



joel

PRAYING FOR GOD'S GLORY THROUGH NATIONAL TRAGEDY

Joel, the Old Testament prophet, lived in a day that was very distant and different from our own and yet, both his world and ours experienced ruin and devastation—his through a plague of locusts and ours through Islamic terrorism on September 11, 2001. On this 15th anniversary of 9/11, the book of Joel provides a prayer guide for us to use in the wake of devastation and terror.

Testimony by Jack Hook, Army Colonel (Retired):

(Video transcript)

"In 2001, I was assigned here at Ft. Gordon. I was actually assigned to the Pentagon from 1996-1998, so I had a lot of experience in that building. But when I came back to Ft. Gordon in 2000, I was in a job where I went to the Pentagon frequently.

"When I got to the Pentagon on the morning of September 11, it was just a beautiful morning. As I got out of the car and started walking through the south parking area, I was just overwhelmed with how the sky was just a perfect blue and clear, and just a perfect day to the extent that I stopped on my way into the building and prayed and thanked God for such a beautiful day. It was so much nicer than what I had just left in Georgia, but it was noticeably beautiful.

"I got to the conference room about 8:45. I was in this room and nobody was there, and people started trickling in. The last couple of people that came into the G6 Conference Room a couple of minutes before 9:00 said, 'Do you all know what just happened in New York?' We didn't. 'Well, a plane just crashed into one of the World Trade Centers.' And we thought, 'Was it an accident? Was it a small private plane, a commercial?' Nobody knew at that point. It had just happened.

"So we started the meeting at 9:00. We were talking about the army's data radio requirements. About a half hour later, we heard a loud explosion and the room shook. Security personnel were running down the hallway telling us to get out of the building.

"We were on the ground floor of the Pentagon between the second and third corridors. The most

direct route out of the building was to head down the second corridor.

“We headed out the second corridor toward the south parking area where I had walked in about an hour earlier at that point. As we started crossing through the A ring and looked up, there was a billow of black smoke pouring in on us.

“When we got out to the south parking area and looked back at the building, we could see this big hole in the building. Parts of the building had already collapsed and there, just fire, just big fire.

“We went from peace time military, to war time in an instant when that plane hit. That was the beginning of that day for me—the beginning of a very long day.

“As I mentioned, we were in a meeting and we thought what we were talking about was really important. And all of a sudden after that explosion, we were walking initially until we saw the smoke and fire coming and then we were running out of corridor to get out of the building. All of a sudden, we realized it wasn’t important at all. The only things that became important to me were my faith and my family.

“We have never had a greater opportunity as a church to be the salt and light that God intends for us to be than we did in those moments and weeks and months after 9/11.

“We have the answers to the questions those people were exploring. And God wants to provide those answers to them through us, but we have to stay the course. We can’t get complacent.

“One of the things I saw a year later—much less five, ten, fifteen years later—is that we have become impatient again, we have become divided again.

“The United States was very unified for weeks and months afterwards, but a few years later, we went back into the same political divisions and debates and arguments and attacks. But we have got to stay the course. We have got to stay unified.

“The other thing is the importance of returning to God. You can read in 2 Chronicles 7:14 where God said, ‘If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways.’ That last part, we kind of want to ignore. But if we do all those things and turn from our wicked ways, then He will hear from heaven, He’ll forgive our sins and He’ll heal our land.

“I’ve never seen us more divided than we have been as we head into this election season. The solutions are not political solutions; the solutions are matters of the heart, and our relationship with God. We need to return to God.

“In Joel, He said, ‘Repent. Repent now.’ Don’t tear your clothes; rend

your hearts, not your clothes, and return to Me. That's what He is looking for.

"I'm not saying He caused 9/11. Evil men with free will caused and conducted 9/11. But God gets our attention through these things. He is calling us to return to Him, and repent from our sins and turn from our wicked ways, and we'll see a lot more peace.

"If the church will do its job, we can lead this nation back to the strength it has had in its history and the peace that we could have.

