

Joel 1-2: Repentance & Revival

by Richard Owen Roberts

Richard Owen Roberts emphasizes the necessity of corporate repentance and the hope of revival as outlined in Joel 1-2.

Duration: 1:39:21

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:1-5

Topics: "Revival"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the book of Joel in the Bible. He describes a scene of destruction caused by a great horde of locusts, which have stripped away all vegetation and left the land desolate. The preacher emphasizes the urgency of repentance and returning to God, as the day of the Lord is approaching. He encourages fasting, weeping, and mourning as a way to seek God's forgiveness and mercy. The sermon concludes with a call to blow the trumpet, gather the people, and sanctify the congregation in preparation for the coming judgment.

Transcript

If you have your Bibles, open with me to Joel, the prophet, Joel, beginning in chapter 1, verse 1. The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel. Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of this land. Has anything like this happened in your days or in your father's days? Tell your sons about it, and let your sons tell their sons and their sons the next generation.

What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten. What the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten.

Awake, drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth. For a nation has invaded my land, mighty and without number. Its teeth are the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

It has made my vine a waste, and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away, their branches have become white. Well, like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth, the grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord.

The priests mourn the ministers of the Lord. The field is ruined, the land mourns, for the grain is ruined, the new wine dries up, fresh oil fails. Be ashamed, oh farmers.

Wail, oh vine dressers, for the wheat and the barley because of the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up and the fig tree fails, the pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree. All the trees of the field dry up.

Indeed, rejoicing dries up from the sons of men. Gird yourselves with sackcloth and lament, oh priests. Wail, oh ministers of the altar, come, spend the night in sackcloth, oh ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

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. Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is near, and it will come as destruction from the Almighty. Has not food been cut off before our eyes, gladness and joy from the house of our God? The seeds shrivel under their clods, the storehouses are desolate, the barns are torn down for the grain has dried up.

How the beasts groan, the herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them, even the flocks of sheep suffer. To you, oh Lord, I cry, for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field, even the beasts of the field pant for you, for the water brooks are dried up and fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness. Blow a trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm on my holy mountain, let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming.

Surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and mighty people. There has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations.

A fire consumes before them and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, but a desolate wilderness behind them and nothing at all escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses and like war horses, so they run.

With a noise as of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains like the crackling of a flame, a fire consuming the stubble like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them, the people are in anguish. All faces turn pale, they run like mighty men, they climb the wall like soldiers and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths.

They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks, they rush on the city, they run on the wall, they climb into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. Before them, the earthquakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness.

The Lord utters his voice before his army, surely his camp is very great for strong is he who carries out his word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome and who can endure it? Yet even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart and with fasting, weeping and mourning and rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and relenting of evil.

Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, even a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God. Blow a trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, proclaim a solemn assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and the

nursing infants, let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber, let the priests, the Lord's ministers weep between the porch and the altar. Let them say, spare your people, oh Lord, and do not make your inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations.

Why should they among the people say, where is their God? Then the Lord will be zealous for his land and will have pity on his people. The Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I'm going to send you grain, new wine and oil and you will be satisfied in full with them. I will never again make you a reproach among the nations, but I will remove the northern army far from you and I will drive it into a parched and desolate land and its vanguard into the eastern sea and its rear guard into the western sea and its stench will arise and its foul smell will come up, for it has done great things.

Do not fear, oh land, rejoice and be glad, for the Lord has done great things. Do not fear, beasts of the field, for the pastures of the wilderness have turned green, for the tree has borne its fruit, the fig tree and the vine have yielded in full. So rejoice, oh sons of Zion and be glad in the Lord your God, for he has given you the early rain for your vindication and he has poured down for you the rain, the early and the latter rain as before, and the threshing floors will be full of grain and the vats will overflow with the new wine and oil.

Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust, the gnawing locust, my great army which I sent among you. You will have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you. Then my people will never be put to shame.

Thus you will know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the Lord your God and there is no other and my people will never be put to shame. Well it certainly is appropriate for me to begin this morning with a word of thanks to you for your attention and interest and also an encouragement. I mentioned the first day then I didn't stress this the next two but really I think if at any point you feel like interrupting don't hesitate.

I stressed it before, I want to stress it again. After all we really didn't come together for me to deliver my message. We came together to gain what the Lord has for us in terms of a fresh and a powerful understanding of revival and to quicken our burden and the concern and to bring us closer to that possibility of a true outpouring of the Spirit.

So if I have said anything already that has left question marks in your mind don't hesitate to bring that up this morning. This will be your last opportunity on this occasion at least to have clarified anything you need and if you have objections I've already told you they're welcome. Just be careful that you know what you're saying is the only thing that I would request and if you in any way wish to speak up just a wave or just something so as I told you before I can finish the paragraph.

