

Introduction

Most people are familiar with "Reveille" and "Taps." "Reveille" is the bugle call used to summon troops for morning roll call. "Taps" signaled the end of the day and time for rest. By the final note of "Taps" all lights were to be extinguished, all men bedded down, and all loud talking was to cease. These are just two of a number of bugle calls which came into the use of the American army during the Revolutionary War. There were signals for meals, for mail, and on Sunday a specific bugle tune for church call. The sound of the bugle is still heard across Army forts numerous times during the day regulating the daily activities of the soldiers. The tunes to communicate the various calls were standardized in 1867 right after the Civil War.

However, blowing the horn for the purposes of communication and regulation of people did not commence in the American army in North America in the eighteenth century. The British and the French used horn signals before then. And going back even further, at the very time of Israel's deliverance from Egypt, God himself prescribed the sounding of the horn as a means of communicating among his people. He does so again right here in our text for this morning.

[Read Scripture and Pray]

Joel 2 features two calls to blow a trumpet. Last week we saw how the chapter opens with the call to blow a trumpet for the purpose to sound an alarm. God himself was coming against his own people because they had turned away from him. They had seen a catastrophic plague of locusts but that plague was just a harbinger of a day far worse. The Lord was bringing a day of the Lord, an epic demonstration of his wrath and power, in the form of an army which would turn the Garden of Eden into a wasteland. Their own homes would be ravaged. The threat delivered by the Lord was couched in a summons. He called the people to repent, to rend their hearts, to return to him. The prophet also offered a glimmer of hope that if they would repent, the Lord might relent concerning the threat and actually bless his people instead.

That brings us to where we are this morning—the second call to blow a trumpet. The trumpet that was blown to summon the people to repentance was to be

blown again. This time the purpose was to gather the people and call them to seek God's face and pray together. Three aspects of the call stand out.

I. The Irony of the Call.

A. We use the word irony to speak of something that is the opposite of the way we might expect it to be. And such appears to be the case with this second blow of the trumpet. There are indications of a connection between this call for a solemn assembly and the regular assembly that would be associated with Pentecost, also known as the Feast of Weeks.

B. Hang with me here. In Leviticus 23, the Lord prescribed an assembly 7 weeks after Passover. It would have commemorated the end of the grain harvest. The people were to gather before the Lord and honor him for the harvest they had just gathered in. There are also indications that this feast celebrated the day God drew near and gave the law. In fact, Joel in this same chapter just a few verses ahead prophesies the day of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is a prophecy which was fulfilled—do you know when?—on the day of Pentecost! These indicators lead us to connect the assembly for which the second trumpet called with the feast of weeks or Pentecost. Thus it was normally the time of year when the people would have assembled for worship before the Lord to give thanks for his provision in the harvest. It should have been a time of joyful and celebratory worship and recognition of the nearness of God in the giving of the law.

The irony is the land had just been decimated by the devastating swarm of locusts. And it was all due to the fact that the people had turned away from God. So instead of it being the normally happy time celebrating the nearness and blessing of God, it was to be a solemn time of fasting and mourning ultimately because they had drifted from God, and God was bringing on them the very consequences he had warned he would bring if they would not obey or be careful to observe his commandments.

C. It is summer, my favorite time of year in Wisconsin! I look forward to June, July, and August from October to May. It is here! It has arrived! But this year, 2020, it just isn't the same. The fullness of enjoyment is muted a little. The events of this year thus far with the virus, the orders, the wrangling, the cacophony of opinions, and now the upheaval of

unrest—these events really have brought forth out of the camouflage the depravity that surrounds us and the depravity still within us. Depravity is not a reason to celebrate. It is a reason for solemnity.

Drawing near the Lord with a deeper awareness of our sin is not a time for lightheartedness. It is not a time for a Pollyanna outlook. There are times when the only appropriate frame of mind is solemn and sorrowful—faces down and shame, drawing near to God without any excuses only admissions that we are sinners who have turned away. We have drifted; we have slid; we have left our first love. These are not times for getting lost in taking it easy. The words of Jesus to the church in Laodicea stand out to me. “I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” You cannot hear those words and just bounce off to frolic in the summer sun. You need to soak them in.

