40 Days of Preparation
**WEEK 1 – REPENTANCE & OBEDIENCE**

**LET’S OPEN TO TWO PLACES TODAY… JOEL 1 & ISAIAH 58**

**JUST BEFORE WE READ FROM JOEL… LET ME READ A FAMILIAR AND TIMELY SCRIPTURE FROM 2 CHRONICLES 7:14:**

**2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**LIKE IN THE DAYS OF 2 CHRONICLES… OUR NATION—OR SHOULD I SAY THE ENTIRE WORLD—IS FACING SOME VERY SERIOUS CHALLENGES. IF GOD DOESN’T INTERVENE SOON, THINGS COULD REALLY GET OUT OF CONTROL.**

**BUT NOTICE GOD’S SOLUTION…. HE’S GIVEN THE RESPONSIBILITY TO HIS PEOPLE TO INITIATE THE TURNAROUND.**

**WE’LL BE READING TODAY FROM JOEL 1… AND LET’S READ VERSES 1-10:**

**Joel 1:1–10 (ESV)** The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: **2** Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? **3** Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children, and their children to another generation. **4** What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. **5** Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth. **6** For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; its teeth are lions’ teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. **7** It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white. **8** Lament like a virgin wearing sackcloth for the bridegroom of her youth. **9** The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. **10** The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes.

**IN THE DAYS OF JOEL, A PLAGUE OF LOCUST HAD DESCENDED ON THE LAND OF JUDAH… AND WITH IT CAME MUCH DESTRUCTION.**

**IN A SIMILAR WAY, A VIRUS HAS COME UPON OUR LAND… AND THE VIRUS, ALONG WITH VARIOUS LEADERS’ REPONSES TO IT, HAS CAUSED MULTIPLE LAYERS OF DESTRUCTION.**

**THIS IS JUST ONE OF SEVERAL PROPHETIC PARELLELS WE FIND IN JOEL TO WHAT’S HAPPENING IN OUR NATION TODAY.**

**THIS WEEK OUR CAMPUS PASTORS AND SENIOR LEADERS MET TOGETHER AND WE READ THROUGH THE BOOK OF JOEL, AS WELL AS ISAIAH 58… AND THE HOLY SPIRIT USED VARIOUS LEADERS TO IDENTIFY MANY THINGS THAT GOD IS SAYING TO US. AS WE PREPARE TO BEGIN 40 DAYS OF PREPARATION TOMORROW, I WANT TO READ SOME OF THESE VERSES FROM JOEL AND ISAIAH 58 AND SHARE SOME OF THE APPLICATIONS.**

**LISTEN AGAIN TO VERSE 2:**

**Joel 1:1–2 (ESV)** The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel: **2** Hear this, you elders; give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers?

**SO LET ME ASK YOU… CONSIDERING WHAT’S HAPPENED IN OUR NATION OVER THE LAST TWO YEARS, HAS ANYTHING LIKE THAT HAPPENED IN YOUR LIFETIME? HOW ABOUT YOUR PARENT’S LIFETIME? OR THEIR PARENTS? I DON’T THINK SO.**

**AND THE DESTRUCTION JUST SEEMS TO CONTINUE. LISTEN TO VERSE 4:**

**Joel 1:4 (ESV)** What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten.

**THERE WASN’T JUST ONE KIND OF LOCUST IN JOEL’S DAY… THERE WERE FOUR DIFFERENT KINDS OF LOCUST… AND THEY CAME IN WAVES, ONE AFTER ANOTHER, CAUSING DEEPER LAYERS OF DESTRUCTION EACH TIME.**

**IN A SIMILAR WAY, THE VIRUS ON OUR LAND WAS NOT JUST ONE STRAIN… THERE ARE AT LEAST FOUR STRAINS OF IT NOW. AND EACH OF THE VARIANTS, ALONG WITH THE RESPONSES TO THEM, HAVE CAUSED LAYERS OF DAMAGE TO OUR NATION AND ECONOMY.**

**LISTEN TO VERSE 7:**

**Joel 1:7 (ESV)** It has laid waste my vine and splintered my fig tree; it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down; their branches are made white.