Now I have been trying to help you not only to understand but to deeply appreciate that the bulk of the material in the Bible on the subject of revival is corporate not personal. Now we have aired right across the board in the church in America in recent years and making so much of everything purely personal. Now let's begin this morning just thinking afresh about the nature of repentance.

Suppose you really embrace as accurate what I stressed last night and had made reference to earlier in the week that the very essence of sin is self. If that is true and it is like it or not then repentance must include true turning from self. But if my great interest in Christ is purely personal, not corporate, then the evidence is clear.

I have not adequately repented if I do not have a burden for others and not just those immediately close to me but others all that God enables my life to touch. If I don't have a burden for them then my repentance needs to be brought into order and to be thorough and genuine. Now we've already thought a little about that passage in 2nd Corinthians chapter 7 but I'd like to ask you to begin there with me this morning.

And Anthony has presented someone, I didn't see who, with a copy of the book Repentance and you'll find much more information on this subject in that book. But I'm asking you at the moment to turn to 2nd Corinthians chapter 7 where there's a very potent passage on repentance and bears directly on our theme this morning. So have you found your place 2nd Corinthians chapter 7? I'm going to read a fairly lengthy portion but then focus on a smaller part.

Now, whoops, I'm not following the instructions you gave you, I gave you. Now remember yesterday we're looking at the passage about Phariseeism and Phariseeism at heart is putting burdens on others but they don't follow themselves and giving instructions. Well there I've gone and done it but now I've made the adjustment and I'm in 2nd Corinthians.

All right, verse 1 please. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. Make room for us in your hearts.

We wronged no one. We corrupted no one. We took advantage of no one.

I do not speak to condemn you for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. Great is my confidence in you. Great is my boasting on your behalf.

I am filled with comfort. I am overflowing with joy in all my affliction. For even when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side.

Conflicts without fears within, but God who comforts the depressed comforted us by the coming of Titus and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me so that I rejoiced even more. For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it though I did regret it. For I see that that letter caused you sorrow though only for a while.

I now rejoice not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance. For you were made sorrowful according to the will of God in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret leading to salvation, but the sorrow of the world produces death.

For behold, what earnestness this very thing, this godly sorrow has produced in you, what vindication of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what avenging of wrong in everything you demonstrated yourselves to be innocent in the matter. So although I wrote to you for the sake of the offender, I although, excuse me I misread that, so although I wrote to you it was not for the sake of the offender nor for the sake of the one offended, but that your earnestness on our behalf might be made known to you in the sight of God for this reason we have been comforted. Now then, will you be disgusted with me if I make this simple observation? 2nd Corinthians follows 1st Corinthians.

Doesn't seem very astute, does it? And yet it's immensely consequential because Paul is obviously concerned about what he had written in that first letter. Now did you ever, when you were not under a great deal of self-control perhaps, write a very hot letter to someone and then in sheer stupidity drop it in

the mailbox? And then before you had actually heard it hit the bottom, you were wishing your arm were long enough and thin enough so that you could reach in that box and also that it wasn't illegal to reclaim a letter? Well Paul is giving us a sense of that. He speaks about having regretted it.

I don't regret it, but I did regret it. And often when we correct someone and we don't know whether they received the correction in the spirit in which we gave it or not, we are apprehensive. Many a time, many a time, I have gone back to my hotel room after an evening meeting and pondered and wondered, did they just get angry or did they really hear what was said and did they take it to heart and will they act upon it or will they merely get mad? We don't know many times how others will receive the message.

Now we don't alter the message because we're uncertain whether they will receive it or not, but one does wisely wonder, if you don't have anybody listening, does it make any sense to talk? My wife and I have a lovely relationship, but just once in a while we get stretched because she'll say to me, you knew perfectly well what those people needed to hear. Why didn't you tell them? And I will say, Maggie, do you think the Lord wants us to throw words away? Well, no. Well, I said, nobody was ready to receive the truth.

Why should I have given it to them? And she agrees, but she disagrees. You know what I mean? You have little experience, perhaps, in that direction. So here's Paul, having written a very critical letter, and you know I trust the contents of 1 Corinthians.

I mean, he didn't hardly get to an opening greeting in place before he's criticizing, dealing with them about the party spirit that existed in Corinth, dealing with them about that problem that seems to grip the bulk of the American church, braininess. I get so tired of listening to sermons aimed at the brain, I'd like to kick the men into Canada, or better yet, perhaps into the ocean. Don't they know that people are not transformed through the brain, but through the heart? Well, not that Christianity is stupid or needs to be made to sound like it, but it's when God moves upon the heart that the life is transformed.

But Paul is making a statement here. Yes, he spoke to them about the party spirit. Yes, he spoke to them about their constant tendency to think of themselves as intellectuals.

