

Introduction

My dad was a trumpet player. He played when he was in high school. And in my childhood, he would pull out that old trumpet from time to time and absolutely amaze me. After years and years he could still put that instrument to his lips and play full musical pieces from memory from beginning to end. And they were hard songs, like "Bugler's Holiday" and "Flight of the Bumble Bee." When the time came for me to join the band, which instrument do you think I chose? Yes, the trumpet. The same was true for Philip and then Ariail. We all played the trumpet.

Well, it may have been of a different style of horn, but the trumpet figures prominently in the scripture. You find trumpets in Numbers 10 and all the way to the book of Revelation. Twice in Joel 2 the prophet calls for a trumpet to be blown. The message of these verses corresponds to the two blasts. We focus on the first blow of the trumpet in Joel 2:1-14.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

In Israel trumpets were blown for a number of varying reasons. Two of the most important reasons were to (1) alert the people of danger and (2) to call them to assemble before the Lord. In the next two weeks, I would like to direct your attention to the portion of Joel's message that is framed by two blows of the trumpet. Today we will be looking at the message of the first trumpet. It is a call to be warned and to repent.

Point One is . . .

I. A Warning Trumpet.

The first call to "blow a trumpet" is associated with warning. It alerts the people of the approach of danger. To blow the trumpet was to sound an alarm. The people should hear and take evasive action to prepare lest the approaching danger should overtake them and completely undo them.

Numbers 10 contains instructions for the use of trumpet blows among the Israelites. In the occasion of war in the land, the trumpet was to be blown as an alarm. Over in Revelation seven trumpets were blown, each

associated with an element of woe upon the earth. These trumpets sound as though to announce the woe and thus they serve as a signal of alarm, a warning of woe to come. All of them point ahead to the great and terrible day of retribution. Thus the warning blast of the trumpet should bring those who hear it to convulse with a fearful anticipation of what the prophet is announcing.

A number of years ago, Melissa and I went to Roff, OK to visit my grandparents. They lived in what is called tornado alley. Their house was situated directly across the street from the town water tower, and mounted on the support beam of the water tower was the town siren. When it went off it sounded like the blast of a great horn. There were several purposes for the sounding of the siren. But the only one with which I was familiar was the warning of an approaching tornado. Well, it came about during our visit that the horn went off in the middle of the night. The blast awakened me from a sound sleep and I like to have had a heart attack. I stubbed my toe as I lurched out of bed and began urging Melissa to get up. We needed to get my grandparents up and head for the storm cellar. My grandmother, hearing the commotion, called out, "Are you guys alright?" And I said, "yes, we are just trying to get ready to go to the cellar." She replied, "Oh honey, that was not a tornado warning. Two blasts is a call for the volunteer fire department." Well, I breathed a sigh of relief but I could not shut off the effects of the adrenaline that was pulsing through my body."

One of the effects of adrenaline in our systems is that we tremble. The horn blast for which Joel called was indeed the alarming kind of blast, for he urged all the inhabitants of the land to tremble. No sighs of relief should be breathed. This was a horn blast to warn of a grave threat. There is no more appropriate way to react than with a flow of adrenaline that frazzles the nerves and results in trembling.

Point Two is ...

II. The Day of the Lord.

The threat to which the trumpet blast is alerting the people is the coming day of the Lord. The Day of the Lord is an instance in which God breaks into the seeming normalcy of everyday life in an epic way, in spectacular fashion and shows himself demonstrably. It is a time, an instance in which

God demonstrates with utmost profundity that He is Holy God. There is violence toward sin. It is a time of judgment for God's enemies and of blessing for God's people. There is no single day of the Lord but a number of days of the Lord. They all point to the final and consummate day of the Lord when he will judge, visiting wrath and fury upon the wicked, and he will bring his righteous people home to glory and eternal blessing.

Notice the characteristics of that day as expressed by Joel. It is a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness and like blackness that is spread upon the mountains. When God brought plagues upon Egypt, the ninth, the next to the last of the plagues, was darkness. And when you turn over to Revelation and the sounding of the seven trumpets, you find that with the sounding of the fourth trumpet there was a darkening effect upon the sun, the moon, and the stars. Darkness and gloom are foreboding expressions of divine displeasure and judgment.

These references to darkness point us to a day 2000 years ago when an entire earthly region was blanketed with darkness when the sun would normally have shone its brightest. Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell us that as Jesus hung on the cross on Golgotha's hill, from about noon to three o'clock in the afternoon, there was a darkness over the whole land.

Certainly this was an instance of the day of the Lord. God was visiting wrath upon one counted as a sinner. He was executing justice towards iniquity. God was visiting the divine penalty for human sin upon the person of His righteous son. It was a most horrible day but it was a most beautiful day of the Lord. Every day of the Lord is in part a demonstration of divine repulsion toward sin. Every day of the Lord exhibits the response of holiness to human iniquity and divine displeasure in the rebellion of the ones who are made in God's very image. And there on the cross the one human being who never sinned was being punished as though he had. Divine displeasure was being executed upon Christ Jesus. He was bruised for the transgressions of others. He was crushed for their iniquity. The chastisement for sin that was due to the guilty was carried out on Jesus as a substitute. It was a dark day.

