warning, you can imagine the sense of despair and hopelessness that they might've felt...

Look at verse 11...

- To the people of Judah listening to Joel's warning thus far... if they weren't shaken enough already, now this next part would've really shocked them!
- Because we find out that at the head of this army... is the Lord, God, Himself. So turns out... this force that is coming towards them is none other than God's great and powerful army!
  - This would be shocking to them - The people of Judah are known to be God's people. They see themselves as those who would unleash God's judgment upon pagan nations. But now, they're going to be the ones judged like those who've turned away from God.
- Verse 11 then ends with a rhetorical question: if this is the Lord's invincible army, then who can endure it? Who can survive?
  - The answer should be obvious by now... no one. No one can survive this coming day of judgment...

What Joel is highlighting here is a sense of despair and hopelessness because what's to come cannot be stopped and cannot be escaped.

<pause>

So for us today - what can we learn from the Lord's warning that judgment is coming?

I know that there's a lot that's happening here and being described, and it can be a bit overwhelming. But whenever we read Scripture - any genre of Scripture - we can always ask 2 questions to better understand it:

- What do these verses reveal about God?
- And what do these verses reveal about us?

**First**, what do these verses reveal about God?

- It reveals that God is awesome and mighty - no one can escape His righteous judgment.
- Yet it also reveals that God is just.
  - All of this destruction (that's described) may sound horrible (and it is), but what we see here is justice.
  - It's because God is perfectly good and just, He must judge and punish sin (if not - if He allows evil to happen and go unpunished forever - then He wouldn't be perfectly good and just).
- So this also means that there is a right and there is a wrong.
  - There is absolute truth - God defines what that Truth is; He defines what is right and what is wrong.
    - And when we do what God deems to be wrong (then that's sin), then we've disobeyed Him and we've sinned against God.
  - And that's not ok. And sin will be punished.
    - Now, in a way... we can find comfort in knowing that life is not meaningless where it doesn't matter if you do good or evil.
  - We can rest assured knowing that in the end, there will be justice - evil will not win (those who have done wrong will be brought to justice)!
    - But unfortunately, this judgment on evil is like a double-edged sword that's also facing us...
    - If we're honest with ourselves, I think we all know that we've sinned against God...
      - And imagine how bad it is when someone sins against you. Now how much worse would it be to sin against God?

Now, this is a good time to move to our **second** question...

## What do these verses reveal about us?

- Well... we're not as good as we think.
- To the people of Judah, this warning of judgment against them should be so sobering. Because whether they knew it or not, they have been against God. Though Joel doesn't specifically mention the people's specific sins, we know from other prophets that the people of Judah have continuously turned away from the Lord - multiple generations have continued to sin against Him - even turning to other gods and becoming idolatrous people...
- And for those sins, they will be judged.
- Friends, one day, we will all also be judged for our sins.
  - And the *just* punishment for sinning against the *eternal*, holy God is *eternal* punishment in Hell.
    - So that's even more bad news - the judgment that's unstoppable and inescapable does not merely mean destruction on Earth (physical death), but it means eternal suffering and torment in Hell (it's far worse than just physical death on Earth).
    - It's experiencing God's judgment every second of your life forever... for the rest of your life... (which at that point, can't even be called "life" anymore).
    - But this is what we *justly* deserve as sinners...



And this day of judgment is indeed coming. In fact, Joel says that it is already *near*!

- And let's not be complacent! Even though it's been thousands of years since Joel's prophecy, "near" here means that it's imminent - it can come at any time!
- And when it comes, it will be unstoppable and inescapable...

I know that's not easy to hear. And I know we've just heard some really horrible news.

So are you ready to listen to some good news?

## **II. The Lord's invitation: "Return to me" (vv. 12-17)**

### **A. Return to the Lord with all your heart (vv. 12-13a)**

Verses 12-13 say this:

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments."

- So the surprising thing after all that's described... is that there's a glimmer of hope! It's not too late after all!
- Amazingly, the Lord invites the people of Judah to return to Him! And He assures them that even now... in this moment of time... it's not too late to return to Him.
  - Even though the land is currently devastated by locusts, and even though the Lord's judgment is near... even though they've been idolatrous... even now, there's still time to return to the Lord!