He spoke to them about their grievously wicked conduct in terms of the Lord's table. He spoke to them about the practice of immorality of which he was aware. And he spoke to them about the confusion and the nonsense that they had developed on the subject of the Holy Spirit.

And when you go after somebody for their error, how do you know whether they respond rightly or wrongly? But he brings this matter into a beautiful focus when he mentions clearly that the return of Titus led him to a state of comfort and joy, because he realized they had received his letter. But now, let me emphasize something of great importance. This is one of the most potent portions on the subject of repentance in all the Bible, but it is not focused on individual repentance, but corporate repentance.

Now, obviously, when there is corporate repentance, it includes individuals. But when there is individual repentance, it does not necessarily include corporate repentance. That may sound like a small matter, but it isn't.

Last evening, I was greatly concerned to help you catch a sense of God's burden, not alone for individuals, but for the nation and the nations. Now, what Paul gives us in this portion is a glorious way of testing the authenticity of repentance. Now, that is clearly needed today, because there are multitudes of people who have been told by others that they're Christians, and yet, when we look at their lives, we wonder, how can

that possibly be? We have people in the churches who are so steeped in some silly tradition, they would rather see the whole nation go to hell than to change their tradition.

We have parents so utterly certain that their child is a believer, that they would gladly see that child go to hell rather than change their opinion. Some while ago, a mother in Texas came to me, and she said, Mr. Roberts, would you pray for my granddaughter? Or, I mean, my daughter. And I said to her, and what is it you wish me to pray concerning your daughter? Well, she said, my daughter's in prison, and I want to ask you to pray that she will be released.

And I said, why is your daughter in prison? Well, she was arrested as a prostitute and for distributing drugs. No, I said, I would not pray for your daughter's release. If I were going to pray for your daughter, it would be that she be converted.

Oh, you don't need to pray for that. She was converted when she was a young girl. And I tried to help her to see if she had been converted to Christ as a young girl, she would not be in prison as a prostitute and for distributing drugs.

But that mother never moved a fraction of an inch. Oh no, my daughter's a Christian. I know that.

Finally, I said to her tenderly but very firmly, your daughter's biggest problem is her mother. And there are countless young people in the world who believe they're Christians because of some absurd thing that their pastor or their mother or somebody else told them. My own dear Maggie, has two brothers who were assured that they were Christians as a result of something they did as teenagers.

Both of them intensely intelligent men, one working in one of the major atomic laboratories in this nation, a man way up there, with absolutely zero demonstrated interest in Christ. And every time either Maggie or myself or the two of us have tried to talk to them about Christ, they have cut us down saying, I'm already a Christian. We're going to have to come to grips with the truth.

Paul makes it clear here. There is a sorrow that leads to death. And there is a sorrow that is from God that leads to repentance and to life.

Let me ask all of you who live through it, what you saw by way of response to 9-11. Was it not phenomenal? Everywhere you look, people were putting up signs saying, yes, in God we trust and things of that order. I mean, we became a religious nation overnight.

But within a couple of days, it was obvious to me how deep that was because I was scheduled to be preaching in Oklahoma that weekend. And I sat in the airport for hours and hours. And flight after flight was canceled.

And then finally, late in the evening, when it was obvious I was not going to get there, I called the church and said, there's absolutely no way I can get here. And the pastor was raging mad at me. And it was quite evident to me that a lot of this fuss about, in God we trust, was just on the surface.

Now, some of you have children whose sole relationship with Christ came about as a result of having been caught in some sin. Maybe by you, maybe by another, maybe by their conscience. But when you're caught in sin and acknowledge it, that is in no way the same as true repentance that comes when one is overwhelmed with sorrow for what they have done against God himself.

The sorrow of the world, I repeat, leads to death. The sorrow that comes from God leads to true repentance and eternal life. But somehow we have managed to confuse all that.

Now, while it's not my intent to go into great depth on this passage, I am burdened to ask you again to focus with me on verse 11. For in verse 11, we have seven incredibly important marks of true repentance. And if you have not looked carefully at this and felt deeply the significance of these things, may I urge you to hurry up and do so.

As I said, Paul gives seven marks here. But I remind you that this is dealing with corporate sin, not purely personal sin. That first letter was to the whole church.

The second letter is to the church, and Paul is speaking about the response not of an individual but of the church. Well, the seven marks are plain enough. They hardly need to be laid out, but perhaps some of you are having difficulty with your inner sight, and so I may need to mention them to you.

