

Read Joel 1

Consecrate a fast, proclaim 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. Joel 1:14

If you have never been to a Concert of Prayer, there are few worship times like it. Serving with the missions organization, WorldChangers, I have experienced quite a few of these. The atmosphere and worship is all geared towards people spending large amounts of time praying. We tend to pray so little within our church services today, which is why they fail to become worship services. A church service is about doing the stuff in the bulletin. A worship service is about opening ourselves up to the presence of a living God.

Joel may be the earliest prophet to have written down his message from the Lord. It seems that a terrible plague of locusts had descended upon the crops of Israel and it was a reminder to the people of their need to rely on God and to do all that He has called them to. But Joel doesn't just tell them to go home and get right. They declare a fast and a solemn assembly. There is something encouraging about knowing other people are going through the same trials as you are. And to pray for one another is a great encouragement. I know that I am impacted when the Lord answers the prayer of a friend that I had been lifting up for them as well. **Are you making solemn efforts in your relationship to the Lord? Do you choose moments of fasting, taking time to pray instead of to eat? Do you find others you can pray for and with? How do you enter the house of God? Do you come to fulfill a bulletin, or to take the opportunity to worship a living and holy God?**

Read Joel 2

It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Joel 2:28

What if Joel could have seen the result of this prophecy? The Holy Spirit was living and active in the life of Old Testament believers, however, He did not indwell all believers. This was a new gift given through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But the ultimate fulfillment of this prophecy happened on the day of Pentecost when Peter was preaching in Jerusalem and 3,000 people were saved. What led so many people to give their lives to Jesus? Peter's sermon has been analyzed to death. It was simple and to the point. There is no indication of any musical worship to get people in the spiritual mood. The difference was that the Holy Spirit had fallen on the people, and was empowering Peter's preaching.

If the Holy Spirit is for believers, then why does God say He will pour out His Spirit on all mankind? The Holy Spirit is a guide and counselor for those who have entered into a relationship with Jesus Christ. He is more than a conscience, giving us the whys and why nots of a particular choice. But He works among unbelievers as well. God's desire is that every person would be saved, and that will not happen by any special words or sharing plans. Salvation comes by the work of the Holy Spirit, and all we can do is be obedient to

share the message and verify the truth that has already been spoke by the Holy Spirit. **There are lost people around you that the Holy Spirit is working on. Some of those people are in personal tragedies, while others are simply in sin. God's Spirit is working for a purpose, but it's a purpose we share in. The whole point is to verify to the unbelievers that there is a reason to set aside their unbelief. As you share this week, remember that it will not be your words, but the Holy Spirit's work that will lead them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.**

Read Joel 3

Let the nations be aroused and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. Joel 3:12

My son thinks he's in charge. He's only 8 right now, but when he's playing with his sisters, 7 and 5, he feels the need to be the parent. He will tell them to stop doing something, and at times will go so far as to grab his youngest sister by the waist and drag her from somewhere he doesn't think she should be. Now he is usually right, but his mother and I remind him, "You are not the parent." We let him know that we appreciate him being protective of his sister, and we always hope he looks out for her. But, he is not her parent and doesn't have the authority to control her.

When I read any prophecies of God towards the nations, I often think about how the rulers of those nations must have taken God's news. The ruler is the face of the nation, and no ruler wants to hear that he is not in total control of his land. Yet, God says that he will sit in the valley, with all the nations gathering around, and He will judge. Power is only absolute in the hands of God. Rulers die. Politicians lose elections. God stands permanently and powerfully as the only one capable of ruling and judging those who rule. **Are you declaring the authority of God in your life? That seems an easy question, until the follow-up: what areas do you know you are withholding from God's authority? He is saying yes or no to something, and you are in disagreement and doing as you choose. God's plans may not be popular, and they may not make sense at the moment, but they always have a purpose. God's plans always take into account all of human history, both the history that has come and the history yet to come. Where do you need to lay down the reigns of authority in your life today? Accepting Jesus Christ is about giving your entire life over to Him, and not just a few parts.**