

Joel 2:12–17

“But What if We’re Not Told What to Repent of?”

The puzzling mystery of repentance.

The winsome incentive of repentance.

The precise particulars of repentance.

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Director attention to mind you the book of Joel we're thinking in terms of. But what? If we're not told what to repent of and what do you do and so look at this book and I think our text tonight is Joel chapter 2 verses 12 to 17. I think for our reading will read a bit of Joel chapter 1 to kind of get you from the front of us and then we'll go to that focus on that text.

I'm a custom when you have the covenant name of God and they will test in the text in our English versions, it's usually spelled. Ward in all capital letters it's referring to that personal name the way and I'm used to using that if you're not also familiar with that you just translate it back but don't let an old one have to learn new tricks tonight to just let me go on and do it my own way and you you do the re-translating if you need to do that.

I think well, let's look at Joel's hopper one versus one to twelve first just to get a kind of a feel for the book and then we'll go one from there to the vertex. Joel one verse one the word of Yahweh which came to Joel the son of pathu well here this you elders and listen all residents of the land has this sort of thing occurred in your days or in the days if your fathers tell about it to your sons and your sons to their sons and their sons is still another generation what the fighter has left the swarmer as he and what the swarmer has left the hopper is eaten and what the hopper has left.

You drunkards and leaf and whale all you wine drinkers over the sweet wine that's cut off from your mouth nation has come up against my land strong and numberless their teeth our teeth of a lion. And their jaw bones are those of alignness. It has turned my vine into a waste in my fig trees this splinters it is totally stripped them and thrown them away.

He has made its twigs whites whale like a young woman wearing sackcloth over the husband of her youth Green offering and drink offering have been cut off from the house of Yahweh, the priests the service of Yahweh mourn the field has been devastated to soil horns for the grain has been devastated the new wine dried up.

The olive oil. Peter now. Be ashamed farmers whale keepers over the wheat and the barley for the harvest of the field is perished. The vine has dried up and the fig tree is winter. The pomegranate also the palm and the apple. All the trees of the field and dried up indeed joy this dried up from the sons of man.

Now, let's give you a little hint of what's going on in the in the context not only a locust lake but a drought and now let's come to where the hinge of the book comes in chapter 2 and verse 12 to 17. Yet even now Yahweh says chapter 2 verse 12 return to me with all your heart and with fasting and weeping and morning and rip open your hearts and not your clothes and return to Yahweh your God where he is gracious and compassionate slow and anger and rich and grace and relents over sending disaster.

Hosts. He may turn and relent to leave a blessing behind him a grain offering and drink offering for Yahweh your God blow the horn inside consecrate a fast call and assembly gather the people consecrated congregation convene the elders gather the children and nursing influence, but the bridegroom come out of his bedroom and the bride from her chamber between the porch and the onto the altar with the priests the service of Yahweh week and let them say have pity upon your people.

Will give your possession up to this grace for nations to rule over them. Why should they say among the people's? Where is their God? Hello the chapter 2 verses 12 to 17 in particular bring in certain items from the rest of the book as needed. I don't know if you heard during 2019 and 2020 about the locust flag at East Africa and also a Pakistani.

In addition to all the Covenant problems that that they had there. I understand from reports that a swarm of only one square mile. Of. Pass. Will eat as much as 80,000 people can eat in one day. The tour swarms of hundreds of millions of locusts could migrate distances of ninety miles a day.

So there's some mobility there. The last locust play get apparently in Africa, big one. I guess was in 2003. And it affected 23. 23 West West Africa countries it involved three generations of locusts and it took two years. Bring it under control. These are not things that you mess with.

Locust flags may be more unfamiliar to us, but these are hard things. So you step into the Book of Joel the very first chapter and you step into the locus play and if you look there and some of the material that we've read and Capital One versus two to four it's unprecedented that there's ever.

A plague like this. You can mark it on your calendar. You can tell it through generations etcetera. There's never been a locust place like this. It's totally unparalleled. Yahweh even calls these locusts nation. Verse 6 after one verse 6. Their damages devastating leave speed trees and splinters and so on Farmers and Vineyard keep.

Their unemployed and saddest of all public worship ceases verse 9, exactly 1 and 13 and 16 because there are no grain offerings and drink offerings because grain and wine the growth of the locus is on it's all consumed. So you can't have it. Shuts down worship. So a very very sad affair.

