

Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic (Week 2: Joel)

Joel 2:12-13

Last week, we began our new sermon series, “**Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic.**”

The goal of this series is not just to study the prophets, but to become prophetic people—meaning, we hear God’s Words, be transformed by it, and tell the world humbly and boldly.

We started with Hosea, and we heard that the heartbeat of his message was God’s broken yet relentless love for His unfaithful people.

Even though Israel chased idols and confused God with Baal—God still cried out,

“How can I give you up, O Israel?” (Hosea 11:8)

and called to them again,

“Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God.” (Hosea 14:1)

That was God’s voice beating in our hearts last Sunday.

Today we turn to the second prophet in our series —**Joel**.

When most people think of Joel, I believe one passage would come to your mind—that’s the words Peter quoted at Pentecost:

“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.” (Joel 2:28–29)

This was Peter’s first words in his first preaching after receiving the power of God. **Once a coward stood courageously before the crowd** and said,

“Hey everyone, listen to me! What Joel promised—it’s happening right now!”

The Holy Spirit was being poured out on ordinary people—people just like me.

So, it was an incredible moment when God’s promise was fulfilled, God’s Church was born, and a new creation began.

It was like a **heaven-touching-earth moment!**

But I want you to notice that small word in the beginning of verse 28: “**afterward.**”

After what?

In other words: *What must come before the outpouring of God’s Spirit?*

What much precedes revival?

That’s what we’ll discover today through the book of Joel.

(Let’s pray.)

Joel is a mysterious figure. The Bible tells us almost nothing about him except that he was the **son of Pethuel** (1:1). Who is Pethuel? We don’t know, either.

Plus, no kings or rulers are mentioned in this book, so scholars cannot even date his ministry precisely. Some say early 800s BC, others much later. But nobody knows for sure.

But at least two things we know for sure.

That the name **Joel** means “Yahweh is God.”

In other words — *God alone reigns. God alone saves.*

And his father’s name **Pethuel** means "vision of God."

So, if we put those two names together, we get something powerful: “The vision of God is that Yahweh alone is God.”

It’s like God saying, “*When you truly see Me—when you have a right vision of who I am—you will know that I alone am God. There is no other.*”

That really sets the tone of this book.

Another thing we know for certain about this book is that Joel wrote this book in the context of a **national crisis**—it looks like something terrible had happened to them as a nation. That’s why Joel begins his book this way:

Joel 1:2 – “Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors?”

And that terrible disaster was a **locust plague**.

Look at verse 4:

“What the locust swarm has left, the great locusts have eaten;
what the great locusts have left, the young locusts have eaten;
what the young locusts have left, other locusts have eaten.”

He then says:

“A nation has invaded my land,
 a mighty army without number;
 it has the teeth of a lion,
 the fangs of a lioness.
 It has laid waste my vines
 and ruined my fig trees.
 It has stripped off their bark
 and thrown it away,
 leaving their branches white.” (Joel 1:6-7)

Joel basically describes what it was like to hit by locusts: waves upon waves of locusts, marching like soldiers, devouring everything green in their land. So, nothing left – the vines, the trees, the fields, the crops — even the bark off the trees. They’re all gone.

Now, most of us living here in the West have never experienced an insect invasion like the one Joel describes here.

I mean, the closest thing we can think of would be the lanternflies that took over this summer. They were *everywhere*—on our doors, cars, trees, even on your head! It was so annoying! I had to hear my wife and kids were screaming because of lanternflies. And I’m sure all of us got plenty of **lanternfly exercise** this summer—slapping, stomping, swatting, or just running away from them!

But let me tell you — comparing lanternflies to a locust plague is like comparing a water gun to a machine gun.

Here are some jaw-dropping facts:

A single swarm of locust can contain 40 to 80 million locusts per square kilometer.

Each locust eats its own weight in vegetation every day.

Put that together, a swarm can consume as much food in one day as all the people in New York City.

All of a sudden, we are happy with lanternflies, right?

The point is, once you are hit by this locust plague, that means you're done. You'll face famine, economic collapse, and total panic and despair.

That's why Joel is saying:

"Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors?" (Joel 1:2)
He even goes to say: "The priests are in mourning..." because there was nothing to offer on the altar. (1:9)

"Even the cattle moan... because they have no green to feed on." (1:18)

But hear me on this — what Joel is trying to say here is not just to give his people a depressing news report.

He's not saying, "Well, we had a terrible disaster." "How pitiful are we?!"

No! Remember, he's not a news reporter, but he is a prophet.

His message is this: *"My people, this is not just a natural disaster — this is a **divine wake-up call!**"*

What you've seen—the locust plague—is just a **preview** of something far greater and more fearful to come.

That's why he cries out over and over:

"Wake up, you drunkards! Wail, all you drinkers of wine!" (Joel 1:5)
and "Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly." (Joel 1:14)

Joel is warning people that **something greater is coming.**

He calls it **"The Day of the Lord."**

Look at chapter 2:1, "Let all who live in the land tremble, for **the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand.**"

"The Day of the Lord" is one of the **central themes in the prophetic message.** It appears throughout the Bible – both Old and New Testaments.