James puts it this way: “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord.”

D. These words fit every person. They fit everyone who has yet to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ. This is the path of redemption. Jesus lived and died and rose from the dead so that sinners might be set free from the guilt of their sin and become children of God, redeemed from sin’s eternal curse and ransomed to spend eternity in the glorious presence of God. If that is you, you have yet to truly humble yourself before God over your sin. You need to do so right now. Confess your sin and receive God’s forgiveness as a gift through the payment of Jesus, and be spared what you deserve.

The call to humbly draw near is suited to those who already follow Christ as well. When David sinned against God—committed adultery and murder—it took some time but eventually he was cut to the heart and confessed, “I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you and

you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I will be whiter than snow.”

In the midst of a shakeup, it is a time to be humbled over our sin. We should examine our hearts for the neglect of God, the presence of bigotry, pride, selfishness, self assurance, fearing man rather than God, uncleanness, impurity, hate, envy, jealousy, malice, immorality, speech not seasoned with grace, impatience, unkindness, and things like these. We should bring our broken selves solemnly to God.

II. The Extent of the Call.

A. The extent of the call is all-encompassing. No one in Zion is to be excluded from the call to assemble together before the Lord. Notice how the prophet gets this point across. He says in verse 16, “assemble the elders; gather the children, even nursing infants.” Everyone from the youngest to the oldest is called to gather. If the call includes the oldest and the youngest, there is no one who by virtue of age is not targeted with this call. Then there is this reference to the bridegroom and the bride. In Israel a man in his first year of marriage was exempt from serving as a soldier. But this is a day which is so critical, no one is exempt from the call to assemble—not even the newly wed couple.

Everyone must come. No one is too busy. Nothing is more important than gathering before the Lord with his people. Any of the pains and inconveniences associated with age are not a sufficient excuse. All the extra measures needed to care for a newborn infant do not suffice as a good enough reason to miss this meeting. The entirety of God’s people are called to come and gather before him.

B. Now I realize that this was Old Testament, and this was not a once-a-week gathering, but a highly significant annual meeting. Still it is striking that the Lord is not letting anyone off the hook. Everyone must be there. What a contrast with the cavalier way many Christians look at attendance and involvement in the church these days. I heard of one survey that indicated that many people during this pandemic actually liked church-at-home-in-your-pajamas and they want to keep doing it that way. Others

never even joined live streams and now don't plan on going back to church ever.

None of you who are joining by live stream this morning need to think I am targeting you with this point. As we have said before, we say again, during this unprecedented time with a deadly virus out there, if staying home is what you believe to be the best thing for you, then that is what you must do. If you feel sick, you certainly need to be at home. We need you to stay at home. It has indeed been a blessing that during this time of confinement we were able still to gather through electronic means. It is not the best but when it is all you have got, it is not that bad. Thankfully, though, many of us are back and we look forward to the day when the rest of us will also be back.

Nevertheless it is amazing what suffices for an excuse for some of us to miss church. Many do not take seriously the role of assembling together. We are not ticking off boxes trying to get into heaven. No, but we are growing children of God in need of spiritual nourishment and strength we get through fellowship with God and his people, that we get through attending to God's word. It is life to our souls. It is not to be overlooked that scripture itself directs us not to neglect to meet together, but to encourage one another and all the more as we see the Day drawing near.

Yeah, there in Zion the day was drawing near and the people, all the people, needed to gather to urgently seek the Lord. Well THE DAY OF ALL DAYS is drawing ever nearer to us, not the mere assault of an enemy army but the consummate day of the Lord is drawing near. All followers of Christ should gather regularly with the people of Christ. It is for us but also for him. Are we really serious about returning to the Lord. Do not fool yourself. If you have little appetite to be with the family of God, you probably are not in the family. Have you noticed this in yourself and in other: one of the first things to go when a person is drifting from the Lord is their attendance to the gathering of the church. If you notice somebody missing, it is important to check on them. They may be sick and need ministry, but they may be drifting and need a brother or sister to pull them in.