The first mark of true repentance that Paul gives is earnestness. Now, I alluded to that last night in that portion where I mentioned that elderly Christian missionary Bertha Smith, who commanded men to take a big pad and a wad of pens and write out all the sins they knew they were guilty of. Isn't it amazing how shallow and how lacking in earnestness we can be when dealing with our sins? Would it be out of the way for me first to ask you personally if you have ever been truly earnest about repentance? And then, if I ask secondly, has your church ever been earnest about repentance? The second word that appears here is a word that might on the surface provoke a bit of misunderstanding, but it need not.

Behold what, number one, earnestness this very thing has produced in you. Number two, what vindication of yourselves. Notice that it is plural.

He is dealing, as I mentioned, with corporate sin, but what does it mean to vindicate yourselves? Well now, I've known some folk who, when accused of a sin, looked as if they were an innocent babe and said, oh no, I didn't do that. And in those words, they're trying to get out from under the conviction. Or they say, well, I admit that that happened, but you've got to understand, my wife made me do that.

But Paul is not speaking at all in that direction. What is he saying when he talks about the church at Corinth vindicating itself? We have vindicated ourselves when we have turned so far from sin that we can never be accused justly again of sinning. Are you a part of a church that has vindicated itself? A church that has gone so deep into the subject of repentance that it cannot be accused of living in sin.

Not that it may not sin again, but surely there is a huge difference between living in sin. Most churches peel up the ecclesiastical carpet in the corner and brush the sins under the carpet. Most churches have never dealt with their sins.

Once in a while you're privileged to have some part in a church's true repentance. I shall always remember, I expect, a situation where I had preached in the mother church and then some while later in the breakaway group. And as a result of those two series, they determined to come together and to acknowledge their sin in the nasty split that occurred and in the treacherous way in which they had spoken of each other.

And then they took out a full page ad in the local newspaper acknowledging to the city that they had sinned wickedly against God in the division into two churches and in the antagonism expressed against each other and assured the city that it had been concluded by all that it would be unwise to merge the two

groups because each was having a separate and distinct ministry. But they wanted it understood by the whole region that they were walking in fellowship with one another. How many churches have dealt with anything of that sort? The vindication of yourselves.

Look at the third word that the apostle is led to use. Behold, what indignation. Indignation.

What does that mean? Are you part of a church that grows so indignant over its own sin that it calls a solemn assembly to put that sin away? Well, most churches haven't even heard of a solemn assembly. And if they heard of it, they wouldn't have the slightest notion what it might be. Most churches have never, ever in the last hundred years done a single thing about corporate sin except go on committing it.

But what about you? No, I've already said, but I'll repeat it. Surely all of these words apply to individual repentance as well. But in this context, they are dealing with corporate sin.

Look at the next word. Behold, what fear. Fear.

Fear of what? Is it not an awesome thing to take the name of Christ upon yourself? Is it not awesome when a church takes in some fashion the name of Christ, of Christian, and then does incredible damage in the community where it finds itself by sinning willfully and plentifully against the very Christ after whom they are named. Indignation, not against somebody else because they discovered our sin, but against themselves that they went contrary to their own stated purpose and instead of living holy, pure, gloriously united together in Christ, they have all kinds of party spirit within the church and they commit all kinds of grievous sin against the community and one another. There's still plenty of churches that don't want anybody of that color in our church and don't want anybody on that low wage level in our church and don't want anybody who doesn't have at least this much education and don't want anybody who does not fit.

What if your church got serious and created a catalog of sins like the Church of Scotland did and then got together in fasting and in prayer and put sin away? And look at the next word that appears in this wonderful passage. Behold, what longing, longing. Now look, I don't think anybody could dare to criticize me when I say there's not much evidence of longing in the typical church today.

Longing for what? Well, for what church is all about. Church is not all about me. It's not all about you.

It's all about God. And what kind of longing does the average church have for God? Well, virtually none. In fact, it's pretty common to help people to feel they don't have to seek God.

God is everywhere. I mean, you can be walking down Main Street and say, oh, good morning, Lord, and go on and you're a Christian for having called out a greeting. The notion that is presented in Isaiah of a God who dwells in a high and lofty place and has extraordinarily limited habitation, that's not the notion that fits the American church.

The American church makes it clear that anybody that acknowledges Christ is a Christian, and yet the prophet Isaiah was led to say that God has only two dwelling places, the high and the lofty and the spirit and the heart of the broken and contrite. And every church that I know of has members who know nothing of brokenness and contrition, who are not only received as members, but elected as elders and deacons and pastors and Sunday school teachers and choir leaders and everything else. Longing, all true repentance bears the mark of a longing, longing for God, longing for holiness.

Does your church demonstrate that it is a repentant fellowship? Because such longing for God that instead of decreasing the number of prayer meetings, they are increasing. Instead of decreasing the participation in the prayer meetings, the participation is increasing. And then a look at what follows, zeal.