Typically, this day refers to two meanings:

1. To describe times in history when **God directly intervenes** in human world to confront sin, bring justice, and make things right. (Ex. Isaiah 13:6, Ezekiel 30:3, Amos 5:18–20.) So, this can happen anytime and multiple times.
2. (This carries more significance). It refers to the **final Day of Judgment**—the day we Christians believe Jesus Christ will return in His glory to bring the ultimate destruction of evil and to establish His eternal kingdom once and for all (Joel 3; Zephaniah 1; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 6–20).

So, the bottom line is, Joel is saying: *You think the locusts were bad? That's nothing compared to what's coming.*

That's why Joel cries out,

“Alas for that day! For **the day of the Lord is near**; it will come like destruction from the Almighty.” (1:15)

Now, hear me this. It's not a destruction by locusts; it's a destruction by the Almighty God.

And then Joel paints these terrifying pictures —fire consuming everything, armies marching like an unstoppable force, the earth shaking, the skies darkening, and the heavens trembling (Joel 2:3–11).

So, ultimately, he asks this haunting question:

“The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:11)

In other words, “Are you ready for that day?” “Are you sure you can stand before God on that day?” “We are doomed people.” “We're like a dead meat!”

And just when despair and fear reach its breaking point.

Just where the people would say, “We're finished; there is no hope”—in that very moment, the voice of the Lord kicks in. **And God speaks two words that change everything:**

....

“Even Now...”

“**Even now**, declares the Lord,
 return to me with **all your heart**,
 with **fasting and weeping and mourning**.
Rend your heart and not your garments.” (2:12)

Those two words—“**Even now**”—are the hinge.
 They pivot the story from wrath to mercy, from curse to blessing, from death to life.

Even now – meaning, after rebellion, regret, and ruin.

Even now – meaning, when the fields are burned and the future seems lost.

Even now – meaning, when shame whispers, “It’s too late.” “I’m a failure!”

In that very moment, God still says: “Return to Me—with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments.”

In Joel’s day, people would tear their clothes to show sorrow. It was a public display of grief — a way of saying, “Look how sorry I am!”

But God says,

“Don’t tear your clothes — tear your heart.”

Because the true repentance is not about putting on a public show; it has to be deeply personal. It has to be something about our hearts.

True repentance is about a **ripping your heart, as God says**— a heart that feels the pain of your sin, and a deep sorrow because you know you broke God’s heart.

You see, there’s a big difference between **crying because you got caught** and **crying because you’re convicted**.

Think about a boy who’s been told a hundred times, “Don’t play ball in the house!” But, of course, he does it anyway. One bad bounce—*crash!*—Mom’s favorite vase is in pieces. When Mom walks in, this boy bursts into tears—perhaps out of fear, guilt, and embarrassment. But then he sees tears in *his mom’s* eyes... and suddenly, his crying changes. Now he’s not crying because he’s in trouble.

He’s crying because he realizes he’s **broken his mother’s heart, which broke his heart**.

“Mom, I’m sorry, I won’t do it again!”

That’s the difference between **tearing your garments** and **tearing your heart**.

One heart says, “Mom, I’m sorry for breaking your vase.”

Another says, “Mom, I’m sorry for breaking your heart.”

And that’s why God says,

“Rend your heart and not your garments.

He is saying, “Know my heart!”

“Know who I am!”

“Know what I desire!”

“Know what I care about!”

And then He says, “Return to the Lord your God,

for I am gracious and compassionate,

slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (Joel 2:13)

My friends, here’s the beauty and power in the message of Joel.

When the people turn back to God with all their hearts—**everything changes**.

“Even now” changes everything.

You’ll find it in the scripture. There is a stark difference before and after “even now.”

The fire of destruction becomes the rain of blessing.

The curse of drought turns into a harvest of abundance.

Mourning becomes rejoicing.

Shame becomes gladness.

Despair transforms into hope.

Judgment becomes deliverance.

And God promises:

“I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten.” (2:25)

So, once we return to God with all our heart, God not only forgives; He **restores** us.

And then comes that glorious **“afterward.”**

“And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people...” (2:28)

So, let me ask you again.

After what? **After repentance. After returning to God with all your heart.**

We often pray, “*Lord, pour out Your Spirit!*” or “*I want to receive the power of the Holy Spirit!*” “*Let our church be filled with the Holy Spirit!*”

Here’s the truth: **The Holy Spirit doesn’t come to proud or unrepentant hearts.**
God fills with His Spirit to the hearts that are **humble, hungry, and broken before God.**

God is ready to pour out His **fresh, pure, life-giving Spirit** to us, to His church— but He wants to make sure the cup is clean first.