So it's either one verse 15 a little word play there. You've heard God called himself to Abraham Lionel Shedai, so what God Almighty. Well, it's happened one verse 15, there's a little play if a translator is like shattering from shadow. The Lord has beaten down his people. In this way.

Maybe there's just a little exaggeration that the Bible is engaging in knowing hardly. I take you to pictures of one that I saw on one of hooks or where you have a fig tree that's in in full leaf and so on and then 15 minutes later another picture after the locusts got a whole lot of it as completely strapped of all foliage.

They're unstoppable. If you look in chapter 2 verses 7 to 9 it talks about that. I, Know. Some people in that part of Joel 2 think that's talking about a foreign army but I tend to they get still describing locusts under an intensification perhaps of a locust play but in chapter two verses seven to nine nothing stops and they just keep coming and and they even crawl up walls they crawl up through windows and so on so I into the end of homes and so on so it's real affliction, in fact there's one description from 1845.

I should have told you I usually don't do long introductions but this one's a little bit longer to set the stage and get you a custom to locus but one one fellow at 1845 saw the locust coming on and he said they're number was astounding the whole face of the mountain was black with them on they came like, A deluge week.

Inches and Kindle fires and feet and burned to death heaps upon heels, but the effort was utterly useless wave after wave rolled up the mountainside in poured over rocks walls ditches and edges those behind covering up and bridging over the masses already killed there was a, These and they eat everything there was a.

1889 a swarm of locusts that was spotted across the Red Sea it was estimated that they were 2,000 square miles.

A swarm is estimated to contain up to 120 million insects per square mile. 2,000 square miles of locus and not to be gross about it, but think about the piles of locust dong that come out of that. There you have it in 1915, there was a locust flag in Palestine females were laying eggs, it was estimated 65 to 75,000 eggs per square meter of land in 1915, they heard the loud noise before they ever saw the locus the sun was darkened shut out as it were from them and times were captured and burned alive in fact in April 1915 the government.

Required every man from six ages 16 to 60 to bring in 11 pounds of locusts eggs every day turned them in and even the bark was peeled from trees not just the oil is what the bark whiskey. And sadly enough even Arab babies who were left by their mothers in the shade of some tree had their faces devoured before their screams were heard.

So, Skagit stats and focus and that's what the people with Judah are facing in Joel's day. In fact, it refers to chapter 2 verse 25 to the years the locusts heavy. So, this was probably more than just one season or one year and the drought of course that accompanied it.

And so publics and Winn-Dixie and Piggly. Wiggly all went out of business obviously and I think chapter 1 verse 12 sums it up eloquently joy. Has dried up from the sons of man. So that's the focus. Then we come to our text chapter to and verse 12 where it begins yet even now Yahweh says.

As if there may be some gleam of hope yet even now there is opportunity for repentance. And so we want to look at this what this text teaches us about repentance and the thing that really gets me is what if we're not. Of the that's the puzzle I think in this text at least it is to me that's always bugged me about the book of Joel.

Well, let's look at it first of all it's our first matter. I want to point out is the puzzling mystery of repentance verses 12 and the first part of 13. It even now you always says return to me with all your heart and with passing weeping and mourning.

God. The puzzling mystery of repentance. Now, there's some things there that aren't puzzling. Let's talk about what isn't puzzling. For one thing he didn't God demands that would be of sincere disposition to our repentance that's in verse 12 and 13, isn't it? Return to me so on and with that.

And weeping and mourning with external expressions of repentance, but it can't just be these. Expressions verses and remove both in your hearts and not your clubs. Don't just put on an act about it. It has to be an internal conviction and sociopathy about it. So, Sincere disposition, that's required Albert Speer who was Adolf Hitler's architect and so on during the the Nazi third, right?

I pulled up the time in about 1935, when when they were taking film of the Nazi party Congress apparently got some film that was damaged or or something and so they decided that they would restore it by well doing it all over again acting it out in the in the studio though not with 30,000 people watching and so on and all the fervor the crowd will just reenact it in the studio so.

Here comes Rudolph. Hess one of the Nazi lackies and Albert spear said he came on and and. He he did his part just as he did at the actual scene before thirty thousand people and with his special brand of harder he turned precisely to the spot where Hitler would have been sitting snapped to attention and cried my ear.

I loved him in the name of the party. Congress the Congress will now continue the fear of speaks and and spear said it was so convincing. In fact the gal who was doing the the reenactment you might say in the studio thought. The tuning was better than what originally took place at the party congress.

Albert Spear said, this is what made me wonder. If you can show this kind of apparent sincerity and harder and enthusiasm when you're just acting in a studio.

