



# Rend your heart and not your garment

## The prophecy of Joel Study 5

(Chapter 2:12-17)

The prophet Hosea said, “Break up your unploughed ground for it is time to seek the Lord until He comes and showers righteousness upon you” (Hosea 10:12b)

Repentance if it is genuine must go deeper than the emotions. God does not require a superficial emotional response from us although our emotions will be involved when we genuinely repent. Our hearts can be like hard baked soil that needs to be ploughed up before it can receive the seed of God’s Word.

Before the farmer receives his crop he must first plough up his field and sow the seed so that when the rain comes in its due season there will be a crop. The key to the harvest is the ploughing up of the soil and the planting of the seed.

If we are to walk fully in all the will of God for our lives then our hearts need to be receiving the seed of God’s Word if there is to be spiritual fruitfulness for Him in our lives. While a farmer has no control over the weather he does have his part to play in receiving the harvest. He must sow the seed into the ploughed soil in expectation of the harvest to come.

In Old Testament times when someone truly repented they tore their garments as an outward sign that they had “torn” their

hearts in repentance towards the Lord. For repentance to be real there needs to be an inward as well as an outward response to the Lord. As the scripture says of God that, “You desire truth in the innermost being” and that, “the Lord is near to the broken hearted” and that “a broken and contrite spirit He will never despise.”

As believers God has given us a wonderful friend in the Holy Spirit who Himself leads us to repentance. Without His gracious influence we would never repent, however, He will not do the repenting for us but only enable us to repent in the way that truly pleases God. The scripture itself says that, “God’s goodness leads us to repentance” and that “Godly sorrow works repentance.”

Before the Holy Spirit can lead us into genuine and heartfelt repentance God requires that we have a genuine desire to repent. Even though the Holy Spirit has put the desire in our hearts to repent we must still be willing to do it. The scripture says, “Seek the Lord while He may be found; call on Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him, and to our God for He will freely pardon” (Isaiah 55:6-7)

Joel was another prophet among many prophets that God sent to His backslidden people to turn them back to the spiritual priorities He had for their lives yet time and

time again the people would not listen to these prophets. Unfortunately when God's people refuse to repent He must use severe measures to bring them to the place of repentance.

There was a time when Sennacherib the king of Assyria with his army laid siege to Jerusalem and was at the very gates of the city but the prayer of Hezekiah and Isaiah caused the Lord to intervene and Jerusalem was spared.

Even with the Babylonian army God could do the same thing but as God's Word and historical records show us the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem refused to repent bringing on themselves a terrible disaster, a disaster to be repeated again in 70AD and one that will have its ultimate fulfillment at the hands of the Antichrist at the end of this age.

Today there are many in the Church who believe that God has finished with Israel and that the Church has replaced Israel but they are wrong. The prophet Joel reveals that God is doing a parallel restoration both in Israel and the Church and that at the end of this present age both Israel and the Church will come into their spiritual inheritance. While He is dealing with them independently He still uses a common means to bring them to repentance when they backslide.

The "locusts" are the means by which God will ultimately get His way with a backslidden and rebellious people. Even though things go to the very brink of disaster God will always hold out to the last minute before He sends the judgement. His hope and desire is that His people will turn back to Him so that He can have mercy on them and save them from the hands of their enemies!

*(Vs 12) "Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.*

The situation was desperate and disaster was imminent for the people of Israel yet even in the eleventh hour God was willing

to have mercy on His backslidden people. Today it is the same in his dealings with the Church. Even at this late stage if His people will turn away from the faith prosperity signs and wonders gospel, seeker sensitive services, Kingdom now, purpose driven agenda, the immerging Church and ecumenism He will have mercy and judgement will be averted. However, it would seem that things have gone too far and that the "Northern Army" will invade "the land."

There are three things that Joel mentions concerning the kind of repentance that moves the heart of God.