Notice the word used though... "Return."

That implies that the people of Judah have strayed away from God; they've gone further away from God...

- So note that these are not unreligious people! This is the people of Judah! They're supposed to be God's people.
- Yet even they have this sinful tendency to stray away from God.

How about us? Even though we say we're the people of God... Are we aware of our sinful tendency to turn away from Him, and to turn to other things instead?

- Because, unfortunately, the truth is that we can easily forget about our God (even as believers). We can leave this place of worship tonight, and then tomorrow... Instead of relying on Him, we can possibly rely on other things instead, turning to money, career, sex, or other worldly desires and pleasures (as our source of security as if they're our gods).

Even if we're Christians, we have this sinful tendency to turn away from God again and again.

So then... How amazing is our God? That knowing that His people would sin against Him again and again, yet He says to us, "yet even now... return to me."

- Yet even now, He invites us to return to Him again and again.

Now, as the Lord invites His people to return to Him, notice that there's a specific way on how God's people are to return to Him...

- Look at verses 12-13 again - They're to return to the Lord with all your heart - with fasting, with weeping, with mourning.
  - And tear your hearts, and not merely your garments.
- So in those days, the people would literally tear their clothes as an outward showing of the grief in their hearts, as they're weeping and mourning.
  - But perhaps some people were only tearing their clothes to make it seem to others like they're weeping over their sins, when they're actually still living comfortably in their sin.
  - So some were only showing an outward appearance of repentance, while inside... they still haven't turned back to God.
  - How many of us have only torn our garments, but not our hearts?
  - How many of us go to church and study the Bible, showing an outward sign of repentance, when - inside your hearts - you still haven't turned to the Lord?
  - I encourage you to take time to reflect and check what's in your hearts. Don't assume you're Christian just because you go to church.

Going to church is a great start! Please continue to do that...

- But understand that God calls His people not to merely tear our garments, but to tear our hearts; to truly weep and mourn (over our sins), and to truly repent.

So what's being described here is true repentance.

- A genuine turning away from our sins (leaving sin behind us), and a turning toward the Lord with all our hearts.

And as God's people - as Christians - we're to return to the Lord with all our hearts - not only weekly every Sunday, but everyday. Because we're prone to wander away from Him each day, so we also need to return to Him each day.

But I understand that sometimes it's difficult for us to even be aware that our hearts are actually starting to stray away from God.

- But this is a struggle that we all face (not only the people of Judah) - And we can be more aware of our sinful tendency by being mindful that with every struggle that we face each day, we're presented with one of two options:
  - Either we respond by turning to God, trusting in Him and relying on Him.
  - Or we respond by turning to something else other than God, perhaps relying on ourselves or on other things instead.
    - It's always one of those two options.

So, let's ask ourselves: What daily struggle are we facing in this season of our lives?

- Maybe some of us are struggling with matters related to our physical appearance, or our singleness, or our marriage, or other relationships, or our jobs, reputation, or maybe something else...

But whatever it is that you're struggling with at this time, maybe that struggle is being used by God to reveal a part of your heart that you still need to return and surrender to Him.

- So what feelings or emotions do you usually feel these days? Is it a sense of anxiety or stress? Sadness or hopelessness? Fatigue, tiredness, or burnout?
- Take some time to reflect on what you're feeling and don't be afraid to feel your feelings; it can be helpful to just sit, feel, and name your feelings.
- And ask yourself: what's causing you to feel that way?
  - And what does that reveal about your heart?
    - What does it reveal about some of the things of this world that you're turning to... instead of God?

Maybe what's being revealed to us in this season of our lives are the parts of our hearts that are being filled with other things other than God.

- Praise God for the opportunity to bring those things to Him - to turn away from those things, and return to Him again and again, one day at a time.

And how amazing is it that our God is the one who continues to invite us to return to Him.

### **B. Return to the Lord who is gracious and merciful (vv. 13b-14)**

Now, let's take a look at the second half of verse 13 - "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."

So, let's ask one of our go-to questions again: what do these verses reveal about God?

Well... it shows us that God is not only just, but He's also gracious and merciful, and abounding in steadfast love.