"We are going to always be in an eternal battle, I believe, as long as there is life on this earth with evil. That's not going to go away, so we have got to stay the course." ■

Dr. David McKinley:

September 11, 2001, was a bright and beautiful morning in New York City. Morning news' shows were being broadcast coast-to-coast and the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center stood strong and tall, awaiting the arrival of their daily inhabitants as the market bell rang in the beginning of another day's activity in the global financial markets.

Those towers, with their distinct column shapes, had created the unique image and signature identity of the New York skyline for over three decades.

Suddenly the beauty of that September morning shattered as two commercial passenger airplanes, hijacked by Islamic terrorists, graphically and intentionally flew into these massive structures. In a moment in time, the representation, the prestige, power and prosperity of our American economy collapsed before the eyes of an observing nation.

I will never forget the shocking, horrifying and saddening realization that our nation had been attacked. It was the most despicable act of hate I had ever witnessed. Many of you probably remember where you were at the time you saw the TV reports for the first time and realized that hundreds, ultimately thousands of people perished and lives were shattered because the Twin Towers fell.

September 11, 2001...9/11...
15 years ago.

Yet, in the midst of this unfolding tragedy, Americans observed bravery. Fire and rescue responders partnered with a massive army of men and women wearing blue. They saved lives, and for many, it was only to lose theirs.

I remember the brokenness that fell across our nation. It was the brokenness that accompanies grief and breeds humility. This brokenness was embodied on the steps of the United States Capitol as congressional leaders from both

parties appeared together, stood together, wept together, prayed together, and spontaneously sang together *God bless America*.

9/11 brought terror and tragedy to Main Street USA, but with it also came a humility and dependency in an effort to display unity that I have never observed before in my lifetime.

There were feelings of restored patriotism and revived faith all across America. Volunteers flooded the scene, young adults enlisted to serve, and church pews were packed with people who knew this event would change our nation, our lives and our future.

Sadly, these attitudes and efforts were short-lived. Hand-holding congressional leaders returned to their finger-pointing political ways. Church-going reverence quickly faded into party time revelry. And soon, the face of America turned from humble dependence back to defiant arrogance.

The Twin Towers fell on 9/11/2001, but as I look back over the past 15 years, I see the debris of other “towers” that have also fallen:

- The tower of freedom to travel without fear has fallen.
- The tower of economic independence and stability has fallen.
- The tower of constitutional law has fallen in the daybreak of boundless acts of judicial legislation.

- The tower of ethics, morality and biblical foundations for society and for civility has fallen.
- The towers of the sanctity of life and the protected innocence of our children have fallen.
- The towers of civil responsibility and legal authority have fallen.
- The tower of truth in education has fallen.
- The tower of natural law and marital design has fallen.
- The tower of work and responsibility has fallen in a world of entitlement and dependence.
- The towers of identity and stability that once shaped our lives and social order have crumbled in the wake of a cultural war.

Towers that once stood strong in the character of our nation, our cities, our leaders and our families are gone.

Just as the ash of the collapsed Twin Towers hovered and covered the structures and the inhabitants of New York City, there is an ashen condition that clouds our lives and futures in America today.

Yet, in the rubble of those towers on 9/11, there was a resounding symbol of both tragedy and hope. It was a cross—a cross uniquely formed from the rubble, and later taken and placed on display for all to see and remember.

Today, we remember the national tragedy that befell our nation 15 years ago and we realize it was a

day that marked a moment in time when many other things to come would yet unfold.

So as we gather today...

- We come to unite our hearts and to look again at the need for humility and dependency upon God in our nation, our cities, our families, our churches and our lives.
- We come to move toward brokenness and repentance, asking God to work in our hearts and to revive us as His people.
- We come to hear and heed the words from the prophet, Joel:

“The word of the LORD that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten... The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes... Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld

from the house of your God.

Consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the LORD your God, and cry out to the LORD. Alas for the day! For the day of the LORD is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes (Joel 1:1-4, 10, 13-15 ESV).

Joel, the Old Testament prophet, lived in a day that was very distant and different from our day in so many ways. And yet, Joel experienced in his day and time something that is not unlike what we have seen and experienced in our own world and in my own lifetime.