I’ve shared this illustration before, but picture this again. You walk into a restaurant in the middle of a scorching summer day. The heat is unbearable, your throat is dry, and you’re desperate for something refreshing. A waiter approaches with a pitcher of fresh, ice-cold lemonade and asks, “Sir, would you like some lemonade?”

“Of course! I’d love to!” But then—uh-oh!—you realize your cup is dirty, covered with dust and mud.

Now, do you think that waiter would pour his fresh, ice-cold lemonade into that cup? Of course not.

First, you need to clean your cup. Rend your heart. Empty yourself.

But this brings us a serious question: “Well, how do I clean my cup?”
Or, you may ask, “Who could possibly clean my cup enough for God?”

That’s why prophet Jeremiah said:

“Though you wash yourself with soap and use much lye, the stain of your guilt remains before Me.” (Jeremiah 2:22)

In other words—we can’t.

No amount of self-scrubbing can remove the stain of our deep-rooted sin.

That’s why **Joel’s prophecy points straight to Jesus.**

As we sing this often:

What can wash away my sin?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

What can make me whole again?

Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

“The blood of Jesus... cleanses us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7)

And that's where this powerful and beautiful truth comes, which was quoted by Paul:
"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32)

Then Joel says something amazing; one of my highlights in this book:

**"The Lord will be a refuge for his people,
 a stronghold for the people of Israel."** (3:16)

The same God who is promised to come as Judge with fire and heavenly army now becomes our Refuge, our stronghold.

The One who was against us now fights for us.

"Even now"

God is still calling,

"Even now," declares the Lord,

return to me with **all your heart**,

with **fasting and weeping and mourning**.

Rend your heart and not your garments." (2:12)

As you can tell, we have something going on with our chapel building. And I'll be honest with you. When I found out about this issue, my first reaction was, "Why, Lord? Why now?"

But the more I prayed, the more I began to see — maybe this is not a coincidence at all. Maybe God wanted us to be in the book of Joel **right now**, as we are walking through this.

You see, Joel begins with a plague — a crisis that shook the whole nation. But it wasn't just a disaster. It was a **wake-up call**. God used that moment to call His people back to Himself.

And I believe that's what God is doing with us. This mold isn't just a maintenance issue — it's a **spiritual message**. God may be saying to us, *"Wake up, Smith Chapel. Examine not only our ceilings, attics, and hidden places, but how about your own heart? There might be a mold somewhere in your heart; somewhere in your life! So, don't just clean the building — cleanse your soul; cleanse your body."*

In Leviticus 14, when a house was found to have mold, the people were told to pause, inspect, cleanse, and only then return. Why? Not just for hygiene — but for **holiness**. Because even our spaces belong to the Holy One. And the Bible says, "Our body is the temple of God; God's dwelling place."

So what if God is saying to us today:

“Cleanse My house — and I will make it holy again.

Cleanse your hearts — and I will dwell among you again.”

Even now!

Some of you might be living in your own **locust season**. Meaning, you feel like something has eaten your peace, your purpose, your joy. You may be wrestling with despair, thinking, “It’s too late for me. I’m too broken. I have no energy these days.”

Hear what God speaking to you: **“Even now, son!” “Even now, daughter!”**

Even now—when your hope feels thin—I can **restore**.

Even now—when you feel lonely and shattered—I can **rebuild**.

Even now—when you see only failure, depressing thoughts, and uncertainties—God still says, **I can make all things new.**

Even now in Christ our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our part is to return to Him — rend our hearts, not our garments. Meaning we don’t just be sorry for the sins we committed; we should see God’s tears and those tears touch our hearts, melt our ignorance and wake up our sleeping souls!

And say, “Lord, I’m sorry for breaking your heart.” “I’m sorry that I did not care about you.”
“Now, I come to you with all my heart.”

Once we fully return to God,

Joel says,

“Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill...
and a fountain will flow out from the Lord’s house.” (Joel 3:17–18)

When God’s house is purified — that means, not just the building, but **you and me** — His presence will flow like a fountain again. That’s the power and fruit of the Holy Spirit. We know and everyone will know that there is something special about this place; there is something special about you and me.

We’ll be the people whose fear turned into courage, despair into hope, tears into joy, and the cowards will rise as bold witnesses of Christ like Peter.

Even now!”

Even you and me!

Even our church!

Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord, even now we return to You with all our hearts. Tear open the hardened places within us and make us clean again. Cleanse not only our building but our hearts. Restore the years the locusts have eaten—our lost joy, peace, and purpose. Pour out Your Spirit upon us once more, that we may become a prophetic people—humble, holy, and bold. In, for, and by Your Name, we pray. Amen.

Reflection Questions

1. Where might God be calling me to “rend my heart, not my garments”?
2. What “locusts” have been eating away at my peace, my passion, or my faith—and what might God be wanting to restore?
3. How can I personally prepare the “cup” of my heart to receive a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit?
4. What would it look like for our church to be a prophetic people in this season?
5. How does the message of “Even now” change the way I see my past failures or present struggles?