

Scripture Reading: Joel 2:1-19

Sermon Title: “**Rending Your Heart – The Corporate Fast**”

Introduction

As most of you know, JSEM has just started a 42-day corporate fast, beginning October 1st and ending November 11th. Leaders are all fasting at least one day a week during this period and some are doing 10-day fasts. Looking over the sign up sheet last Sunday, it looks like almost everyone in the church is committed to the fast and everyday has an average of about 5 people fasting. This is good good stuff. Fasting has blessed my life in powerful ways and I am excited to be in a church that is hungry for more of the Lord. Tonight I want us to tear into a passage that Pastor Christian mentioned during his message on fasting a couple Sundays ago. So please keep your Bible's opened to Joel 2. If you're taking notes, you can title this message, “**Rending Your Heart – The Corporate Fast**”

Pray

Background to Joel 2

Now, before we go through this passage, I want to give you all a background to this chapter. Joel chapter 2 is one of my favorites in the Bible. It comes at a time when Israel and all the other surrounding nations are about to face the judgment of God. No nation will be able to avoid going under the rod of God. The sin of the nations, including Israel and Judah, has piled to the limit. God is about to bring His army of locusts and completely wipe out the land. So the prophet Joel, spurred by the Spirit of God, cries out to the people to gather and return to the Lord with all their heart. It's either the people turn to God, or they face His wrath. **Judgment is imminent.** That's the background to this story.

Biblical Prophecy

Now, this past week in my Bible study about Biblical prophecy our group discussed how surprising it was that the Jews didn't recognize Jesus as their Messiah when He first came. There were so many prophecies about Jesus all throughout the Old Testament, but the Jews didn't pick up on any of them. **They had a poor understanding of Biblical prophecy** and how it related to them. And because of that, they failed to recognize Jesus for who He truly was.

Sadly, this is true for most Christians as well today. Few Christians have a grasp on how Biblical prophecy pertains to them in the present. Few Christians are paying attention to the signs around them that judgment is coming soon. Few Christians are aware of the tribulations that await the church in the end times. Most Christians simply gloss over Joel chapter 2 and write it off as something that only pertained to the Israelites long ago.

I don't know about you, but I know my Lord is coming soon. **Amen?** And I know when He comes this whole world is going to be judged. **Amen?** I know that this world is only going to get darker and darker until He comes and I know it's only those who remain close to Him who will overcome. **Amen?** **And by knowing all this, I can look at Joel chapter 2 and know right away this chapter pertains just as much to us now as it did to the Israelites of long ago.**

Judgment is coming. We have to be ready. And Joel gives us very clear instruction for how to prepare. Let's dig into the passage.

Joel 2:12-13 – “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. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”

Love is a Verb

Rend your heart and not your garments. Go ahead and underline that in your Bible.

Who of you knows what an Israelite king would do when something dreadful would happen to him or to his kingdom? What was his typical response?....

He would tear his robes. In his despair he would grab his ornamental robe and rip it apart. I guess the robes back then weren't made of the strongest material, because it would have been pretty embarrassing if it wouldn't rip. Tearing the robes was what was expected. It's just what you do in a bad bad situation.

But God was asking for more. He didn't want just a simple motion. He wanted their whole heart. And God wanted the people to demonstrate their love by coming to Him with fasting and weeping and mourning. He was basically saying, “**Show me how much you want me. Show me your love.**”

Let me ask you, how many of you are confident in God's love for you? Who of you knows what God's love is? His love wasn't given to us in words or simple motions. God showed us His love. It's written in the two John 3:16's. **Please say John 3:16 with me...**

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Our Father in heaven didn't just say He loved us, He demonstrated in the most powerful way. He gave His only Son up for us. And while that verse is powerful, there is still another John 3:16 that you should all memorize. This verse makes what love is even clearer for us, and that's 1John 3:16...