That they're seeming enthusiasm and intensity is really sincere. It can be acted for crying out loud and what you always say here is.

You're not act. Repentance, don't act sincerity. Rep open your hearts, but not your garments should. N't yes yes first well fasting a weeping and mourning. But realness there so that's what puzzling there's they're supposed to be a sincere disposition and there's something else here that isn't puzzling about this repentance and that is that there's a real need for it there's no doubt about that because of the locust play we know there's something amiss among the people of Judah somethings are rock.

And we know that because this locust play is one of the covenant curses remember back in the anomaly 28 verse 30 it now. Deuteronomy 28 the last part of it most of the latter part of the chapter has to do with other curses if the Lord's people are not faithful to him, they don't listen to his voice they don't do his commands as these curses will come upon him and Deuteronomy 28:38 is usual.

Out consumer. Soviets and sustainable assumptions seemingly in Solomon's prayer and first kings 8:37 to 39. They're gonna be a situation where locusts and caterpillars will eat crops etc and your people cry out to you then here in heaven and forgive and so on. That there's a real need here for repentance and the idea is if this is one of the covenant curses as during the 28th indicates where on faithfulness to the Lord in some way then there's there is a reef.

Need for Rita, something's wrong, something is a rock in Judea. Okay. But now let's turn to what is hustling about this recovery. So this is what is always. Fascinated me and maybe wonder about the text. His puzzling you will find us in any number of scholars a different one that you have a dozen of them will we'll call tension to it.

There's a silence of the prophet. On the nature of the national sins that prompted the locus play. Their urge to repent. But the text is silent on the nature of transgressions. There's no specific covenant violation cited that. Here. Now, they're made you read commentators, they may dredge up some that they think are going on or that they think are in the background, but there's no place to where God's people are accused of idolatry.

They're not involved in nail worship. He doesn't accuse them of that. There are no pagan practices that are described this decry. There's no particular disobedience. There's no indication of what they need to repent of. Do they need? Are there any direct accusations and there doesn't seem to be any?

If the word for the loudest play tempo worship was apparently going on. They had apparently orthodox church life. But that's the puzzling mystery of repentance. No during that accusation of any particular sin. So when we do here, what does the tax say first well and even now you always said return to me with all your heart first 13 and return to Yahweh your God.

Harry general in a way. Nothing in specific terms here. Hey, I'm wondering maybe some text in the New Testament might help us. What? Ten if. Are there sometimes when there's a call or demand for repentance, but perhaps it's not necessarily spelled out in the tale. I think of Jesus where to the church in Ephesus in Revelation 2 4 and 5.

I have this against you. That you have left the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you fallen repent and do the first words. Well over the first words, they might have to think about that. But. You've abandoned you've left the love you've had at first I think there in that revelation to text that is primarily love for Christ for God and Christ that's vertical a lot of rather than horizontal love that can be debated we talk about that later but the love of school.

You've abandoned a love you had at first. Why doesn't he spell that out in greater detail? Maybe he wants some to think about how they've done that. Rather than spelling it out towards them. Where what about papers to one? You remember how it goes? Therefore, we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard last we drift away from it.

It's a it's a drawing of conclusion from Hebrews 1. Presented the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who upholds the universe by the word of his power and has a better name and status and angels and so on and he's proving and and supporting the deity of Christ. He is deity.

Therefore, we have to pay much closer attention to the word we've heard lest we drift away from it. How do you drift away from something? Oh, just kind of. Go slowly and imperceptibly. Yeah, and noticeably. You just may not be conscious of it at all. It's kind of quiet and remarkably says that word for drift there can be used of a ship.

That carelessly is allowed to slip past the safe partner. I just kind of a neglect that takes place. Can you can you can you drink? And maybe not even be aware of it. And therefore there may be no specific wickedness. But you need to return. To Yahweh your God.

I wonder if that's a word for us you see what's the text telling us as a church not necessarily this church, but any church. Saying what is not me, we don't need more committees or projects or ministries or long-range planning all and and and what else what else may well be in place, well, there may be proper worship there may be no denials of sound doctrine.

There may be no scandals of unchecked and morality giving is not falling off. But you may need to return to me. And we be utterly orthodox and apparently consistent. And yet have abandoned our first love and just drifted away. That we need to return now the following of Douglas Brown and Englishman at was involved in some revivals in eastern England back.