The darkness of that day is an occasion for the breathing of a sigh of relief for many. The good news is that because of the substitution of Jesus, he will save from God's wrath all those who will repent of sin and trust in Christ Jesus!

To quote the Getty's hymn,
"This the power of the cross, Christ became sin for us
Took the blame, bore the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross."

If you haven't yet, I urge you to take refuge this morning in the cross of Christ by turning from sin and trusting in him.

Point Three is . . .

III. An Enemy Invasion.

The dark day of the Lord to which Joel points in this chapter is the day of an enemy invasion. In chapter 1 he looks back at a terrible invasion of locusts; in chapter 2 Joel looks ahead to the assault upon Zion by a great and powerful people like they have never seen before. The experience of the locusts was just a foretaste of an even greater day of darkness. It would be a day of fiery destruction turning a garden of Eden into a desolate wilderness. They will cause the inhabitants of Jerusalem to grow pale with anguish and dread. Nothing distracts the invaders or diverts them from their purpose. They will not merely destroy the fields; they will scale the walls of the city. Weapons will not stop them. They enter into the houses of people.

It is striking that this army is depicted as the army of the Lord led by the Lord himself. "The Lord utters his voice before his army." This foreign army of invaders carries out the will of God. God is using Zion's own enemy to fulfill his purpose. This army carries out his word. Through this army God is confronting his own city, the place chosen for his own dwelling. He is coming against Zion. It will be a staggering day of awe, and who will endure it?

When you think of God's confrontation of human beings, do not make the mistake of thinking that God is any less serious about holiness and true worship among the people called by his name as among those who are not.

Affliction and suffering are purifying. And God brings them and uses them even in his own church which he purchased with his own blood. 1 Peter 4:17 says "it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God."

This fact is definitely clear when you turn to the letters to the seven churches in Revelation. Jesus commended the church at Ephesus for a number of good things, but then he said, "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place." Jesus had a few things against the church in Pergamum as well. Among them were some false teachers. Jesus said to the church, "Repent. If not I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth." Jesus told the church at Sardis that they needed to repent and wake up. He said to them, "If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief and you will not know at what hour I will come against you." That is like right out of this chapter in Joel. To the church at Laodicea, Jesus said, "Those whom I love I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent." And so you see that the day of God's coming against Zion foreshadows the coming of Jesus against those churches which harbor false teaching and ungodliness and a lack of zeal for his name. They have left their first love. They tolerate immorality. They are dead. They are neither cold nor hot. And he will not simply let it ride!

The standard to which God holds his people is a high standard. He is aware that we are but dust. He is patient. He is understanding. But he is not satisfied with a heart of worship that is lackadaisical, half-hearted, or insensitive to the truths of his word. Where there is a love that is in decline or a lack of passion for holiness, Jesus would say to his own church, "Repent, or I am coming against you. I will make war against you. And who can endure it?" From Joel through Revelation WE need to hear the voice of Jesus in our day reminding us that he is deadly serious about truth and holiness and witness. Christ followers need to look at our lives. We need to consider our zeal for Christ, for truth, for righteousness. And we need to repent from where we have fallen. Who desires that Jesus should come against us?

Point Four is ...

IV. The Warning's Purpose

So the prophet has uttered the threat of an unimaginable day of the Lord, the day of the enemy invasion. Why does he warn? Why does anybody warn? Why does the national weather service issue thunderstorm warnings and tornado warnings and flood watches and warnings? So that folks may be prepared, so that they might even avoid endangerment if at all possible. In light of the terrible threat, the sounding of the trumpet, the Lord's design has been to wake up the people of Zion. The reason for the warning is to get their attention so that they will listen as he cries out to tell them what they need to do. What they need to do is the same action Jesus demands from the churches in Revelation. They need to repent. They need to turn.

Look at the declaration of the Lord in verse 12. "Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart." So now we have the problem in Zion. The people have turned from God. They have followed the impulses of their flesh. They have drifted from the solemn and joyful and zealous worship of the one true and holy God. They have perhaps not left all the outward marks of worship, but their hearts are simply not in it. A half-hearted show of religion is not what God wants in his people. He calls his people to return with all their heart.

He does not want them to abandon outward marks of worship. He tells them to return with fasting and weeping and mourning. But he wants their hearts as well. He says, "Rend your hearts and not your garments." Anybody can tear their clothes and make a display of sorrow. There are still in this day professional mourners who make a show of sorrow, who sound and act sorrowful but who get up from the show and go on their merry way. This is what God does not want from his people. He wants the hearts of the people to be torn and broken over their distance from God. And that is what they should be. They should be broken. What they have done is shameful. It is horrible. This fearful threat that is on its way is their doing. They must be gripped by the fact that they have wronged the God of the universe who has been so gracious to them, whose air they breathe, whose produce they eat, whose grace has brought them as on eagle's wings to this promised land.