1John 3:16 – This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. **And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.**

Jesus didn't just say He loves us or stop at even healing the hurting and delivering the oppressed, He went all the way to enduring the Cross for us and taking ALL our iniquity on His shoulders. He showed us love in the truest way, and that is through: **sacrifice**. Doing something He didn't have to do and should never have been expected to do. And while on that Cross, amidst all that pain, you know He was thinking of us... that despite the pain, He loved us more and was willing to endure. So, when any of us might doubt and ask Him, “Jesus do you love me?” He can respond, “Yes, I love you... I love you this much” (open arms out, both like a hug and

demonstrating the Cross). And when we see His open arms not just welcoming us but also bearing the marks of the Cross, then we know for sure, He loves us. And that love will never change.

So Jesus clearly teaches us that love is not just an action, it's a sacrifice. Can you see how fasting ties into it? Fasting isn't just an action, its not just something you can do like showing up to church, singing some songs, reading and praying some, **fasting is a sacrifice**. And so during our fasting, when the hunger pains come and we feel uncomfortable, we can sincerely say to God, "Lord, I love You more. I want You more. This much more (holding stomach), I want You." Compared to the Cross, its not as big of a sacrifice. But God still notices. He sees the heart. He knows the motive. And believe me, He is touched.

This is one of the reasons for the corporate fast. We aren't just rending our garments. We aren't just going through the regular motions. We are instead taking a pause to our lives. We are saying to God, Lord I don't want to just give you my garments, the usual offering, simple expectations, I instead what to give You more. I want to give You my heart. And I want to show You this by this simple sacrifice of food. And when the Lord sees a whole church taking this measure, You know He is touched even more.

So how should we expect the Lord to respond? Lets look at verse 14...

Joel 2:14 – Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing—grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.

Who Knows?

Repeat after me, "Who knows?" Underline those first two words of that verse in your Bible. "Who knows?" How will God respond to the corporate fast? How will He respond to people demonstrating their love for Him in such a sacrificial way?

Shrug

"Who knows?"

That's probably not what you wanted to hear. This is where the gut check comes. This is where you have to ask yourself, **"Is this fast for me or for God? Am I doing this for my reward, or for God's glory?"**

If this fast is for your own reward, then how is it really an act of love? If this fast is for your own reward, then it's not a sacrifice. It's a work and you expect your pay.

But if this fast is for God's glory, then you already have your reward and nothing can steal your joy. You are already content. Whatever extra that may come, praise God! But our joy isn't based on circumstances. Our joy is in Him.

I've done long extended fasts in the past and have had no dreams, no visions, no breakthroughs. I knew God was prompting me to do the fasts, but I was seeing no benefits in the physical realm.

But that didn't stop me, I just wanted to obey and love on the Lord. That was all that mattered to me. And the blessings did come, in powerful ways, but not in the timing I expected. We are called to obey and to wait on the Lord. If our joy is already complete in Him, then waiting shouldn't be a problem.

“Who knows?” That's your gut check. Our life isn't for our own glory, its for the Lord's.
Amen?

Let's look at the next verse in the passage...

Joel 2:15 – Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly.

Blow the Trumpet

Blow the trumpet! Oh no, did he just say, “Blow the trumpet?” Do you guys know what that means??? No? Turn with me to Numbers chapter 10. And read your Bible more.
☺

Lets look at verses 5 through 7...

Numbers 10:5-7 – When a trumpet blast is sounded, the tribes camping on the east are to set out. At the sounding of a second blast, the camps on the south are to set out. The blast will be the signal for setting out. To gather the assembly, blow the trumpets, but not with the same signal.

So there you have it. We see here that the trumpet blasts were to call the church together. To gather an assembly. Just like Joel 2:15.

Now, that's kind of anticlimactic. While I was praying over this message those passages weren't what came to mind when I thought of the trumpet blast. Instead, it was the next two verses. And I believe this is what the Lord really has for JSEM. Lets look at verses 8 and 9...