I don't know that late 189 1800s 1900s and so on not revival meetings but genuine revivals where God was really restoring his people and others. Brown made the comment. He said revival is not going down the street with a big drum it is going back to Calvary with a big saw.

I wonder if we could say that about repentance. I thought necessarily. Putting on a big display or he but you go back to Calgary with a big saw because you need to renew your first love as you all the way says breach to me. It might be that we don't have conduct it needs correction to take away we need affections that need to be in Kindle.

Maybe maybe there's a reason why we're not told something particular evil or sin the repent of the that's the puzzling mystery now a little briefly let's look at a second the winsome incentive of repentance you notice the last part of verse 13 and also verse 14 return to all of your thoughts for he's gracious and compassionate slow to anger and rich in grace and relents over sending disaster who does he make?

Lessen behind him and bring offering and drink offering for Yahweh your God. Yeah. You notice a stress there, he's giving why you ought to be in booze about returning to Yahweh for youth gracious and compassionate someone slow to anger you you return to him because you realize his character what he's like.

This isn't something in verse 13 that Joel fought up he stole this in verse 13 this comes from Exodus 30. Verses 6 and 7 is a situation if remember after Israel worship the golden calf right in the shadow of Sinai when the covenant with Yahweh was being concluded and they.

Exercised you might say with that bull half image and worship that and it was in the context of that when Yahweh was renewing the covenant that he may. Proven Exodus 34. Mary says Yahweh Yahweh God compassion and gracious slow to anger and rich in covenant love. And Fidelity keeping covenant love for thousands forgiving iniquity and rebellion and sin and will by no means lead to guilty unpunished now that occurs as we'll seek tomorrow we're willing a number of times but it comes here and Joel's essentially quoting he's alluding to that and he's saying now return to Yahweh your God because look what kind of thought he is.

And and you can be confident of acceptance and forgiveness now you might say well yes but if you look at verse 14, it looks like that's not so sir it says in 14 who knows he may turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him someone as if they say well, you know, you can't be sure but he may no verse 14 is not talking about forgiveness and acceptance verse 14 is talking about the fact that y'all.

Made even reverse some of the consequences of our sin.

He may he may relent and leave a blessing behind him, he may restore some of our crops so that we can begin worshiping God again, but it's not talking about acceptance in verse 4 that's not a or forgiveness that's modern down what what is in verse 14 is the the possible consequences that come from our unfaithfulness he may even reverse some of those who knows we can't be sure but he's that sort of God.

But the main thing I want you to see is the connection between how you should be wanting to return to Yahweh or he is gracious and compassionate etc. It's the length of incentive of repentance. It's based on Yahweh's character. I was always have been impressed with one of Peggy Noodles anecdotes about President Ronald Reagan.

This was after he was president and after his dementia had taken hold of him and he was he was watched at home and cared for and so on. She said, he's a at this time, he's a sick old man. He lives at home in Bel Air and his love of California, etc.

And, He has people who feed him. They see who is safety. There's a little map there by his bed so that he happens to get up his signals them and they know to be on the alert. West he's wondering around and so on. And yes, you said this man who has been so hard wired for courtesy.

When when the nurse or the aid who is feeding him is feeding him and he happens to accidentally bump her arm. He will say with perfect enunciation. Oh, I think your partner. And he's right there. It's as if he's taking part. It's as if he's perfectly clear in that moment.

It's as if the dementia couldn't destroy a basic rooted part of his character. Way is. To say. Oh, that's what verse 13 is saying.

Incentive of repentance. So one could say thanks on verse 13 that Yahweh lures.

There's nothing necessarily dreadful or nothing no drudgery here. No, he lures us to recover based on the kind of God he is I always have liked that little clip from a woman in New York. This this would have been back in the 1700s when George Whitfield would come up came over for me one that was preaching in the colonies in American colonies and, It is a.

Number of times and in the midst of some revivals and so on. And was after Whitfield had died from 56 years old, he died and this woman apparently had been converted under Woodfield's preaching but she. Put in an interesting way. She said Mr. Whitfield was so cheerful. That it tempted me to become Christian.

A marvelous way to put it. Have you ever been tempted to become a Christian? Do you know that the Lord may tempt you to repent because of the character that he is? Sloat anger, gracious and compassionate rich in compliments and fidelity. Don't you want to come back? Don't you want to return to a God like that?

The Winston incentive of repentance. Now then let's look at a third matter here bullying call the precise particulars of repentance which you look at verses 15 to 17. The precise particulars of repentance. Notice that you have about eight imperative verbs here in the below the horned enzyme consecrate a fashion assembly gather the people consecrated congregation conveniently owners gather the children of nursing inputs, but the bridegroom come out of his bed.

