

Joel 2:12-17 – Moving Forward Starts on Your Knees

TSK, HebrewLexicon, Gill, Handfuls, JFB, Geneva, Clarke, Poole, Eclectic, Calvin, Henry, Armstrong, Barnes, INT,

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ: Most people think that moving forward means to get up off your knees, as athletes do at the races, jump into the air, and move forward. And that is true. But only for the Olympics.

There are other ways of moving forward in which your first move is to go to the ground rather than to the sky. That's what God called Judah to do. They were to kneel down, bow down, pray, worship, and have fellowship with God. This was their way forward, if they were to win the race! Hear about this today.

Our headings are:

Return to God

Reason for Hope

Resume Worship

Our goals are: **That the church of Christ will hear God's call to go down on her knees in repentance, will resume proper worship of her Savior, and work for him as she should.**

Return to God

12 "Now, therefore," says the LORD, "**Turn to Me with all your heart**, With **fasting**, with **weeping**, and with **mourning**." 13 So **rend your heart, and not your garments**; Return to the LORD your God...

1. Joel called on the Jews to turn to God will all their heart.

"With all your heart" means "with a single focus." So the Jews were not to have any other thing on which they were focused.

This was the same warning and call to repentance God gave Jerusalem before it was destroyed in AD70!

This repentance had to be genuine. God was tired of token worship, token singing, and token confession of sins.

Isaiah 57:15 For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, **With him who has a contrite and humble spirit**, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to **revive the heart of the contrite ones**."

He had it up to his neck in useless rituals! **He now wanted Judah on her spiritual knees...**

Keep in mind that as God gave these warnings, God's army, the Babylonians, were getting ready, waiting for permission from the Lord to execute judgment on Judah.

2. Joel called on the Jews to return, not just in talk of repentance, but to show it.

Confession was not enough. But Judah had fallen into deep sin. Some had corrupted worship. Others avoided worship! There was no greater sin! So God had to be convinced of Judah's true repentance. Sadness would not be sufficient. (Some people are sad because they are caught!) Look at what they needed to do to show their true sorrow for sins:

a. They had to fast. This was a sacrificing of the body so the soul could concentrate on praying.

b. They had to weep. This was the external action of the inward sorrow.

c. They had to mourn. This was the internal pain for sinning against his Holy Majesty.

d. Joel wanted the Jews to offer their hearts to God.

He wanted them to stop offering false worship – worship that looked good on the outside. They were well dressed in worship, but their hearts were not laid open before the Lord. Look at one example of what God expected:

Esther 4:1 When Mordecai learned all that had happened, he **tore his clothes** and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the midst of the city. **He cried out with a loud and bitter cry.**

Tearing their clothing was just an external act of sorrow for sins. Without opening of the heart, it was only an act of hypocrisy. God wanted to expose the nakedness of the heart! God wanted circumcised hearts.

Deuteronomy 10:16 "Therefore **circumcise the foreskin of your heart**, and be stiff-necked no longer.

Look how it was made even clearer.

Jeremiah 4:14 O Jerusalem, **wash your heart from wickedness**, That you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you?

Joel wanted the Jews to turn back to God and leave their prodigal life behind, like David when he confessed his adultery!

Psalms 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart — These, O God, You will not despise.

3. Lessons:

a. It never too late to repent, regardless how deep you have fallen into sin. Name the sin, God will forgive it. Even if you can't remember how long you have been committing that sin, God will forgive you...as long as you repent through Jesus.

b. The church that is guilty must learn to be ashamed of its sin, learn to blush, and not be fake. She must show shame by constantly confessing sins and fasting and weeping before the Lord. The broken and contrite heart God will not despise.

c. Guard your hearts so you don't desire to impress people around you with your outward godliness...like those who would tear their clothing. Be prepared to tear open your heart before the Lord. Hypocrisy injures your family and friends. Worse, hypocrisy brings shame to God. Exposing your sins is liberating to your soul.

Reason for Hope

13...For He is gracious and merciful, Slow to anger, and of great kindness;
And He relents from doing harm.

1. Judah had reason for hope because God was gracious and merciful

a. Gracious means God will give you something you don't deserve (salvation). His grace is no small thing!

b. Merciful means God will not give you something you deserve (hell).

c. God did not become angry quickly. He was not quick to stir up judgment. He was patient with Judah...very patient.

d. God was very kind, not just kind! Look how God's blessings were summarized!

Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, **merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,** 7 "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

e. Judah could have hope because God would relent from doing harm. God always speaks the truth. (A good repetition!)

Jonah 4:2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; **for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness,** One who relents from doing harm.

14 **Who knows if He will turn and relent,** And leave a blessing behind Him—A grain offering and a drink offering For the LORD your God?

2. Judah was called to repent to be forgiven, and with the hope God would remove some of the coming judgment (locusts).

God will always forgive but he does not always remove some of the earthly consequences of sin. In other words, he might stop the locusts from completely destroying

the land and leave some wheat and some grapes! Remember, God forgave David for his adultery, but he still lost his child.