III. The Directive of the Call.

By the directive of the call I am pointing to what exactly it is that God is directing the people to do by assembling. There are two aspects to the directive.

A. First, and fundamentally this call to assemble is a call to gather before the Lord. It is a call to gather in his presence. When "Reveille" sounds, it is a call to the soldiers to assemble for roll call. The sound of this second trumpet in Zion is for the people to return to the Lord. They need to show up for roll call before God. The sound of the first trumpet was to direct the people to see the horrible situation they were in and to repent, to mourn and experience the sorrow for their turning away from God. They were to rend their hearts and turn back to God, but this second trumpet is a call to express publicly the repentance of their hearts and to put on display for all to see that this people was returning to the Lord. They were coming together to stake their hope on him, to exhibit their worship of him, to express their trust in him, and to display a determination to serve him.

All of that is what a person does if they embrace the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus made it clear, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." That is the life of a Christ follower. We do not live for ourselves. We do not have sufficiency in ourselves. Our goal is not our own glory but his.

B. The second aspect of the directive was prayer. The priests the ministers of the Lord were to gather between the vestibule and the altar. This tells us they were in the temple and it was an area large enough to hold a significant number of priests. In this way we see stress upon the fact that the presence of God is under pursuit. The act they were to carry on is the act of prayer. With weeping from the admission of the sin of the people, with an awareness of unworthiness to be heard by the Lord, they were to intercede for the nation. "Spare your people, O Lord, and make not your heritage a reproach, that the nations should rule over them (that is the preferred translation.) Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

It is intriguing. The people are not left to figure out what they ought to pray. The prophets supplies the very words they should use. The indication is that it pleases God for his people who have wandered into sin to cry out that God would spare them and thus to display the glory of his name. It is prescribed from the Lord himself that we pray that God would work in such a way to demonstrate before a watching world that our God in the heavens is real; that he is all- powerful; that he is at work in and through us.

You might recognize that the formula prescribed here for prayer is basically the same as what Moses used when the children of Israel were worshipping the golden calf. Exodus 32 records how while Moses was with the Lord on the mountain, the Lord informed him what was going on back down at the camp. The Lord said to Moses, "Let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them." But Moses implored the Lord, "O Lord, why does your anger burn hot against your people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and consume them from the face of the earth?'" Moses did not tell the Lord anything that he did not know. But Moses reflected in his prayer the very concerns that were on the heart of God.

The people of Zion should pray for the Lord to spare them. They are his people, his heritage. By his own design his reputation in the world is bound up in them and how he relates to them. He desires to show the world that they are his people and he is their God. He himself desires to disprove those who would charge that their God is either not real or has abandoned them. We know it because this is the kind of prayer expressed by Moses and to which the Lord responded by relenting concerning the disaster he threatened to bring. We know it further because it is expressed in the prayer Joel instructed the priests to pray.

Followers of Christ, ours is the same God. As with Israel, he has united his reputation in the world to us. We can be assured even when we have misbehaved that God desires to renew, restore, and preserve his people. This is why he sent his own son. We know that God the Father himself has provided for his people our own advocate. We should not sin. We should

not drift. We should not turn from God. But if we will turn back and seek his face, he will hear. Listen to the explanation of the Apostle John, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin, but if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sins and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." How about Hebrews 7:25? "He is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Conclusion

Even in this solemn time. Even when we feel with the Apostle Paul, "Wretched man that I am! And wretched is this world around me! Who will free me?", there is hope and even assurance that God will spare us what we deserve. If we draw near to him through the advocate he has provided, we can also say with Paul, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!"

The message of the first trumpet was to be warned and to repent. The message of this second trumpet is to assemble and to pray, to cry out to God to spare us and to demonstrate before a watching world that He is God. We are the ones who have been faithless not him.