Room in the bride from her chamber and then let the priests for 17 weeks and let them say and then there's a prayer and so on. Nothing's left a chance. You keep reading after verse 14 and it's as if the Lord is saying now, here's how you repent. Here's the process you use and you call an assembly you get to the temple you have all these different people come and so on.

Here's how you go about it in your case. Now you notice as you look at the text that this repentance is corporate it's not just individual or personal you call an assembly you gather people you consecrate a congregation you convene the elders essentially. Notice that it's comprehensive you gather the children and nursing infants as well.

And you notice how it is Class of her 16. Here's the groom and the bride and they're in the Holiday Inn. Express honeymoon suite and the elder comes knocking on the door and says as they're wanting to constantly hate their relationship and he says, whoa, it's on a topic.

Or something more important. And making love tonight. And then of course you have the crease who are supposed to weep and lead in prayer so is led by you may say the clergy here now this is something that's done in church then in various in their setting and then notice so besides these matters notice that even what they are to pray is spelled out.

You notice that he gives the words that the priests are to pray a prayer of restore will restoration have pity upon your people verse 17 and don't give your possession up to disgrace for nations to lower them, why should they say among the people where is their call?

I'm good the Lord is to provide such direction, he even gives them the words to say in their prayer has all versions of 15 to 17, it's as if he says now here's the procedure to use here's the process of how you go about repenting in this case. And here's prayer.

The prayer. It reminds me of the the previous prophet the zeal if you go to Jose at that 14 verse 2 the prophet says take with you words. And return to Yahweh. Say forgive iniquity and accept what is good interesting take with you words and return to young think about what you're going to say.

Map this out.

And that's what he does in here, it's old to 17 he gives him the words to say now some of you may have checked it you may say I don't know for that sort of thing. I don't believe in written and prepared and pre-formulated prayers. I believe in free prayer whatever that is.

Well if that's the case. May God wasted his time in giving us the book of Psalms didn't. Because those are prayers. A lot of written ahead time. For us to pray as well. We can use those words and some of those words of those prayers are prayers of repentance.

So you better be a little bit. Well you you better be just a little bit hesitant about. That attitude about about pre-formulated prayers. John Murray who was for a number of years a prophets the omelette at Westminster seminary in Philadelphia received a letter from his sister in Scotland in January 1942, she was telling about the death of their father.

John Murray couldn't get back for his funeral and so on so there he wasn't Philadelphia and his sister wrote to him and, Told him about the last days of his father and she said that for the two days preceding his death he was in the 51st Psalm and repeated it again and again from the beginning to the end and Galway his mother tongue.

Now why did he do that was John Murray's father did he commit? To like David did with Bathsheba that's the background of that song now he did it but the words that David wrote in that prayer of repentance and flee for closing were words that he could use as well and he repainted them from start to finish the two days before he died in his mother.

I need took a prayer that was free formulation. The words were given him and he made his own.

Now sometimes there other prayers besides biblical prayer for up there, maybe some of you have found a puritan prayers collected and put together in a little book called the valley of vision to be helpful. I find that sometimes they say it better than I can. When I read but in my first student walk I'm still in rags my best prayers are stained with sin my penitential tears are so much impurity my confessions of wrong are so many aggravations of sin.

I need to repent of. I need my gears to be washed.

That says it better. I think than I would have myself. Or no day of my life has passed that is not proved me guilty and eyesight prayers have been uttered from a prayerless heart praise has often been praiseless sound my best services are filthy rags. Grant made it here thy voice is sharing me that by my stripes.

I knew I'm guilty but Clark lost but say wandering that found. Sinning the cleanse. Give me perpetual broken marketness, keep me always cleaning the bike rocks. Thanks the Lord still gives us whether it's scripture or. Aside from Scripture in Christian devotion. Gives us prayers to pray. In order to return to Him.

Well in Joel 2, there's no indication of precisely what we need to repent of. Except I hope that doesn't disappoint it except this. Return to me. Says y'all. Take with you words. And return to your. Lord we pray and give you thanks that you are a God who sometimes puzzles us with the numbers in your word.

And they are there. To make us think perhaps. And we thank you that you are God you tempt us to return to you. And we thank you aboard your garden provides us with all that we need. In order to repent. Come back from the far country. And selling Father's house again.

We give you thanks for your own character. In Jesus name.