3. Lessons:

a. You have reason to hope God will forgive even your sins of mature deliberation because you are God's child through Jesus Christ. God obligates himself to forgive his children! In fact, forgiveness is part of his nature.

b. God does not forgive you because you are good! You don't merit anything. Even your best actions are stained with sin and unworthy of any reward. Your good works don't give you hope for forgiveness. It is wickedness to hope for forgiveness through good works...yet this is a common belief throughout the world.

c. You (and the church) may still suffer the earthly consequences for sin. A wife may forgive your adultery, but she may still divorce you.

Resume Worship

15 **Blow the trumpet** in Zion, Consecrate a fast, Call a sacred assembly;

1. Joel then started to prepare the Jews for resuming worship.

a. He blew the trumpet...not for war as before, but for worship. This is what happens when the people follow the Lord. Worship is the Number 1 thing Christians do! God deserves all honor and praise. **This is why it is gross wickedness to say worship is non-essential.** Worship is not only essential, it is vital.

b. Part of Joel's call to Judah was they were to fast. "Fast" meant to "a restraint." They were to put aside food and pleasures to focus on prayer. Fasting by itself has no spiritual benefit. Fasting without prayer is famine...or a health routine.

16 Gather the people, **Sanctify** the congregation, **Assemble** the **elders**, Gather the **children** and **nursing babes**; Let the **bridegroom** go out from his chamber, And the **bride** from her dressing room.

2. Joel wanted all the people to gather together, the whole congregation.

a. The elders, the children, the infants, and the newlyweds had to gather for worship.

Infants were under condemnation as well as their nursing mothers, and so they too needed to be there and fast. Surely a father would think of his sins when he held his infant in his arms. Surely a mother would think of her sins as he held her baby, crying to be nursed but couldn't. Children do suffer for their parents' sins. (Lamentations 4:4)

And while newlyweds were normally given time away to get accustomed to marriage, this was too important! This was so important that even **before the marriage was consummated**, the Bride and the Groom had to leave the marriage chamber and repent for the sins of the nation. Everyone had to be ready to sacrifice in order to worship.

b. The congregation had to sanctify themselves for worship. They were to prepare themselves for worship...not just show up!

They were to set aside earthly pleasures and prepare for worship instead.

17 Let the priests, who minister to the LORD, **Weep between the porch and the altar**; Let them say, "**Spare** Your people, O LORD, And do not give Your heritage to reproach, That the nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

3. When the Jews gathered together, Joel wanted the priests to lead the congregation in worship.

a. The priests were to weep for the people before the altar of the Lord in the outer courts where the animals were killed, while looking toward the sanctuary – the place of hope. They were the mediators God's people.

b. The priests were to pray for mercy. This was a prayer for rescue from judgment that was on the horizon.

c. The priests were to pray on the basis of God's promises...so that Judah would not have to run to other nations for food and necessities.

d. The priests had to pray so the nations would not rule and crush Judah... Normally a nation would want to make those who want food into slaves.

e. The priests had to pray God's name would not be mocked, as the nations would wonder where the God of the Jews was when they ran to the nations for food and necessities. This was what Sennacherib said to the Jews earlier!

Psalms 42:10 As with a breaking of my bones, My enemies reproach me, While they say to me all day long, "**Where is your God?**"

Micah 7:10 Then she who is my enemy will see, And shame will cover her who said to me, "**Where is the LORD your God?**" My eyes will see her; Now she will be trampled down Like mud in the streets.

4. Lessons:

a. When you have sinned, fall on your knees, weep and pray for mercy. Pray on the basis of God's promise to forgive all who come through Jesus Christ. This is the only way forward.

b. Know Jesus Christ is your Mediator who prays for you now! He will always pray God will hear your prayers!

c. The goal of godliness in living and in repenting is the glory of Christ.

d. Look at your children when you think of God's judgment on the church today. Save

them from judgment! Fall on your knees and pray for them.

e. Be ready to sacrifice so you can serve the kingdom! Be ready to give up life's pleasures, even life itself, for the kingdom!

Conclusion:

God called on Judah to humble themselves before him. From the highest to the lowest, even infants, they were to fast and pray, and turn from their wicked ways. God would then forgive them and return some of their blessings.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Pray for forgiveness of your own sins...all your sins. Name your sins before God.

2. Pray that others-the church, the state, businesses-would repent for treating God with contempt! Pray that these institutions would not focus on being popular or influential or larger...but they would focus on truth.

3. Always keep in mind that the ground of your forgiveness is the Lord Jesus Christ. You have no right to God without the Lord Jesus!

Finally, the only basis of you going close to God is with an offering of blood...but not your blood. Your blood will only confess your guilt. Instead, you must go with the blood of Jesus Christ and plead his blood for your blood. Then God will accept Christ's blood and remove judgment from your head and make you his child.