- And this helps us understand why **God would lovingly invite sinners to return to Him.**
  - Because He is gracious and merciful!
    - And that should give us even greater confidence as we turn to Him again and again!
- And this also helps us to understand verses 1-11 - because then we see that it's really because God loves us that He lovingly warns us of coming judgment.
  - He lovingly wants us to turn away from our sins and to return to Him (before that day of final judgment comes).
- Because if God didn't love us... if He was against us, then He wouldn't warn us of coming judgment. He'd just judge us surprisingly (we wouldn't know what's coming), and then it'd catch us all by surprise when we're condemned to Hell.
  - Because if we think about it... an enemy wouldn't want to warn their target of a coming attack. They wouldn't want to give their target a chance of escaping their attack...
    - Years ago, my aunt was standing on the side of the road. When suddenly - out of nowhere - someone on a motorcycle rushed past her and grabbed her purse, and rode off.

- Notice how they didn't sound their trumpet first - Beep! Beep! "Watch out ma'am! I'm coming for you! Please hide your purse"
  - God is not like an enemy waiting behind the bushes waiting to punish you; He warns us because He's not our enemy. He's not against us, but for us, and He loves us.
    - In fact, the way that He warns us is more like how a loving parent warns their child not to eat candy everyday, or how a teacher warns their students to study for their upcoming exam.
    - They're warning them because they care about their long-term future.
    - In the same way, God is warning us because He cares about our eternal future, and He does not want to see us punished in Hell.

<pause>

Now, some of you may be thinking, "Well, if God doesn't want to see anyone punished in Hell, then just don't punish anyone in Hell!"

- But remember, God is perfectly just - if He doesn't punish sin and evil, then He wouldn't be perfectly good and just. If evil is not punished, then there's no justice.
- But also remember... God is not only just, but He is loving, gracious and merciful.

Because God loves us so much, He chose to take on that punishment Himself so that His people may live.

- On this side of redemptive history, we have a fuller picture of God's plan to save His people - we know that it's only through His one and only Son, Jesus Christ, that we may be saved.
- Jesus Christ, who's fully God and fully man, came from Heaven to Earth.
  - He died on the cross in our place - as our substitute - and he took on the punishment that we justly deserved.
  - That means.. Because of Jesus' death, God remains perfectly just (because He still punished sin).
  - But Jesus faced the judgment that we deserved as our substitute, so that our sins may be forgiven, and we may be saved. In that way, God gave us mercy...
- And by His grace, God counts us as righteous because Jesus is righteous (He lived the perfect life without sin).
- And those who believe in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, will not be punished in Hell, but will have eternal life in Heaven.
  - That's the Good News! The Good News is that Hell is avoidable! (What we just read in verses 1-11 is survivable!)
  - So if you haven't yet put your faith in Christ - please consider what you've just heard. Because a response is needed to be saved. Only those who truly repent and turn to the Lord (and put their faith in Christ) will be saved.
    - So I urge you to not delay, and I encourage you to make the decision to turn to the Lord and put your faith in Christ today.

- And as Christians - as those who've already put our faith in Christ - we can now look forward to the Day of the Lord. Because the day of final judgment would not be a day of darkness and gloom for us.
  - But would be a beautiful day that we're longing to see! Where we will finally be with God and God will be with His people forever in Heaven.

<pause>

Now, let's look at verse 14 - As God invites the people of Judah to return to Him, Joel asks who knows? Maybe God will relent, and leave you a blessing instead of this curse?

- Maybe instead of punishment, He will leave a blessing behind.

For us today - on this side of redemptive history - the amazing thing is that we don't have to ask, "who knows?" because we have 100% confidence and certainty that God will indeed save those who repent and turn to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

So our God invites us to return to Him, the one who is gracious and merciful.

### **C. Return to the Lord together as His people (vv. 15-17)**

Now, not only are we to return to the Lord with all of our hearts, but we're also to return to the Lord together as His people - as His church.

Look at verse 15 - There's a second trumpet blown.

- Imagine again the watchmen on the walls of Jerusalem blowing their trumpets when they see enemy forces march towards the city's gates.
- But this time, imagine that you're not merely a civilian, but one of the soldiers in the city.
  - The sound of the trumpet is not a signal for you to just sit and tremble in fear, it's a rallying cry! - prepare yourselves and gather the troops together!
    - Joel says:
      - Gather the people.
      - From the elderly to the children - even the nursing infants!
      - Even gather the bridegroom from his room, and the bride from her chamber!

This is not business as usual! This is urgent! Gather everyone!

- Even infants who are so young that they're still nursing! Gather them!
- Even the bride and groom on their wedding day! Knock on their rooms & gather them! That's how urgent this is!
  - Now, this last part hits me differently. I'm going to get married soon. And my fiancée and I have been working so hard to prep our wedding. It's gonna be such an important day for us. I'm not sure if we'd want any disturbance unless it's of the utmost importance.
  - But that's the kind of urgency that Joel is describing here! This is literally life and death!

This is a rallying cry to wake up! Wake up, and acknowledge your sins and repent, and return to the Lord together as His people!

This is urgent... because the day of final judgment is near - it's imminent; it can come at any time...

So similarly, we also need to gather together as His church, and repent together for our sins! This is of utmost importance!

- And it should be clear to us who are members of our church - we have a members directory that lists all of the brothers and sisters that we've committed to loving and caring for.
  - So I encourage us to look through our members directory...
  - And if we notice members who we have not seen in a while; who have not been gathering together with us as a church, and who may be straying away...
    - Then one of the most loving things that we can do for them is to go after them; to reach out to them and ask them how they're doing, and pray for them, and invite them to gather together and return to God...
  - That's going to be so helpful as we walk with Christ together, and build each other up.
- And this may be obvious, but I'll say it just in case we miss it... this also means that we're to gather together as a church. So if you're a member of our church, you should be regularly attending our church-wide gatherings, which include our weekly Sunday Celebration. And also our monthly Prayer Gathering (please don't forget about that one). Please do not neglect to gather. Rather, let's gather together and spur one another on, as we return to God together as His people (again and again).

<pause>

Now, look at verse 17 - We see that the priests, the ministers of the Lord - so the religious leaders - are the ones who should lead this time of corporate repentance.

- The area mentioned here between the vestibule (or the entrance hall) and the altar refers to the place of prayer in the temple.
  - And so this means that the religious leaders are to lead the people in prayer...
- And we're then given an example of a prayer of repentance:
  - "Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, a byword among the nations..."
  - Which basically means: "Don't let your [special people] become an object of mockery. Don't let them become a joke for unbelieving foreigners who say, 'where is their God?'"
    - Notice what Joel's focus is on here... it's on what other people think about God! It's on the Lord's reputation!
      - And we've now come full circle.
      - Because the Lord invites us to return to Him with all our hearts.
      - What's the evidence of God's people giving Him their hearts?
        - Well, it's that they love and care about God! And they care about His reputation, and what other people think of Him!

So as a church, is this also what we're concerned about? Is our utmost concern... What others are thinking about God? Is our church characterized by our care for God's reputation?

Notice the connection here between our love for God and returning to God with all our hearts...

- As we turn to God again and again... day after day... The Holy Spirit uses that to grow in our hearts... a deeper love for God.
- And more and more... our hearts are aligned with His, and we'll care about God's reputation just as we care about our own (or even MORE than our own reputation).

So ultimately, may God be glorified, as He forgives and saves His people - and as other people (even non-Christians) see us live this life of daily repentance, may it also point them to Jesus, so that one day... they may also be convicted to acknowledge their sins, to repent, and turn to the Lord their God.

## **Conclusion**

- If we go back to the beginning of Joel chapter 2, the Day of the Lord (the day of final judgment) is described here as a day of darkness and gloom. And for those who continue to turn away from God, it will indeed be a day of unstoppable and inescapable judgment.
- But as Christians - as those who already put our faith in Christ - we look forward to the Day of the Lord; it's going to be a beautiful day that we're longing to see! Where we will finally be with God (whom we love) and God will be with His people (whom He loves).
- So brothers and sisters, because of Jesus' atoning work on the cross, we long for the Day of the Lord to come!
  - Because on that day, we'll return to the Lord for the final time and will be with Him forever in Heaven.

## **The One Thing**

***The Lord warns us of coming judgment  
because He lovingly wants us to return to Him.***

Let's pray.