Behold what zeal this very thing, this godly sorrow has produced in you. Many years back when Maggie and I had little children, and I was away weeks at a time, and I would come home and my son wouldn't even know who I was. Maggie had taken a photograph of me and put it on a cardboard and wrapped it up with cellophane.

And if a stranger came, this little guy might hold a picture up and say, that's my daddy. But when his daddy came home, he might hide under the table. Because you know, when daddy comes home, he's a little more outgoing than the visitor.

And if I reached out to hug him, he might hide. And Maggie and I were sure that that couldn't be right, that it couldn't be God's will for my own children not to know me. So we began to pray that somehow God would lead us to a solution.

And in the course of time, I received a call to a church in California, a church of some size. They had 2,400 members at that time, and there appeared to be about 30 Christians in the group. And they were all young Christians because Billy Graham had had a crusade in the city of Fresno, and these were persons who were said to have been converted in that crusade.

But we had a rather amazing time in that church. The really only reason I was asked to become the pastor was that I couldn't speak a word of German. And the church was made up exclusively of Russian-German people, and it had German language services for years.

And some of the young people realized the only way they were going to break the back of German language services was to get a pastor who couldn't speak German. Now listen to me. We saw incredible conviction of sin.

There were Sundays when the whole congregation was a sea of tears. Many, many a time I stood at one of the exit doors and hundreds of people would go by me, still wiping tears from their faces. But we did not see a single convert.

And we realized eventually that there was a conspiracy of evil. And once a person in any outward way showed any signs of giving in to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, the rest of the church in conspiratory fashion got together and forced that person back into their ranks. Now a true church is like a conspiracy of zeal to bring everybody in that fellowship higher and higher and closer and closer to Christ.

The nature of true repentance is it is gloriously zealous for the kingdom of God, for the glory of Jesus Christ. And I'm asking is your church? And look at the next word that is introduced. Behold, what avenging of wrong.

Now what is meant by avenging wrong? How does one avenge wrong? Well one avenges wrong by making wrong right. We have another term, wonderfully useful restitution. A truly repentant church is a church that avenges wrong.

They get together in a solemn assembly, in fasting and in prayer, and they plead, oh God show us everything about us that is disgraceful to your name, that brings your kingdom to a halt, that interferes with

your plan and your purpose. But we have utterly committed ourselves to make right every wrong. Is your church like that? Well I can imagine some of you if you even suggested such things in your church you would be shown the back door and urged not to return.

You see there is something remarkably wrong. We have all this stress on personal salvation and yet we're doing everything in our power to make personal salvation difficult if not impossible. When the church is going contrary to the will of God, it is a hindrance to personal salvation.

And we ought to begin our concern with the church instead of supposing that all is well. Now with those thoughts in mind, that critical New Testament assessment of genuine repentance, let's go back to the portion that Anthony read and read in its entirety at the beginning of our session this morning. Back to the book of Joel, the better part of two full chapters dedicated to the theme of which I have already spoken this morning.

Some of you memorized the arrangements of the books of the Bible. Maybe you're going to have to review that again to find Joel with some readiness. Now look, some of you use Bibles that have notes.

And some of the Bibles with notes say that chapters one and two are dealing with two entirely separate and distinct matter. If your Bible has any indication of that sort at all, may I suggest that you conceive of a proper way to dispose of a Bible and proceed to do so. The last thing we need is somebody's opinion who hasn't come to repentance.

These two chapters are speaking about corporate repentance. Now just because I know how dumb I am personally and how long it takes me to get hold of a matter, I'm going to suspicion that there's at least one person here with a brain about as poor as mine. And I'm going to speak in a way that that person can readily grasp.

Just as every individual sins and must repent, every corporate entity sins and must repent. You've heard me say that before. Nothing novel or new, but immensely consequential.

God himself arranged a particular way in which corporate sin was to be dealt with. There are dozens of passages in our Bibles that help us with this matter of the solemn assembly, but none is more extensive and wonderfully useful than this passage here in Joel. So if your church has never engaged in a solemn assembly, here is a very clear pattern that you can follow and be assured that you have met the biblical requirements.

Now we have two very drastic things that have preceded the solemn assembly. We have an incredibly awful invasion of locusts, and we have an extraordinarily severe drought. So both of those events of nature, events under the direct control of God, have occurred and have preceded this solemn assembly.

Now few of us, I dare say, have any idea of the magnitude of invasions of locusts that history itself teaches us concerning. I have read accounts of situations where for 48 hours no one saw the sun, the moon, the stars, because locusts were passing overhead in a dark cloud for that great length of time. We have records of plagues of locusts that cover the ground three inches deep.

Not a single place where anything but locusts can be seen. There is a record of a plague of locusts that covered a 2,000 square mile and devoured everything edible in that entire area. There is a record of a plague of locusts where the wind arose and began to blow these locusts into the sea.