When you open the pages of the book of Joel, you immediately meet devastation. In fact, if there is one single word that captures the opening of the book of Joel, it is the word, *ruin*.

The ruin within Joel’s nation did not come because of terrorists who flew airplanes into buildings, but the terror of a plague of locusts. In just a matter of days, locusts devastated and destroyed the crops—the future prosperity and well-being of the people in Joel’s day.

For many of us, it is difficult to imagine the after-effects of a plague of locusts. However, locusts are like masses of armies that utterly and completely devastate and destroy. In fact, the book of Joel describes the scene as though

it was the movement of an “army,” leaving devastation in its wake.

Ruin was everywhere. Ruin could not be avoided. Ruin was something they had to address because it touched every person.

As we look back at the scene presented in the book of Joel, it causes us to look at our own land and our own people.

First, we look at 9/11. Today may be a day of memorial for us, but for some, it is a day that forever changed their life, their family and their future.

In much the same way, there was massive devastation in the day of Joel. In Joel 1, it clearly says,

“What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten (Joel 1:4).

Ruin and devastation.

Today we see the effects of tremendous ruin and devastation in our nation and culture. It didn’t all start with 9/11, but 9/11 visualized and epitomized something in which we were facing and struggling, and continue to face as a nation. We have seen the devastation of hate, injustice, racial tension, immorality, sexual deviation, poverty, greed, lust, selfishness and anarchy in our world.

Today we need to pause and answer a call to prayer.

Earlier this summer when I was at the Southern Baptist Convention, I received a challenge—as did other pastors and churches across America. The challenge was this: On the 15th anniversary of 9/11, consecrate a fast and call a sacred, solemn assembly together to pray.

And so through the remainder of our time together, we are going to pray. In fact, we are participating today with churches from Maine to Alaska, across six time zones in America. Hour by hour by hour, people are gathering today to pray for our nation, our cities, our families, our lives and our future.

As the President of the Southern Baptist Convention spoke, he said,

“As a people of faith, many followers of Christ would love to see prayer become part of our schools in America again. But I would suggest we first bring prayer back into the churches of America. The vast majority of churches in America give more time in their worship services to promoting their next event than they give to practicing prayer... You may have given up on America, but God hasn’t. As the foundation of our nation is cracking and our culture is crumbling before our eyes, never and I mean never in our generation, have we needed to call out to God in prayer more than on Sunday, September 11.”

—Dr. Ronnie Floyd, President of the Southern Baptist Church, 2016

There so many things we could pray about today for our nation. A few of them are:

- The upcoming elections and our President, Congress, Supreme Court
- State and Local Leaders—Governors, State Legislative Bodies, Mayors, City Councils, School Boards, Schools and Universities
- First Responders, Law Enforcement (and of course, the crisis of race that divides us in America), and our Military
- Our church and churches in America to be revived by the power of the Holy Spirit and for God to bring the next great, spiritual awakening to America.

Then Dr. Floyd said this:

“We have no right to prognosticate doom about America, upon evangelicals, upon the church, or anyone else unless we are willing to humble ourselves before God and pray.” —Dr. Ronnie Floyd

May God bring the walls down. May God let us see that sinful hearts and sinful choices have built walls, but that the work of Jesus and the power of the cross can bring down the walls.

So it is that today, we’ve come to pray with the book of Joel as our guide.

Today is the beginning of a season of prayer for our church. And on October 2, we are going to

distribute the prayer guide, *Lord, Hear Our Cry*, for you to use for 30 days during the month of October.

I am asking you to join with me in a time of daily prayer for our nation, for our city and for our church that God would move again in us and that God would move amidst the deep ruin in our nation...

Note to reader: As you read the remaining paragraphs, you are encouraged to participate in prayer with David McKinley and ministers from Warren Baptist Church.

[Invitation to Pray]



Father, we pray, oh God, in a way like we have never gathered on the Lord's Day as a church to pray for the tremendous need of brokenness and ruin and devastation that we see throughout our land, across our nation, in our cities, among our homes and families, in our churches and our lives.