If we jump to the New Testament, we see when John the Baptist and then Jesus came on the scene, the message had not changed. They both came preaching a message of repentance. That remains the message for sinners today. When the crowds were convicted at the preaching of Peter on the day of Pentecost, they cried, "What shall we do?" Peter's first word was "Repent."

There is no true coming to God without repentance, heart-rent repentance. The first word to a lost person convinced of his sin is "repent." It is a false-gospel that tells people they can be reconciled with God by a faith that does not repent. As the Apostle Paul met with the elders from the church at Ephesus, he recalled the nature of his ministry among them as testifying of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He made to them this solemn statement, "I testify to you that I am innocent of the blood of all, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God." Any message of peace with God that leaves out repentance toward God is not declaring the whole counsel of God.

Do you want peace with God? Do you want to receive the gift of eternal life in Christ? It starts with repentance. Life in Christ continues with repentance. Christ calls his churches to repent. God calls out to his people in Chronicles. If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Point five . . .

V. A Reason for Hope

We close this morning on a hopeful and assuring note. I do not want you to miss the incentive that Joel confidently holds out. He sets forth the one reason for believing that returning to God will make a difference. It is God himself—specifically who he is. "Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

When the Lord placed Moses in the cleft of the rock and made his glory pass by, this what he proclaimed. This is who God is. This is his glory. He is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." He relents over disaster. This is what he does. He had mercy when the

people worshiped the golden calf at Sinai. In the days of the judges he had mercy over and over. The Lord had mercy when he sent Jonah to preach destruction to the Ninevites. There is every reason to believe that if you will turn to him in genuine repentance, the Lord will relent concerning the disaster about which he spoke. Perhaps he will even replace disaster with blessing. That was Joel's message to the citizens of Zion.

It is a message we need as well. To the lost sinner who feels as though he is unforgivable, that he has gone too far, Joel would say, "no." I would gladly concur. God is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love and if you feel yourself desiring to repent, don't wait a moment longer. The Lord is like the father of the prodigal. He is waiting and longing for those who have left him to return. Psalm 51:17 says, "the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."

This message of hope is for the saved sinner and for the church as well. Have we failed the Lord? Have we sloughed off in our service and seriousness over the holiness of God? Have we left the love we had at first? Let us not wait. Let us not wonder. Let us return. He is gracious and merciful and abounding in steadfast love.

Conclusion

Those high winds that swept through the region this week were fierce. Up in Sheboygan the winds reached a speed of almost 70 miles an hour. A number of trees were downed throughout the city. Some fell on houses and some on cars. But another notable casualty was the American flag that flies beside the interstate. This is the flag that flies on America's tallest flagpole. The winds that came through Sheboygan shredded the flag. As I heard it reported on the news and saw the pictures, I thought what an accurate symbol of the United States of America right now. This country has been and is being shredded. First the virus and now an apparent act of brutality that has triggered unrest, protest, and racial tension. People are hurting. People are angry. People are fearful. We are seeing rage. We are seeing murder. Divisions in this nation are shredding its fabric.

Is there any hope in these days? Is there any possibility of change? Where is the church and what should the church be doing?

Well, we should first see the fundamental reason for this upheaval. The fundamental problem in America today is the same as it was in Joel's day. Our fundamental problem runs deeper than the fact that there are people who mistreat each other based upon the shade of our skin. This is a narrative we have been fed, and until we reject that narrative we are and will be deluded. Our greatest problem as a nation is that we had the most privileged beginning of any nation other than Israel. And as a nation we have departed from God. And God is shaking us up. There is hope, but it is not in hating one group of sinners and sympathizing with another.

There will be no real peace until Jesus is king. I cannot offer you any hope other than Jesus Christ and his gospel. He alone and the transformation that comes through him is the only hope for any peace with each other. He brings peace between sinners and God, and he changes sinners from their hateful nature to people who love.

Do you want hope that things will get better? Then here is what you and I need to do. We need to heed the message of Joel. God is not pleased. The day of the Lord is coming. The signs of the times are everywhere. These unprecedented times merely place exclamation points that follow the declaration of the nearness of the day of the Lord. The world would believe any other explanation for our problems than this one but here it is: we have wandered from God. That is true for the nation. It is true for the church. And what we—each of us—need to do is to turn back. We need to return to the lord with hearts that are torn in two over our sin and lukewarmness. We need to repent from our love of this world. As we turn we must call others to return to him as well. They must return and seek God in the face of Jesus Christ. The reform for which people are crying out is not possible except through turning to God in repentance. If we can do anything about the trouble in our shredded land, it is going to start with our turning and repenting to the one true God who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. We must hold forth the gospel which urges others to repent as well. Perhaps God will turn and relent and leave a blessing.