And locusts by the millions drowned in the sea and the waves of the ocean washed them up on the shores in great heaps. And in their stench, in the decay of their bodies, some loathsome disease developed and there were 2,000 inhabitants of that region who died as a result of the rotting carcasses of these billions of insects. Now none of you, I'm sure, have seen anything like that and of course neither have I. But I do know a little history and I've shared a wee bit with you.

In this country we have had major infestations of locusts, never as great as what I just described, but not very long ago about seven of our western states had such an invasion of locusts that they feared they would lose the entire crop in that area. Well I just want you to get a sense here. Now notice how this account begins in Joel 1 1. Hear this, O elders, and listen, all inhabitants of the land.

Has anything like this happened in your days or in your father's days? Tell your sons about it. Let your sons tell their sons and their sons the next generation. Obviously when we find language like that in God's holy word, we know that something truly extraordinary has appeared and indeed it is essential that those acts of the arm of God that has so profoundly affected humanity should not be forgotten.

Now one of the great weaknesses of the American church is we've lost very largely any sense of history. We live as if the only thing that matters and the only ones that matter are us right now. And if you're acquainted with your old testament, you know how often they were commanded to remember what the Lord had done and knowing yourself how easy it is to forget.

And sometimes our forgetters are so large that it's crushing when we face reality. Sometime back my family found ourselves in a very real financial pickle. We had a payment of \$200,000 in cash due and we had sold a piece of property, we thought, and had that money right on hand and at the very last moment the whole thing fell through and there we are faced with a \$200,000 death.

And having no recourse, we had a family prayer meeting and we laid the matter before the Lord and prayed together for an hour and a half or so and then the phone rang and we were just finished and I went and answered the phone and someone said, I understand you have a crisis. Yes. That you need some money.

Yes. How much? Need \$200,000 in the morning. I'll have it in your hands in the morning.

And he did. About three weeks later I was looking over the accounts for our bookstore and somebody owed us something like \$12.50. And I was standing there fussing the gall of this person not paying on time. My son was standing there and he said, Dad, you don't seem to have a very good memory this morning.

What do you mean? He said, Dad, it wasn't even three weeks ago. Then God provided \$200,000 out of nowhere and now you're muttering about \$12 and a half. Isn't that like God? But Joel is describing an event that ought never to be forgotten.

A plague of locusts greater than anything that had ever occurred beforehand and anything that would ever occur afterward. So the little descriptions I gave you a few moments ago are puny in comparison with what Joel is writing about. And verse four gives us an explanation.

This plague of locusts was either four separate swarms or the same swarm in developing stages. What the gnawing locust has left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust has left, the creeping locust has eaten.

What the creeping locust has left, the stripping locust has eaten. Do you ever see a locust? What do they look like? Do you recall? Kind of hard to recall, I expect. Well, there are some descriptions of their physical appearance.

We'll come to them. You're listening closely. You'll catch them in a wee bit.

But notice verse five. Here is something wonderfully insightful. Awake, drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you wine drinkers, on account of the sweet wine that is cut off from your mouth.

Now isn't that a picture? The locusts have so thoroughly devoured everything that they can make no wine. They've nothing to make it out of. The first protest, the first howl, the first wail comes from those that we're glad to see deprived, the drunkard.

But that's only the beginning of the record. Verse six. A nation has invaded my land, ninety, and without number.

Now here is the description. Listen to this. Its teeth are like the teeth of a lion, and it has the fangs of a lioness.

There'll be another bit later on, but you get that? Did you get that picture? These locusts that have teeth like lion's teeth? How would you like to meet a bunch of them? Say a hundred million at once. But notice now. A nation has invaded my land.

Then verse seven. It has made my vine a waste, and my fig tree splinters. It has stripped them bare and cast them away.

Their branches have become white. I know there's good reason why these vines must be down, but for a moment just pretend they're not down. And we're looking out across this beautiful view.

But instead of seeing these lovely green trees, all we see is stark white. Every tree, every bush, every planted plant, everything edible stripped away by this incredibly great horde of locusts. And then verse eight gives a picture that is extraordinarily sensitive, and one that we should truly consider.

Well, like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. Can you get that picture? I don't know how it strikes you, but let me tell you what I'm thinking. I'm thinking of a special church that I know.

A church with a lot of wonderful, earnest, godly young people. And in that marvelous group of young people, there's one girl who's just a standout. Everybody in the church is aware of her.

There's just something about her that just draws your attention and makes you wonder what will happen to that girl. What a picture of a godly young woman she is. Is there a fellow anywhere in this fellowship worthy of a girl like that? And about the time you're really wondering, a total stranger shows up, and this girl spots him, and he spots her, and soon it becomes apparent he's like her.