Lord, we realize today that there is great need for what You and You alone can do—to put Your hand in our hearts and deliver.

God, how we pray for the delivering work of Your grace and the move of Your spirit that would take our devastation and would turn it from sorrow to joy, from brokenness to blessing, because You and You alone, oh God—through the power of Your Son, Jesus Christ, who suffered—can bring strength and blessing from

His suffering upon us. Father, You know the ruin of our land. You know how we as a people have become proud and arrogant and defiant and somehow believe we can shun You and spurn Your Word and then still ask and expect Your blessing.

But God, we know Your Word is filled with a reminder of impending judgment. God, we see the signs of judgment upon our land. Just as Joel and the people of that day were called to come together in assembly and to pray, we have come to pray today. We confess that we have weakness in prayer and we bumble and fumble in prayer, but God, we've come today because we need You.

God, we seek You. We cry out to You. Your word says that righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people. While we know we are not the covenant people of Israel, we know we are a nation that is marred and scarred and marked by the ugliness of the darkness of our sin. As a people, the devastation of that sin is destroying future generations.

So, Father today, we pause to ask You would intervene and that You would—in a way that only You can—save the future generations of our nation and of our community through a revival of Your power and of Your grace and of Your love. So God, in this moment, we cry out to You and we confess to You our need, our sin.

God, we are broken before You today. We pray that as Your Word says, You resist the proud, but You give grace to the humble.

God, today, this moment, this hour is a time of humility—corporately, collectively, in every gathering, in every moment in which we meet today on the campuses of Warren.

Lord, as we join with other churches across America, we ask that You would move and God, that You would restore and God, that You would revive Your people.

So Father, we bring this request and we lay it before You. Your Word says a broken and contrite spirit You will not despise. We bring you ruin and we pray for Your work of grace. In Jesus' name, Amen. ■

Rev. Lance Stuckey:

The people in Joel's day had experienced ruin—ruin unlike they could have ever imagined. Chances are if you lived long enough, you too, have experienced pain and ruin and brokenness in ways that you could have never imagined.

I want you to know that our God is a God of compassion. It grieves Him to see the brokenness in our lives. He has provided a means of salvation. His name is Jesus.

The message of the book of Joel is this: God uses the brokenness in our lives to bring us back to Himself.

“Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love” (Joel 2:13 ESV).

God calls you and I to turn from our sins and turn to Christ. This active “turning” is called repentance. And today, many of us in this room need to repent.

Some of us need to turn to Christ for the first time ever. We’ve never turned away from our sins. Some of us today need to turn to Christ. For others, you have trusted Christ as Savior. You have turned to Him, but in this moment, God is calling you to turn to Him and follow Him with a greater fervency than ever before. Return.

I want to invite you to pray with me now. As you pray, voice a prayer of repentance to God. Tell God how you need to return or perhaps you need to ask God to show you where in your life you need to return to Him...

[Invitation to Pray]



Lord, right now, corporately and individually, we confess that we are sinners. Through the power of Jesus Christ, help us to return to You. Lord, will You draw us back? Help us to commit to an ongoing following of You. Lord, I pray that you will bring other Christians in our lives—whether it be family members, members of our Life Group communities, co-workers,

neighbors. Lord, help them to come alongside us as we commit to return to You. This is our prayer. Amen. ■

Rev. Andrew Skelton:

We see the ruin as Joel did in his day. We hear that call to return, but that call to return to God also comes with a promise:

“I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, My great army, which I sent among you... And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out My Spirit. And I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls” (Joel 2:25, 28-32 ESV).

We are promised a restoration—a physical restoration—as we see in Joel. The years lost to locusts will be restored. That is just a small thing in comparison to

what He promises in our spiritual restoration.

You see, what God is promising Joel and the people in this passage is the coming of the Holy Spirit that we see in the New Testament book of Acts. He is telling them, "I am coming to restore you personally, spiritually, eternally."