Numbers 10:8-9 – The sons of Aaron, the priests, are to blow the trumpets. This is to be a lasting ordinance for you and the generations to come. When you go into battle in your own land against an enemy who is oppressing you, sound a blast on the trumpets. Then you will be remembered by the Lord your God and rescued from your enemies.

Now that's more like it. First off, its the priests who are to blow the trumpets... the spiritual authorities. Who called us to this corporate fast? Pastor Christian. If you want true revival in your church or fellowship, it **MUST** start with the head, the one in authority. The anointing flows from the head down.

Next, we see that the trumpet is also very important in battle. Not only does it rally the troops, but God hears the blast as well and He brings His presence quick. The trumpet is sounded for the higher power. Its basically saying, **“Um, we can't win this battle on our own. We need You God. Come quick!!!”**

I believe that when our hunger pains coming during this fast we shouldn't just hold our stomachs and say to God, "I love You more Lord" and "I want You more Lord." We need to also be saying, "I **need** You more Lord! I need Your more Lord!"

Our hunger pains are a signal of our flesh that it wants to be fed. That it wants the things of the world. And when we fast, we can see just how fleshly we are. Just how chained we are to this world. Our body constantly wants to be satisfied and I'll be honest, we can't overcome this world if we are letting our flesh have so much of a grip on what we think of and what we want to do.

During this corporate fast we are sounding the trumpet to God that not only do we love Him and want Him, but that we NEED Him at JSEM. **Amen?** It is His presence working through us that drives out the enemy, heals the sick, and convicts the sinner to repent. Its only by surrendering our flesh to Him and being filled with His Spirit that this church can have victory.

John 3:30 – He must become greater; I must become less.

Through this corporate fast we are sending a loud trumpet blast up to heaven and calling out to the Lord that we need Him. Its time for battle and we need Him in front. Its in Him that we have victory.

Let's go back to Joel 2 and look at the next verse...

Joel 2:16 – Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.

Consecrate the Assembly

First, I want you to underline, "Consecrate the Assembly." What does the word consecrate mean? It basically means, "To set apart for a specific purpose," or, "to make sacred or holy." Not just anyone is allowed in the presence of the Lord. You have to come clean. You have to come clothed in His grace, walking in obedience, with a heart set on Him.

I believe JSEM is in this process, and my hope in this fast is that during it more leaders will be convicted to go through the deliverance ministry. God is looking for a holy church, a spotless bride. He wants a church that is free from bondage; not defeated to lust or shame or hate or fear. If we still have parts of heart that hide sin or unforgiveness, then how can we say we are wholeheartedly seeking God? And guess what, that includes that fear of even admitting past sins. You may have confessed your sins to God, **but if you are still afraid to openly confess your sins to a few leaders in the church, then that shows that both fear and shame still have a hold on you.** Are you guys hearing me? Let me say that again: if you are still afraid to openly confess your sins to a few leaders in the church, then that shows that both fear and shame still have a hold on you. You need to pray and ask the Lord for the Spirit of holiness to convict you and give you strength against the enemy. We don't just want to say through the fast, "This much I love You." We want to say by our obedience to a life of holiness, "This much I love You!"

Consecrate the assembly. We have to come clean, church.

Gather the Children

Next, in verse 16, I want you to underline, “Gather the children” in your Bible. Now let me ask you, who is exempt from the corporate fast? Can anyone say they don’t belong?

The point from this verse is simple. If children were expected to gather to fast and cry out to the Lord, then surely every adult member of the congregation should be expected to participate. God doesn’t expect only certain people to seek after Him and show their love to Him. He expects this from all. No one should be exempt from the corporate fast.

Next, let’s look at verse 17, this is the final verse of instruction for the corporate fast...

Joel 2:17 – Let the priests, who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

Where is Their God?

This verse summarizes all that we just covered. The spiritual authorities need to be leading the corporate fast. They need to be the examples of intercessors to the rest of the church. All of us need to be crying out to and asking Him to come near to us, to not let our flesh or this world have any victory over our church.

But look back over the verse. Notice how the priests and people intercede. It says...

Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, ‘Where is their God?’”

While the people were crying out for forgiveness and deliverance from the Lord, they emphasize who they are in God (His inheritance) and that by the Lord answering their cry they will bring glory to God on earth because all the nations will see, and know who their God is.

This was what capped the revival. The people knew their identity in God and were claiming His love. The people were zealously seeking God’s glory. **Identity in God, zealously seeking God’s glory.** When you know that You are a child of God, His beloved, that He died for you and has a special place in heaven for you to reign as a prince, that God is with you always and He is mighty to save... when you claim this and live it out... that’s when Satan knows he doesn’t have a chance with you. That’s when your prayers take great power. And if you are walking in this identity and zealously seeking God’s glory, strongholds are going to come tumbling down all around you. And that’s you as an individual. Think about if the whole church was living this way. If the church can get these two down: identity in God and a zeal for His glory, we will be unstoppable.

Just look and see how God will respond to us... let’s look at the last two verses we will cover...

Joel 2:18-19 – Then the Lord will be jealous for His land and take pity on His people. The Lord will reply to them: ‘I am sending you grain, new wine and oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.’

New Anointing

Last, I want you to underline the words, “Grain, new wine, and oil.” To the ancient Israelites, these three things symbolized prosperity. To have an abundance of grain, new wine, and oil meant you were rich in the world.

I believe God wants to make us rich with these three things as well... the grain, the new wine, and the oil. But rather than materially rich, He wants us to be spiritually rich, with each of these three: grain, new wine, and oil significant in their own way.

Grain

First, I believe the grain symbolizes the Bread of Life. The Word of God. Fresh revelation from God. Fresh bread from heaven. I believe God is going to give the church fresh revelation both from the Word and through the prophetic. **God’s word is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105).** As this world gets darker and darker, it will be His word and prophetic revelation that will shine the way for the church and sustain us in our fight against the enemy.

New Wine

The new wine I believe symbolizes a new calling for the church. God is doing a new thing!
Amen?

Isaiah 43:18-19a – Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. See, I am doing a new thing!

I believe God has wonders and a new level of intimacy for the church that have never been experienced before. This is the new wine, meant for new wineskins. While Pentecost and the early church were great, I believe that **the glory of the latter house will be greater than the former (Haggai 2:9)!** **Amen?**

I believe by us doing this corporate fast we are preparing the wineskin, our hearts, to receive this new wine: a new thing the Lord wants to do for our church.

Oil

Last, the oil symbolizes the anointing, the Holy Spirit. In the Old Testament the kings who were set apart by the Lord would be anointed with oil by a prophet. And when they were anointed, it wasn’t a little smudge on the forehead or a little sprinkling... the man of God would literally “pour” the oil over the man’s head (1Samuel 10:1). You all know what happens when you **pour** oil over a fire. The flames go higher and higher!

The new anointing that is meant for the church isn’t going to be just a little spark. It’s not going to be a little candle flame. Imagine all of us in this room drenched in oil and the fire of God consuming us. **People are going to notice.** The world is going to notice. We are going to be lit

up! And God says that He will give us enough grain, new wine, and oil to satisfy us **fully**. He doesn't want to hold back. The Lord loves to bless those who are earnestly seeking Him.

Hebrews 11:6 – He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.

James 4:8 – Come near to God and He will come near to you.

Recap

So to review the passage, God is calling the church to rend our heart and not our garments. To not just go through the motions, but to offer a true sacrifice, and in this case to fast together. So when we feel the hunger pains we can say to God sincerely, "I hunger for You more Lord." Who knows how the Lord will respond, but as long as He is glorified we rejoice. Our joy is in Him. Through this fast we are sounding the trumpet that we need Him to overcome. No one is to be left out in this fast, from little children to the elders we are all called to participate. And throughout this fast we are to declare our identity in Christ: that we are His people made for His glory. And if the Lord chooses to bless us with the grain, new wine, and oil. Well, praise God. ☺ Let's pray.

Pray