**THE EFFECT OF ALL OF THIS HAS SLOWED DOWN PRODUCTION AND REMOVED THE FALSE APPEARANCE OF STRENGTH THAT MANY BUSINESSES HAD. EVEN THE VALUE OF OUR DOLLAR HAS BEEN AFFECTED. IT SEEMED FOR A WHILE AS THOUGH WE COULD ENDLESSLY PRINT AND SPEND ENORMOUS AMOUNTS OF MONEY WITHOUT BEING ADVERSELY AFFECTED... BUT THAT FACADE HAS BEEN STRIPPED AWAY AS WELL.**

**AND THOUGH FOR A WHILE IT DIDN’T AFFECT PEOPLE’S OFFERINGS TO GOD, EVENTUALLY IT DID**

**Joel 1:9 (ESV)** The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord.

**ONE RECENT STUDY REPORTED THAT SOME 1500 MINISTERS A MONTH ARE LEAVING THE MINISTRY IN AMERICA**

**AND NOW WE’RE EXPERIENCING SHORTAGES AND SUPPLY CHAIN DISRUPTIONS. LISTEN TO VERSE 12:**

**Joel 1:12 (ESV)** The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm, and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man.

**AND LOOK AT VERSES 16-17:**

**Joel 1:16–17 (ESV)** Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? **17** The seed shrivels under the clods; the storehouses are desolate; the granaries are torn down because the grain has dried up.

**SO IT SHOULD ALREADY BE OBVIOUS TO YOU THAT THERE ARE MANY PARALLELS TO THE BOOK OF JOEL AND WHAT’S HAPPENING IN OUR NATION TODAY… BUT LET ME POINT OUT A FEW MORE IMPORTANT ONES.**

**SOMEONE MAY ASK… “SO WHAT DOES THE FUTURE LOOK LIKE? IS THERE ANY HOPE?”**

**LISTEN AGAIN TO 2 CHRONICLES 7:14:**

**2 Chronicles 7:14 (ESV)** if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

**DOES THE BOOK OF JOEL HAVE ANY SIMILAR INSTRUCTIONS? IT ABSOLUTELY DOES. LET ME SHARE A FEW OF THEM:**

**Joel 1:14 (ESV)** Consecrate a fast; call 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.

**Joel 2:12–13 (ESV)** “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.

**Joel 2:15–16 (ESV)** Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; **16** gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her chamber.

**IN OTHER WORDS GOD IS SAYING, I’M CALLING MY PEOPLE TO STOP GOING ON WITH “BUSINESS AS USUAL” AND TO REPENT… TURN FROM THEIR WICKED WAYS… SEEK ME… CRY OUT TO ME… AND CALL ON ME TO TURN THINGS AROUND.**

**DOES JOEL EXPLAIN WHAT GOD PROMISED TO DO IF WE RESPOND LIKE THIS? YES HE DOES… LET ME SHARE A FEW VERSES:**

**Joel 2:18–19 (ESV)** Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people. **19** The Lord answered and said to his people, “Behold, I am sending to you grain, wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.

**Joel 2:24–29 (ESV)** “The threshing floors shall be full of grain; the vats shall overflow with wine and oil. **25** I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent among you. **26** “You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the Lord your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. **27** You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else. And my people shall never again be put to shame. **28** “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. **29** Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

**TESTIMONY – From a fast 1 congregation did earlier this year**

The DAY AFTER we started the fast, in our daily reading, Acts 3:19 spoke to me so clearly. It said, repent therefore, that times of refreshing would come. My husband and I had been working through some stuff financially for a while, and had been dealing with sicknesses in our house, and just other stuff that had weighed heavily on us. I KNEW God was telling me in that moment to repent of my part in all of it so that times of refreshing would come. I spent a bunch of time searching out the deep parts of my heart and repented. By the end of the week, I had repented to my husband and shortly after, I could feel a tangible shift in my heart. I knew that my attitude and the way I went about things were shifted for good. Within a week of that, my husband (who had been unemployed since the pandemic started) found a job, we got a large chunk of money and we were able to pay off almost all of the debt that we had acquired, and even today we keep getting “random” checks, or credits, or more than we expected for things. God is faithful to His word. I am pumped to set aside another 40 days to fast and pray. We don’t do it to get anything from the Lord, but He loves us so much that when He says, “seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all of these things will be added to you” He means it.