Utterly devout, gloriously committed to Christ. And you begin to think to yourself, my, what a match that would be. And lo, before too much time passes, the engagement is announced, and everybody's thrilled and excited, thankful to God.

And then the wedding. The church is along a busy street, and after the service and the reception, this lovely young couple make their way to the car, and he helps her in to the car parked at the curb on the

passenger side. And then he goes around the back and opens the door on the driver's side, and some drunken idiot comes tearing down the highway, drives right along the side, rips the door of the car off, and crushes this young bridegroom to death.

Can you not hear the wail of this virgin bride? That's a picture that is worth remembering. The plague of locusts has produced that depth of sorrow, that rains of consternation and tears. So well, like a virgin girded with sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth, the grain offering and the libation are cut off from the house of the Lord.

The priest mourn. The ministers of the Lord. The field is ruined.

The land mourns, for the grain is ruined. The new wine dries up. Fresh oil fails.

Be ashamed, O farmers. Wail, O vine dressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field is destroyed. The vine dries up.

The fig tree fails. All the trees of the field dry up. I wonder if you see what's happening here.

Joel is giving us a description of the church in America right now. Oh, I don't mean to say that he foresaw our situation. He described something in his day that fits us to such a level, it's hard to believe.

Everywhere I go, I see the church in the condition he has described. Dried up, shrunken, looking absurd. Everywhere I see weary pilgrims making their way to church, hoping for a morsel from the Lord, and then I see them leaving, bowed down and grieving, because their church had nothing for them, no nourishment for the soul, no help for the pilgrim on the way to God's glory.

Now, the virgin wept at the church. No, we're doing fine. We've no concern.

All is well, all is well, and in the terms of Jeremiah, you have healed the wounds of the daughter of my people superficially. Peace, peace, and there is no peace. The vine dries up, verse 12.

The fig tree fails. The pomegranate, the palm also, and the apple tree, all the trees of the field dry up. Indeed, rejoicing dries up from the sons of men.

Alas, verse 15, for the day, the day of the Lord is near, and will come as destruction from the Almighty. Has not food been cut off from before our eyes? Oh, we got plenty on the dinner table, but there's not much on the platter of the church. Countless streams of people going by me, telling me how hungry they are, what a little dribble of nourishment their church furnishes.

The day of the Lord is near. It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Has not food been cut off before our eyes? Gladness and joy from the house of our God.

The seeds shrivel under their clods. I mentioned two great issues, the plague of locusts and the drought. Here the drought comes into the picture.

Seeds shrivel under the clouds. The storehouses are desolate. The barns are torn down.

The grain is dried up. Oh, how the beast groan. The herds of cattle wander aimlessly because there is no pasture for them.

Even the flocks of sheep suffer. To thee, oh Lord, I cry. Why, that's the very heart of the problem.

Here we are facing the greatest devastation the nation has ever faced, and the church is laughing. Where are the weeping people who see, who feel, who know the devastation? To thee, oh Lord, I cry. The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

Even the beast of the field pant for thee. For the water brooks are dried up. The fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

It's truly a sad day when the beast of the field have more sense than the pastures in the pulpit. Gird yourself with sackcloth, verse 13, and lament, oh priest. Well, oh ministers of the altar, come, spend a night in sackcloth, oh ministers of my God, for the grain offering and the libation are withheld from the house of our God.

Consecrate a fast. Proclaim a solemn assembly. When was the last time your church consecrated a fast and proclaimed a solemn assembly? I am deeply grateful to have been raised in a nation that was once much smarter than we are today, and to be under the spiritual guidance of ministers who had hearts for God, and knew what to do when the situation was fiercely awful.

And I'm also deeply grateful to have been led as a young man to begin to accumulate precious historical material on the church of Jesus Christ, and to have discovered hundreds of fast day sermons preached by godly pastors in America, calling the church to fasting and prayer and solemn assemblies. Now, I've got a word for the young people. I want to be very urgent about this.

Don't wait till my age to fast. And I'll give you a very practical reason why both Maggie and I are under such medication that we cannot fast. Our doctors are very explicit, saying you've got to have this medication, and you cannot take this medication on an empty stomach.

Do your fasting while you can, and do your fasting while it's needed. Do not wait. Listen to these words in chapter two.

Blow a trumpet in Zion. Sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming.

Surely it is near. Now, let me pause, and in case you missed this, let me make it clear. Joel is going back and running through the matter again.

He's giving us a completely different perspective, but he's describing the same event he has already described. Now, in your mind, I've asked you at least twice this week to use your imagination. Here I go again.