*"Return to me with all your heart"* true repentance involves the emotions but is not just an emotional response. Judas Iscariot was remorseful over what he had done and even knew he had done the wrong thing but did not repent. Likewise, Esau was moved to tears over losing his inheritance but did not come to the place of repentance. Feeling sorry for what we have done is only the beginning of our repentance. There must be a desire to turn away from it with all of our heart and be willing not to offend in that area again. Repentance is to change your mind about God, Christ, The Bible, about sin and the Devil. It means you must change from a Christ hating, Christ rejecting way of life to a Christ loving, Christ accepting way of life. This is where repentance begins when a sinner finds Christ. However, repentance will be something that continues throughout the Christian life. There will be times in every believer's life when they will need to repent of some sin or wrong attitude. However, it needs to be said that the Christian life does not consist in continuously sinning, repenting, sinning and then repenting. If we do sin then we need to repent and God has made a provision for our cleansing in the blood of Jesus Christ, however, a life of sinning and repenting is not the life of victory that God has for us in the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we are conscious that we have sinned we need to be open and honest with the Lord. To confess is to agree with what God says and not to argue with Him. God

will always show us mercy when we have a genuine and heartfelt desire to forsake sin with all of our heart. Jeremiah put it this way when God spoke through him, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, " declares the Lord" (Jeremiah 29:11-14a)

God's will is always good, acceptable and perfect when we are willing to let the Holy Spirit have His way in us. (Romans 12:1-2) When we read and obey God's Word the Holy Spirit will keep us free from sin by the Word. God's Word is the instrument the Holy Spirit uses to sanctify us. (Psalm 119:9-11,105, 130) Sometimes God will use affliction to discipline us when we have strayed from His commands. David understood this when he said, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word." He also said, "It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees." So then when we repent we must turn to the Lord with all of our heart.

*"With fasting."* Sometimes we will need to fast to show the Lord that we really mean business. When we fast our spiritual senses are heightened because our physical hunger has not been satisfied. When we are aware of our physical hunger it reinforces in us our spiritual hunger for the nutritious food of God's Word and for the satisfaction that comes from Him when we repent. Sometimes fasting will be required when things are almost beyond our control. Some situations such as Israel faced require fasting, as it was a desperate situation. If they did not repent they would suffer at the hands of the Babylonians.

*"And weeping and mourning."* Our tears of repentance are very precious to the Lord and he puts them in his wineskin and they are recorded. (Psalm 56:8) Our tears, if they are genuine, draw out from us all those unpleasant memories of our past sins and offences that we have covered up or have been buried

deep in our subconscious mind. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to evoke this strong emotional response to the Lord. While our emotions cannot always be trusted they are a part of us as human beings and are the vehicle through which the longings and desires of our hearts are expressed to the Lord and often with sighs and groans that cannot be uttered. At such times of genuine and heartfelt repentance the Holy Spirit will be there in us and along side of us interceding for us according to the perfect will of God. (Romans 8:26-27) The Holy Spirit knows just what should be said and how it should be said and offers up our faltering prayers with perfect accuracy to the Lord because being God the Spirit He knows the mind and heart of God. If He knows God's heart and mind then He certainly knows all about us.

Tears and emotions are part of repentance but must also be accompanied by a genuine desire to turn away from the sin revealed to us by the Holy Spirit. When we mourn over our sin and confess it to the Lord the Holy Spirit will be swift to deal with it by applying the blood of Christ to our heart and conscious thereby cleansing us from all of it. (1 John 1:9) (Hebrews 9:14) Once we have truly repented our righteousness, joy and peace in the Holy Spirit will be restored.

*(Vs 13-14) "Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God."*

True repentance requires a turning away from sin and a turning to God for mercy and pardon. It means we change the direction in which we are walking. We do a complete turn around and instead of walking in disobedience to God's Word we begin to walk in obedience to it. The wonderful thing about the Lord is that He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love and does not want to send calamity. If only we would repent more often we would be spared His chastisement.

*"He is gracious."* A gracious person is one who is willing to overlook an offence even though it has been personally directed at them. God is never offended but He is hurt and grieved when we sin against Him. Yet He is gracious towards us long after we have run out of graciousness as human beings. Think about this next time you want to accuse Him of wrongdoing or unfairness. Remember the graciousness of God expressed towards us in Jesus Christ.

As the scripture says, "He who gave us Christ will He not also give us all things with Him." God is gracious and would always choose to have mercy on a sinner before passing judgement. Remember, "Godly sorrow works repentance" and brings out a gracious response from the Lord towards us.