That's the hope that Joel has. That's the hope we have seen happen. We live after the coming of the Holy Spirit. We live in the time of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us.

We can pray about the ruin of our country. We can pray for us to return. We can pray for the restoration of our country, but our country will never be restored until we are personally restored.

So for us to see our country become great again, for us to see people's lives transformed, for hatred to disappear, to see the animosity go away, to see our country become loving again, we have to become loving again. We have to be filled with the Spirit of God. We have to be transformed by His Holy Spirit.

Until then, there will be no restoration of our country. We will continue on this path of destruction. We won't be a light in the world. We will be just as any other country. We will fall.

But God is bigger than that. God desires to know you personally, to restore you personally to righteousness, to restore you to joy, to restore you to a hope that this world is not your home. You were made for something more.

So Father, as we pray, help us to remind ourselves through Your Word, through your Spirit, that You have come not to simply call us back to You, but to restore us to You, to restore our desire for righteousness, to restore our desire for hope, for joy, for justice, for all the things that are of You. But it starts with us, with me.

Restore my desire for Your Word. Restore my desire for Your Spirit through prayer, for Your people through love, for the "least of these" through compassion.

[Invitation to Pray]



Father, restore my heart and make it Yours. Father, be with us for the rest of our time. May we glorify You as we pray. May we glorify You as we leave. May we glorify You in every aspect of our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen. ■

Rev. Bret Legg:

The question is: How should we respond to all of this? How should we respond to the ruin—not just the ruin in our country that we see and that the pastor spoke about earlier—but how do respond to

the ruin in our own lives? And it's there if you look.

How do we respond? How do we respond to God's call to return to Him? Do we just continue going on about our regular business or do we somehow turn and change?

How do we respond to God's desire to restore us? Do we somehow sort of say without really saying it, "Thanks, God, but no thanks. I've got this." Or do we hunger and thirst for a restoration?

Interestingly enough, the answer is dead center in the book of Joel:

"And it shall come to pass that **everyone** who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved. For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls" (Joel 2:32 ESV, *bold added for emphasis*).

Did you hear that first phrase? "Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

It's a very broad call; it's to everyone. It doesn't make any difference how old, how young, how rich, how poor, how black, how white, how.... It doesn't matter. Everyone!

But the call and its response is really narrow and specific. Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD. We have to take the initiative. We have to be the ones

who humble ourselves and say, "I need You, God."

And if we do that, it says we shall be saved. You know on 9/11, people needed to be saved. You and I do, too. It's just not quite as obvious.

We need to be saved from ourselves—our sin, our self-centeredness, our lust, our greed, our pride.... We need to be saved from all those things we want to believe are not there. And everyone who calls upon the name of the LORD shall be saved.

So we cannot end today without responding somehow. The response needs to be first from your heart. For some of you, your heart and the Lord may tell you this is the next step for you. If you have never given your life to Christ, He wants to save you. He put everything on the line including His own body and His own blood to pay for your sin and my sin that we couldn't pay for ourselves. That is His heart's desire, but you have to call upon His name. Maybe that is you today. We want you to know that salvation today.

Just maybe, you need to respond by being baptized or joining this church. Or maybe just where you are, you need to humble yourself and confess your sin and ask Him to change you even more than He has.



Father, this is Your time, and Your space, and Your place. More importantly, this is Your message and this is Your call upon our lives. Our lives—whether we think so or not—are in ruin apart from You. We need to return to You and turn from our sin. And if we do that, You will restore us, but we must respond. So Father, in this moment and in this time, help us to lay aside all pride, all pretense, all self-consciousness, anything that would interfere with us responding to You and we ask for it in Jesus’ name, Amen. ■

[Invitation to Respond]

This edited message from the series, *Prophets, Politics and Prayer*, was preached from the pulpit of Warren Baptist Church, Augusta, Georgia, on Sunday, September 11, 2016, by Dr. David H. McKinley. Rev. Lance Stuckey, Rev. Andrew Skelton and Rev. Bret Legg, Ministers at Warren Baptist Church, led in prayer.

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