Imagine yourself now in that flat land, surrounded by hills on three sides, and by lesser hills on the other side. And when you rise early in the morning, and you step outside for a breath of air, you see that indeed it is a gloriously beautiful day. But in the distance, you see a black cloud, and you say to yourself, I don't think I'm sure what that cloud is.

It doesn't look like rain, though we need it desperately. You go back in the house for a brief time, and you look out again, and the whole top of the mountains are covered in black. And as you watch that black is moving down the mountain, your grandmother's staying with you.

And you say, grandma, something strange is going on. Something is covering the mountain with blackness. And she steps outside, and she says, oh no, no, no, not that! She has seen small plagues of locusts before.

She knows what they're like. A day of darkness and gloom. A day of clouds and thick darkness.

As the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great and a mighty people. There has never been anything like it in the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them, and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but a desolate wilderness behind them, and nothing at all escapes them. The appearance of them is the appearance of horses. Are you still with me? Like the, remember the teeth? Now, like the appearance of horses, and like warhorses, so they run with a noise as of chariots.

They leap on the top of the mountains like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble, like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them, the people are in anguish. All faces turn pale.

They run like a mighty man. They climb the wall like soldiers. They each march in line, nor do they deviate from their path.

They do not crowd each other. They march everyone in path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break rank.

They rush on the city. They run on the wall. They climb into the houses.

They enter through the windows like the thief. Before them, the earth quakes. The heavens tremble.

The sun and the moon grow dark, and the stars lose their brightness, and the Lord utters his voice before his army. Surely his camp is very great, for strong is he who carries out his word. The day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome, and who can endure it? I don't believe we must expect a plague of locusts. How do we know what God is going to use to bring us to our senses? The great burden that I feel, when he does bring us to our senses, will it be too late, or will we come to our senses while there is yet time to fast, to pray, to call a solemn assembly to seek his face? Now we come to the meat and drink of this passage.

Chapter 2, verse 12. Even now declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart. Now the American church has not done anything with all her heart for a long time.

Visitors think we're acting like it's all fun and games, as if we never had a serious moment in our lives, but return with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Now return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and relenting of evil.

Is not our hope based on those facts? Look at them again. He is gracious. We know that's true.

He is compassionate. We know that's true. Slow to anger.

Have you not felt yourself that God could have wisely sent you to hell a long time ago, and been perfectly gracious in doing so? Abounding, oh, abounding in loving kindness, relenting of evil. Who knows whether

he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, even a grain offering and a libation for the Lord your God. Blow a trumpet in Zion.

Consecrate a fast. Proclaim a solemn assembly. Gather the people.

Sanctify the congregation. Assemble the elders. Gather the children and the nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom come out of her room and the bride out of his bridal chamber. My word, you want to know how to have a solemn assembly? Just about as plain as anything could be. Get the people fasting and praying.

Tell the newlyweds that their honeymoon is over suddenly, that they got to come back and be part of this solemn assembly seeking God's face. Make some arrangements so that even the children can be in the solemn assembly, so that every person, young, old, is there. After all, it is corporate sin we're dealing with.

All must assume the responsibility for the wickedness that the church has turned into. And then the priest and the Lord's minister must lead the way by weeping between the porch and the altar. And let them say, spare thy people, O Lord.

Do not make thine inheritance a reproach, a byword among the nations. Why should they among the people say, where is their God? Now they're already saying that. They're laughing at us.

I remember when everywhere I went, known as a minister of the gospel, I was treated with respect. Not that I deserved it, not that it was to me as a person, but there was a respect to the ministers of the land because they stood for God, for righteousness. They led the way in holiness.

But now the people ask, where is their God? Remember that portion in Exodus 33? Moses' third segment of prayer? If you're not with us, how can they believe that we are your children? But all what follows, my dear friends, don't go away wilted and discouraged. Hear the word of the Lord. Then will the Lord be zealous for his land.

Then he will have pity on his people. And the Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I'm going to send you grain, new wine and oil, and you'll be satisfied in full with them. I will never again make you a reproach among the nations, but I will remove the Northern army far from you.

I'll drive it into the parched and desolate land and its vanguard into the Eastern sea and its rear guard into the Western sea and the stench will arise from its foul smell will come. It has done a great thing, but it's past now. Evil replaced with grace.

The God who turned his back on his own people has come back. And these lovely, lovely words, verse 25, I'll make up for you the years that the locusts have eaten. Now I had maybe 20 years that don't need to be made up because they were 20 years of the plentiful flow of grace, but I've lost 50 years now with a nation in steep decline.

And all of you have years that the locusts have eaten. And we're longing for that day when our Lord makes up for those lost years. And although we know well we can't make revival happen, we also know we can weep and mourn.

We can call a solemn assembly. We can plead with the people to return to the Lord.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/28/SID28130.mp3>
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/richard-owen-roberts/joel-1-2-repentance-revival/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net