*"He is compassionate."* Compassion described here is like a moving of the bowels that draws out a response towards the one afflicted. We are told in the New Testament that the Lord Jesus was often, "moved with compassion" when he saw the effects of sin on the human race and it was this compassion that drove Him to the cross. The Lord Jesus was the most perfect example of God's compassion for the lost. Look at how many sinners drew on that compassion when they turned to Him in repentance. Often Jesus was emotionally and even physically affected by the condition of fallen men and women. When He sees our heartfelt and genuine tears of repentance they evoke a response from Him towards us in our weakness and vulnerability.

*"Slow to anger."* It takes a lot to get God angry because he sees things as they really are and acts according to His perfect knowledge. Now God gets angry as the Bible says that, "God is angry with the wicked everyday." The Bible also says that, "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." God is a just and righteous God and must punish sin and severely deal with those who knowing His truth deliberately rebel against Him.

It is interesting that the Lord Jesus was often compassionate with ignorant sinners but ruthless with the religious hypocrites who knew God's law but refused to see its real meaning and application. Spiritual blindness is one thing but wilful blindness is something else. God can show mercy to those who are spiritually blind and need to see but His wrath and anger is upon those who refuse to see the truth because they want to continue in their wickedness. However God is very patient with us and it takes a lot to get Him angry.

*"And abounding in love and He relents from sending calamity."* Have you seen a movie where two people are in love and the camera films them in slow motion running across an open field to embrace one another? We would say that they are abounding towards one another. Well God's love is like that to His children. He is always seeking every way possible to keep them close to Him as He created them to have fellowship with Himself. Even though Israel had turned to idols God was still willing to have compassion on His backslidden people if they would only repent and turn back to Him. Indeed the prophet Jeremiah said to his backslidden brethren, "This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, "We will not walk in it."(Jeremiah 6:16)

Today there are many Christians standing at the crossroads. They are in churches that they know have gone into idolatry especially over the golden calf of prosperity and success in this world. They know that the teaching they hear from their leaders is not quite right and unbiblical but they persist in staying in those churches for convenience sake.

There are ministers today who entertain false teachers but say nothing because they do not want to lose their pensions or their lifestyles or their congregation members. So they say nothing even when they see the wolves circling the flock.

God Himself does not want to send calamity but when He sees the rebellion and wickedness rampant in the Church He has no choice but to bring judgement upon His people. Yes He is abounding in love but also punishes wickedness by sending calamities. Israel did not have as much light as we do in the Church so in a very real sense when Christians backslide they are worse than when the Israelites backslid because they have more knowledge of the truth than Israel had.

*“Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.”*

The Bible says, “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.” In its context this was what Peter told the unconverted Jews to do but the principle remains that there can be no seasons of refreshing or renewal by the Holy Spirit unless there is firstly repentance.

God does not just dispense His blessings haphazardly and He always exercises His sovereign will in these matters. Sometimes when His people repent He will straight away send His blessing but at other times there will be a season of waiting probably to see how genuine the repentance is and whether those repenting will stay the course until they receive His blessing.

Even at this late stage of idolatry and wickedness with the Babylonians almost at the gates of Jerusalem God could turn things around. He could still turn the Babylonians back and provide ample food and drink for the people and the animals in the pasture with enough left over to meet the needs for the temple offerings. However, the time was urgent and unless there was a genuine repentance and response from the people of Israel judgement would come as surely as the sun would rise in the morning. The same will be for the Church in the west if it does not repent of its spiritual adulteries.

*(Vs 15-16) “Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber.”*

The Lord was calling for a worship meeting that required everyone to attend. This wasn't to be a 'happy clappy' time or a laughing revival or a miracle service or a signs and wonders meeting but a solemn and serious meeting where God's people would be totally available for Him to correct and rebuke them for their idolatry and spiritual adultery.

Everyone was to be there whether they were elders, business people, housewives, children, those nursing infants or those newly married. There was to be no excuses at all. The situation was very serious and their very lives depended on how they would respond. Everyone attending this meeting in the temple was required to give the Lord his or her full attention. This was God's final wake-up call to His people. If they would not listen to Him then there would be no reprieve.

*(Vs 17) “Let the priests who minister before the Lord, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, “Spare your people, O Lord. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, “Where is their God?”*

Whenever God's people are led into sin and idolatry and backslide it is because their leaders have also backslidden. God always holds the leaders responsible as they are the ones appointed to guard, to guide and to protect the flock from false prophets, false doctrine and from those who would secretly introduce destructive heresies.