**WHAT IS THIS ABOUT FASTING? LET’S LOOK AT A FEW VERSES IN ISAIAH 58:**

**Isaiah 58:5 (GNB)** When you fast, you make yourselves suffer; you bow your heads low like a blade of grass, and spread out sackcloth and ashes to lie on. Is that what you call fasting? Do you think I will be pleased with that?

**GOD IS NOT IMPRESSED WITH US SHOWING HIM—OR OTHER PEOPLE—HOW MUCH WE’RE SACRIFICING BY NOT EATING OR LIVING LIFE AS NORMAL. GOD SEES THAT AS PATHETIC.**

**SO WHAT KIND OF A FAST IS GOING LOOKING FOR?**

**Isaiah 58:6–7 (ESV)** “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? **7** Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?

**IN OTHER WORDS, GOD IS MUCH MORE INTERESTED IN WHAT WE DO THAN WHAT WE’RE NOT DOING. HE WANTS US TO CHANGE THE WAY WE’RE LIVING AND LIVE A LIFESTYLE OF OBEDIENCE TO GOD AND LOVE FOR PEOPLE.**

**AND WHAT DOES ISAIAH SAY WILL HAPPEN WHEN WE DO THIS?**

**VIDEO – MIKAEL BURNETTE**

**Isaiah 58:8–9a (ESV)** Then shall your light break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up speedily; your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard. **9** Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’ …

**GOD DESIRE IS TO BRING BREAKTHROUGH FOR YOU… AND FOR YOUR ENTIRE FAMILY**

**EX – MANY BELIEVERS HAVE BEEN LIKE A CAR THAT CONTINUES TO BE FUELED WITH A LITTLE BIT OF GASOLINE, AND A LOT OF WATER, ORANGE JUICE, COCA-COLA, AND FRUIT PUNCH. CONSIDERAING WHAT THEY PUT INTO THEIR EYES, EARS, HEARTS AND MINDS EVERY WEEK, IT’S NO WONDER THEY’RE SPUTTERING SPIRITUALLY WITH NO REAL HORSE POWER.**

**BUT OUR LOVING GOD HAS COME TO CHANGE THAT!**

**DURING THESE 40 HE’S CALLING ON US TO STOP INGESTING THINGS THAT DON’T FEED US SPIRITUALLY AND TO REPLACE THEM WITH THINGS THAT DO… PRAYER… READING THE WORD… HEARING THE WORD… GATHERING WITH OTHER BELIEVERS TO ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER IN THE TRUTH OF GOD’S WORD, ETC.**

**BUT BEFORE GOD POURS OUT HIS SPIRIT ON US IN A NEW AND FRESH WAY, HE IS CALLING US TO REPENT OF SIN AND WHATEVER ELSE HAS BEEN KEEPING US FROM LIVING THE LIFE THAT HE WANTS US TO LIVE.**

**GOD IS CALLING US TO REPENTANCE AND OBEDIENCE.**

**LET ME CLOSE BY EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CONFESSING OUR SIN AND REPENTANCE.**

**EX – DRIVING ON FREEWAYS IN THE LOS ANGELES AREA.**

**I WANT TO HAND OUT A PLANNER FOR YOUR 40 DAYS OF PREPARATION. THIS IS NOT SOMETHING WE’LL COLLECT… THIS IS FOR YOU TO TAKE HOME WITH YOU AND CARRY OUT OVER THE NEXT 40 DAYS.**

**THE PLANNER HAS FOUR SECTIONS:**

1. **WHAT YOU WON’T DO DURING THE 40 DAYS**
2. **WHAT YOU WILL DO DURING THE 40 DAYS**
3. **WHAT YOU WILL PRAY AND BELIEVE GOD FOR**
4. **WHO YOU WILL CONNECT WITH EACH WEEK FOR STRENGTH AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

**HELP THEM FILL OUT THE PLANNER**