

Reignite, Return, Repent

Sunday School Lesson, June 13th, 2021

Text Joel 2:12-12

Main Idea:

We must repent of all known sin so that we can enjoy the presence of God among us.

Synopsis:

Reignite

As we turn the key and reignite the church a new and a fresh, we long for the presence of God.

Return to God

We must return to God in brokenness, and we must return to God because He is gracious.

Repent of all known sin

This happens when we confess every known sin.

Introduction

Imagine you traveled to London to have an audience with the Royal Family. What would you wear? How would you prepare? Would you take special preparations? The royal family refers to the event as “receiving and audience”. (You can learn about it [here](#).)

Whatever the answer to the questions, the reality is that what we would do would be different than what we normally do. Why? The presence of royalty demands something different. It demands that we be prepared. You do not casually have an audience with the queen. You also do not casually have an audience with God.

There is a price to pay.

Reigniting the Presence of God

We have studied a great deal about the presence of God in our study of Exodus.

In July of last year, and again in March, we turned to the last five verses of Exodus.

³⁴ Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁵ And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. ³⁶ Throughout all their journeys, whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out. ³⁷ But if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out till the day that it was taken up. ³⁸ For the cloud of the LORD was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel throughout all their journeys.

The idea is simple, the Lord moved in, and the people moved on. This is what we want, a people moving on with the presence of God. As the pastor shared (will share) this morning, our goal is to become a presence centered church, which means we will be a praying church.

This is why we believe God is leading us to pray. We pray because we want God to move in and move on with us. Prayer is not the end, prayer is the means. The end goal is not to pray more, the end goal is to have God’s presence on everything that we do as a church. Prayer is the portal to God’s presence.

Promises and the Presence of God

God has great things in store for our church. We believe that. We sense He is ready to move. But we can not detach the presence of God from the promises of God. Yes God has great plans for us. But nothing greater than His presence. Again, **we err when we think that we can have without God's presence, what He only promised to give with His presence.**¹

Thus, we pray. Prayer is the gateway to receive all that God has, and His greatest gift, which is Himself.

Bunkers

Again, as we pray, and as we enter God's presence we see a pattern. Everyone who enters God's presence becomes acutely aware of their own sin. Before we see God move in great power, we have to come to grips with our own sin, and confess it to God.

Bill Elliff puts is succinctly in this illustration when he writes,

Bunker Buster bombs were created in World War II by British designer Barnes Wallis. They were designed to be dropped from almost four miles in the air, reaching velocities in excess of the speed of sound. These powerful bombs were developed not to penetrate the underground bunker, but to go through the earth beside it and create a mini-earthquake, exploding the bunker's foundation and creating a massive hole below the fortification. The stronghold would instantly collapse into the hole.

During the invasion of Iraq in Desert Storm, similar bombs were needed but none available. A stopgap measure was created in twenty-eight days with WWII bombs that were retro-fitted with laser-guidance. They were so effective that after a few weeks, all the Iraqi bunkers were destroyed, and the American forces marched in with little opposition.

THE CHURCH'S GREAT ENEMY

Satan is not ignorant. One of his greatest tactics is to develop spiritual and structural bunkers inside the church to oppose the movement of the Spirit of God. If unnoticed, these strongholds can become mighty barriers to the activity and presence of God in the lives of His people. These bunkers are not hard to create, given the threefold attack by the world and its philosophies, the flesh and its weakness, and the devil and his schemes.²

¹ This insight is borrowed from Sam Storms in his book *Practicing the Power*.

² Bill Elliff, *The Presence Centered Church*

As a church, here we are. We are coming out of this pandemic with great hope that God will move. However, before he does there are some things that will need to be broken up among us.

So, three things are clear.

1. We want to become a church with God's presence.
2. Prayer is the pathway to His presence.
3. Sin can keep us from his presence

Therefore, the next step, *before we go anywhere*, is to repent of all known sin. This leads us to the Prophet Joel and his call for the nation of Israel to return to God.

Return to God

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, media outlets reported that church attendance in America increased by as much as 25 percent. This upsurge in religious interest unfortunately had little lasting impact and, after finding initial comfort during a time of crisis, people quickly settled back into their old patterns of religious devotion. The book of Joel reveals a turning to God following a time of national calamity in ancient Israel -- a severe locust plague. The people's apparent repentance led the Lord to bring blessing in the place of judgment (Joel 2:18-27). Israel's history could have looked much different had the kind of response to the prophetic word that is modeled in Joel 2 been more frequent.

The prophet Joel, whose name means "Yahweh is God," is not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, and the book provides few clues as to its precise date and setting. Dates for Joel range from the ninth century BC through the postexilic period, as late as the fourth century BC. The view taken here is that Joel's ministry most likely took place in the postexilic period, though any conclusions on date and setting are tentative at best.

Joel prophesies in the aftermath of a terrible locust plague that has ruined the land and its crops. He proclaims the locust plague is just the beginning of judgment and that another "Day of the Lord is near" (1:15). Joel calls for sacred assembly and fasting so the people might repent of their sinful ways and return to the Lord. When the people respond positively to these calls for repentance, the threats of judgment turn into promises of blessing. The Lord promises to reverse the agricultural ruin of the land and even to "repay" his people for the years that the locusts have eaten (2:25). These immediate blessings associated with restoring the land's fertility are merely the prelude to Israel's ultimate restoration, when the Lord will pour out his Spirit on his people, deliver them from the nations that seek to destroy them, and bless them with permanent peace and prosperity.³

³ The above three paragraphs are directly quote from Yates and Fuhr, *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets*.

Joel has one simple message: return. Notice the word “return” is used in 2:12, and 13 (emphasis mine):

“Yet even now,” declares the LORD,
 “**return** to me with all your heart,
 with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³ 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.

What does it mean to return to the Lord?

How to Return to the Lord

Joel describes this returning with three actions: fasting, weeping, and mourning.

This in a word is brokenness. Jesus said this in the Sermon on the Mount:

Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
 Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted.
 Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. (Matt. 5:1-3)

We chaff at the idea of brokenness, because we must admit that we are broken. But, and this is so important, brokenness is not something we feign. We don’t pretend to be broken.

Brokenness is the consequence of being aware of our sin, which is real. Broken people are more in touch with reality. Broken people understand. Broken people get it. Broken people are not deceived by their looks, accomplishments, or status. Broken people simply understand that they need a Savior. Therefore, God can help them.

Nancy DeMoss has a helpful tool to assess whether we are broken or proud. *See Appendix to this lesson. This may be something good to print out for your class or read it to them.*

Since it is difficult to move us into brokenness, why should we want to be broken over our sin? Joel’s explains this.

Why return to the Lord

Look at the text again. Joel 2:13-14 gives us the reason why.

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.

¹⁴ 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?

There is great hope! If we turn to God and “rend our hearts and not our garments.” We will experience the forgiveness of God. The only way to experience forgiveness is to confess the sin.

Here is the great irony. **We think that if we hide sin, we will not have to deal with it. But the reality is that transparency is the path to forgiveness and restoration.**

John said it like this in I John 1:8-10 when he wrote,

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

God knows we have sin. If we confess, we can also have forgiveness.

Proverbs 28:13 says,

Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper,
but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.

Confession leads to forgiveness.

When we confess sin, when we confess it to God, and we confess it to others, we feel the joy, the peace, and the release that comes from making things right. Exposure of sin leads to a clear conscience before God, which leads to peace. What joy!

And yet that joy lay on the other side of relinquishing pride. We cannot be personally right, justify our sin, and receive forgiveness. Forgiveness comes from confession.

So, let us confess our sin, our personal sin and our corporate sin, and get right before God.

This leads us of course to repentance.

Repent

Repentance is the practical outworking of the above. If we are broken over our sin, if we confess our sin, we find ourselves in a position of repentance. This is a turning away from sin and turning toward God.

Conclusion

There is a great warning in Hebrews 5:11-14 for those who keep a short list with God.

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God.

You need like, not solid, food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to determine good from evil.

How tragic. This passage describes stunted spiritual growth based on an unwillingness to walk with God.

Conclude the lesson by asking three penetrating questions. Don't be afraid if there is not an immediate response from the class, but let them sit on the class until they respond.

1. Why is it so difficult for us to be honest with each other?
2. Why is it so difficult to confess our sins?
3. What if every person forgave everyone they had wronged them, confessed all known sin to God and to others, and walked in integrity (Psalm 101)? What do you think would happen in our church?

Discuss these three questions as a way to get them talking about the worship service, or reflecting on it.

Broken People vs. Proud People **Nancy DeMoss**

Proud people focus on the failures of others.

Broken people are overwhelmed with a sense of their own spiritual need.

Proud people have a critical, fault-finding spirit; they look at everyone else's faults with a microscope but their own with a telescope.

Broken people are compassionate; they can forgive much because they know how much they have been forgiven.

Proud people are self-righteous; they look down on others.

Broken people esteem all others better than themselves.

Proud people have an independent, self-sufficient spirit.

Broken people have a dependent spirit; they recognize their need for others.

Proud people have to prove that they are right.

Broken people are willing to yield the right to be right.

Proud people claim rights; they have a demanding spirit.

Broken people yield their rights; they have a meek spirit.

Proud people are self-protective of their time, their rights, and their reputation.

Broken people are self-denying.

Proud people desire to be served.

Broken people are motivated to serve others.

Proud people desire to be a success.

Broken people are motivated to be faithful and to make others a success.

Proud people desire self-advancement.

Broken people desire to promote others.

Proud people have a drive to be recognized and appreciated.

Broken people have a sense of their own unworthiness; they are thrilled that God would use them at all.

Proud people are wounded when others are promoted and they are overlooked.

Broken people are eager for others to get the credit; they rejoice when others are lifted up.

Proud people have a subconscious feeling, "This ministry/church is privileged to have me and my gifts"; they think of what they can do for God.

Broken people's heart attitude is, "I don't deserve to have a part in any ministry"; they know that they have nothing to offer God except the life of Jesus flowing through their broken lives.

Proud people feel confident in how much they know.

Broken people are humbled by how very much they have to learn.

Proud people are self-conscious.

Broken people are not concerned with self at all.

Proud people keep others at arms' length.

Broken people are willing to risk getting close to others and to take risks of loving intimately.

Proud people are quick to blame others.

Broken people accept personal responsibility and can see where they are wrong in a situation.

Proud people are unapproachable or defensive when criticized.

Broken people receive criticism with a humble, open spirit.

Proud people are concerned with being respectable, with what others think; they work to protect their own image and reputation.

Broken people are concerned with being real; what matters to them is not what others think but what God knows; they are willing to die to their own reputation.

Proud people find it difficult to share their spiritual need with others.

Broken people are willing to be open and transparent with others as God directs.

Proud people want to be sure that no one finds out when they have sinned; their instinct is to cover up.

Broken people, once broken, don't care who knows or who finds out; they are willing to be exposed because they have nothing to lose.

Proud people have a hard time saying, "I was wrong; will you please forgive me?"

Broken people are quick to admit failure and to seek forgiveness when necessary.

Proud people tend to deal in generalities when confessing sin.

Broken people are able to acknowledge specifics when confessing their sin.

Proud people are concerned about the consequences of their sin.

Broken people are grieved over the cause, the root of their sin.

Proud people are remorseful over their sin, sorry that they got found out or caught.

Broken people are truly, genuinely repentant over their sin, evidenced in the fact that they forsake that sin.

Proud people wait for the other to come and ask forgiveness when there is a misunderstanding or conflict in a relationship.

Broken people take the initiative to be reconciled when there is misunderstanding or conflict in relationships; they race to the cross; they see if they can get there first, no matter how wrong the other may have been.

Proud people compare themselves with others and feel worthy of honor.

Broken people compare themselves to the holiness of God and feel a desperate need for His mercy.

Proud people are blind to their true heart condition.

Broken people walk in the light.

Proud people don't think they have anything to repent of.

Broken people realize they have need of a continual heart attitude of repentance.

Proud people don't think they need revival, but they are sure that everyone else does.

Broken people continually sense their need for a fresh encounter with God and for a fresh filling of His Holy Spirit.