True repentance will not only express itself in a deep sorrow for sin and a willingness to turn away from it with all of the heart but also have a deep regard for God's reputation. It is not that God's reputation

needs defending; it certainly does not as God answers to no man for what He does.

True heartfelt repentance will also express itself in a deep sorrow and regret because the Lord's name has been dishonoured among the pagans because of His people's sin.

The final appeal is to the sovereign mercy of God. While it is not specifically mentioned here the cry for mercy is always based on God's covenant promises.

Remember when the people sinned around the golden calf and God wanted to wipe them out Moses stood in the gap between God and Israel and reminded Him of His covenant promises and the Lord relented.

As believers whenever we sin against the Lord we are bringing disgrace and dishonour to His name. Next time you are tempted to sin stop and think about how it will dishonour the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who has purchased you with His own blood.

While the faith prosperity gospel is tolerated and the Kingdom now teaching embraced and the purpose driven marketing strategy for Church growth pursued. While there is psychology, Psychotherapy, Seeker sensitive, positive thinking ideology tolerated and Ecumenical dialogue and doctrinal compromise in the Church the name of the Lord Jesus is dishonoured.

Many have a Jesus but He is not the Jesus of the Bible but another Jesus hence they have another gospel and the scripture is clear that if any person preaches another gospel they are under a curse. (Galatians 1:6-9) In fact anyone who adds to God's Word or takes away from it will have experience the plagues of God's wrath and will lose his share in the tree of life and in the Holy City. (Revelation 22:18-19)

Ministers of the Church are not called to alter or amend the Bible or to twist the scriptures to fit in with their ideologies but to preach the Word of God in season and out of season, whether the circumstances are

favourable or unfavourable. They are to preach it sincerely and honestly without denominational bias or embellishments but as the Spirit breathed Word of God profitable for doctrine for reproof for correction and for training in righteousness that men and women of God might be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Even now if the Church in the west will repent of their spiritual adultery and idolatry God will spare them from the "Babylonian" Invasion of Islam. There is a Northern army rising again in the earth that is sweeping through the Middle east, through most third world countries, infiltrating Europe, England, America, Australia and sweeping through India and Pakistan. Even countries like China and North Korea will not be exempt from its power and influence. Its agenda is the global domination of Islam. The "lion" is loose again in the earth and western democracy and those countries directly connected historically with Christianity are threatened.

God called Israel to repent before it was too late and He is calling the Church in the west to repent before the axe is laid to the root. Now is the time for the Church to bear fruit to meet the requirements of repentance. But will it repent in time?

No one wants to see family and loved ones, friends and neighbours suffer and die at the hands of the "Babylonians" but this is the reality facing the Church today. Israel is still to go through the time of Jacob's Trouble but will the professing Christian Church be exempt?

If there is genuine repentance in the Church then God can forestall the inevitable, however, in the book of Revelation we are told that a time will come when the beast empire will destroy the prostitute Church with fire and that this destruction will be according to God's set purpose. (Revelation 17:15-18)

The prophecy of Joel clearly depicts a time of utter desolation and chaos on a global scale and at the centre of this conflict

will be the nation of Israel. Even now Israel is centre stage in world politics. Ultimately all of the nations will come against Jerusalem. At that time multitudes of Israelis will perish at the hands of the Antichrist, however, God will spare a third of His people and bring them through the fire into a place of victory and make Jerusalem the Capital of the world. On that day the Lord Jesus Christ Israel's Messiah and His faithful followers will reign over the nations for a thousand years. Both Israel and the true Church will receive their spiritual inheritance from the Lord on that day when He comes again to be glorified in and through His people.

### Postscript:

God is always willing to send a revival to His backslidden people if they will repent. God never delights in sending calamity and disaster. All of us who profess to be true Christians can have a revival right now! Whether it is one believer or several believers or a congregation all can have a revival. If you get 5 or 10 or even 50 believers who go back to their first love for Jesus and for His Word the Bible and repent of their unbiblical doctrines you will have a revival! Our first love for the Lord Jesus is the key domino that will knock down the other dominos of lukewarmness, compromise, wrong doctrine, false foundations, rebellion and sin. If only the Church would repent! "This is what the Lord says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is and walk in it and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, "We will not walk in it."(Jeremiah 6:16)

## BLOW THE TRUMPET IN ZION

" For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ "

