

*Text of messages delivered by Grant Harris at Windsor Park Baptist Church on Sunday 27th July 2025.
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Joel: Wake Up, Aotearoa!

In this creative, **first-person narrative** sermon, the prophet Joel steps into modern-day Auckland to deliver an ancient but urgent message: **wake up and return to God with all your heart**. Joel begins with a crisis, a locust invasion, that symbolises seasons of loss in our lives. But the heart of his message isn't doom; it's **hope**. The Day of the Lord is near. God is present, active, and calling His people back. True repentance isn't about dramatic gestures; it's about a changed heart. And God promises restoration, not just for a select few, but for *everyone*. Young, old, men, women, farmers and students. His Spirit is for all.

Joel's voice still speaks: **God isn't finished with Aotearoa. Or with you.**

Section 1: Welcome & Introduction

Shlum mishpacha ... that's Hebrew for, 'Hi family.'

Kia ora, whānau ... that's Māori for, 'Hi family.'

I'm Joel. Prophet. Son of Pethuel. Not that you would know him – he's only mentioned once in the Bible and then disappears faster than a free coffee in a café, but his name means something like *"the mouthpiece of Gd"* so I have some DNA that gives me credibility for being someone who speaks on behalf of God, even though I'm one of the lesser-known prophets.

Now, I know what you're thinking, *"What's a dusty prophet doing wandering into the 21st-century?"* Trust me, I'm asking the same thing; these shirts and jackets are definitely a new style!

You'll read my words in the book of your Bible called ... Joel. That's me. I'm one of the 12 minor prophets. In your Bibles all twelve of them are in separate books, but in the Hebrew Bible, all of us from Hosea to Malachi are just one book. Called, The Twelve. This means that when folks read the words of what we all said in the Hebrew bible, they read it in just one session. We're not so minor then! I guess you modern people like short reads.

My book is quite short because I didn't spend much time talking about things that some of my contemporaries talked about. But FYI, I lived during the time of Ezra & Nehemiah, and I quote Isaiah, Amos, Zephaniah, Nahum, Obadiah, Ezekiel, and Malachi, as well as the book of Exodus. If you read all these books at once, you'd see how everything rolls together in God's big picture, but I've heard that someone added chapters and verses to your scrolls. Weird to me, because it should be one big story.

After all these years, I'm here, with you, because I don't think God has stopped speaking. What I said back in the good old days, still has relevance. To you.

Section 2: The Swarm (Locust Crisis)

My message started with a crisis. A natural disaster. Not a cyclone or a flood, or an earthquake – you kiwis have had your fair share of those.

This was an *invasion*.

Not an invasion by an unwieldy army.

Not an invasion of notifications.

An invasion of ... **locusts**.

Billions of them. Swarming like Auckland traffic on a long weekend.

They came like a freight train and stripped everything bare - crops, vines, trees, the economy, joy.

Gone.

It was like waking up to find your KiwiSaver and your Airpoints ... *all vanished in a single day*.

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People were stunned.

“What just happened?” “Where’s God in this mess?” “When can we get back to normal?”

But God didn’t want normal.

He wanted a wake-up.

Section 3: Wake Up (Spiritual Numbness)

And that was my job. To wake them up.

“Wake up, you drunkards and weep!” (You can read that in Chapter 1 Verse 5).

I wasn’t just talking about wine; they hadn’t spent too long at the vineyards on Waiheke Island.

I was talking about people who’d gone *numb*.

Numb with **distractions**.

Numb with **comfort**.

Numb with doomscrolling endlessly through whatever Babylon’s version of Facebook was.

They were sleepwalking through life, too comfortable with the things that made them comfortable to notice that God wanted their attention. He wanted them. With Him. He wanted them to see His kingdom so that they would be kingdom thinkers, seeing the world through His eyes.

I don’t think you’d be like that, today, given that the Book of Twelve is still a best seller in a compilation with the other 54 books. You’re awake, right?!

But I guess I’m here because there might be an element of comfort in your lives.

In your hearts.

In your bank accounts.

You might sing about God being your healer, your portion, your everything, but on Monday, without even realising it, you’ve come to trust your job or the Reserve Bank more than God’s provision.

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I didn't speak about specific comforts and pleasures, because as I mentioned, my contemporaries did, and they talk about similar comforts that people have sought since time immortal.

So, I blew the trumpet.

You can read about that in Chapter 2 Verse 1, ***"Sound the alarm on my holy hill! Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming!"***

Section 4: The Day of the Lord (God Acts)

The Day of Lord. A day that has come because God is with us, but also a day to come, where all of us will have to answer for the choices we make. The Day of the Lord is here and is coming! It's not just some apocalyptic scare tactic.

It's God saying, *"I'm involved. I'm here. Pay attention."*

In my time, the Day of the Lord was both a wake-up call and a promise. I say in Chapter 2 Verse 31, ***"The sun will turn to darkness..."*** and in Chapter 3 Verse 16, ***"The Lord will roar from Zion..."*** It's a day when God steps in to set things right, sometimes in history, and ultimately in eternity.

Sounds intense, right?

It is.

Because it means God isn't passive.

He's not on sabbatical.

He's not hiding in a back up north.

He's present. Active. Ready to move.

God gave a warning, through me, in Chapter 2 Verse 11 I declared, ***"The Day of the Lord. It's dreadful, who can endure it?"***

And that means we've got a decision to make.

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Section 5: Return With All Your Heart (Repentance)

The decision we must make is based on whether we choose to follow the same things that God said to my people as He's saying all these years later.

If you read Chapter 2 Verses 12 & 13a, you'd see that God says, ***"Return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning... 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."***

Someone should write a song with those words!

And then I continued (Joel 2:13b – 14), ***"He relents from sending calamity. Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing."***

This is what made me different from other prophets.

While some shouted judgment, I whispered mercy. Back then, when people repented, they'd tear their clothes - literally rip them. A dramatic outward show: *"Look, everyone! I'm really sorry!"* But God says, *"Don't tear your shirt. Tear your heart."* Because true repentance isn't about a show. It's not for an Instagram story. It's about a genuine change of heart.

Let's be real for a moment. New Zealanders are mostly a private people. You keep things quiet. You don't want to make a fuss. What garment do you keep putting on to cover the ache in your soul? But God says, *"Don't bottle it. Bring it. Bring the real you. That hidden sin you've been too ashamed to name ... name it. That apathy that's dulled your spirit ... bring life to it. That bitterness you've buried deep under busy schedules and polite smiles ... get rid of it."*

God wants *"that"* heart.

Not the filtered version. Not the tidy one. The real one.

Because He's not a figure waiting to catch you out, He's your Father ... slow to anger, rich in love, ready to restore.

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God says that if you return to Him, you won't find condemnation; you'll find **compassion**.
You won't find a wagging finger; you'll find **open arms**.

Of course, this call to return to God found its fullest shape in Jesus, the one who bore the locust years on the cross so we could be restored.

Section 6: God's Big Plan: Everyone Gets In (The Spirit for All)

And then God drops this bombshell promise that you can read in Chapter 2 Verse 28, ***"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people..."*** Did you see that ... **all people**.

In my day, that was outrageous. Madness. Radical. In my day God's Spirit was for prophets, kings, the temple elite, but **not** for your average olive farmer or fishmonger. God flips the system, and even more He goes on, ***"Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men and women will dream dreams. Your young men and women will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days."***

This promise didn't come cheap. Jesus bore the judgment. So that mercy could pour freely.

That means that even the retired among you who think your best days are behind you - God says, ***"I'm not done with you. Dream again."*** That means your teenage daughter, who's glued to her phone, might be the one to speak God's word into her generation. That means your rangatahi/children don't have to wait until they're 40 to be used by God. They have vision now, and God wants to pour petrol on that fire.

- It means God wants to speak through your students.
- It means God wants to speak to the cleaner in Glenfield.
- It means God wants to speak to the mum in Mairangi Bay.
- It means God wants to speak to the tradie on the North Shore who's never prayed out loud but feels the Spirit tugging.

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Everyone.

No rank. No title. No waiting list.

God's dream is a Spirit-filled people: awake, alert, and alive.

People who don't just attend church, but who *are* the church.

This promise came to life at Pentecost.

And it's still alive today.

And I reckon Auckland, right now, needs some Spirit-filled visionaries.

Not more cynics. Not more critics.

But dreamers. Prayers. Prophets.

God's Spirit isn't reserved for churches or pastors.

He's pouring it out in classrooms in Browns Bay, on construction sites in Birkenhead, and in lounge rooms across Aotearoa.

So, don't count yourself out.

You're not too young.

You're not too old.

You're not too broken.

You don't need a microphone, a title, or a platform.

You just need a willing heart. And God will do the rest.

7. What's Your Locust? (Personal Reflection)

So, let me ask you this:

What's been stripped from your life recently?

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Maybe it's not crops and vineyards.

Maybe it's *clarity*.

Maybe it's *peace*.

Maybe it's your *marriage* or a *family relationship*

Maybe it's your *confidence*.

Or *your own sense of God's presence*.

Maybe you feel like there's not much left but stumps and silence.

But friend, locusts don't get the final word.

God does. He says in Chapter 2 Verse 25, ***"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten."***

He's not just the God of second chances,

He's the God who brings beauty out of desolation.

Section 8: The Joel Challenge (Practical Response)

So, here's my challenge.

It's a challenge I think someone else who speaks on behalf of God gave you recently.

This Thursday at 4pm, stop. Just for one minute.

No emails. No texts. No to-do lists.

Just you and God.

Pray this simple prayer: *"God, I return to you with all my heart. Wake me up. Fill me with your Spirit."*

That's it.

No theatrics. Just an open heart.

May you be a church that lives fully awake.

May you not snooze your faith until it fits your schedule.

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May you be prophets. Dreamers. Visionaries. People who know that the Day of the Lord is near.
And so is His mercy.

Look, I know I'm just a minor prophet.
But I'm here because *God still wants your whole heart*.
So don't wait for everything to be perfect.
Don't wait till the next disaster.
Don't wait until the kids leave home or the mortgage is paid off or you've read Leviticus.
Return today.
All your heart.
All your mind.
All your strength.
Because God's Spirit is being poured out.
Right here. In Aotearoa New Zealand.
And He wants to use you.

Wake up. God is not finished with you yet.

Let me pray for you.

Song: **The Lord is Gracious and Compassionate**

As we sing, let this be more than a song — let it be your return. Your moment of waking up. Of handing God your real heart.

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These questions are intended to help you think more about this message. We hope they might enable conversation, encouraging you to wrestle with how God might be challenging us to apply what we have heard/read.

Reflecting on Sunday 20th July 2025: Last Sunday we welcomed Leor Sankar, the General Director of the 550-strong Baptist Churches of Bangladesh. He spoke from Micah 6:8. Looking back over the last week, where was God inviting you to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with Him? What was one practical outworking of that, or what is one practical outworking of that that God may be leading you to work out this coming week?

Questions from this week's first-person narrative sermon:

1. Joel began with a season of devastation through a locus invasion. What's something that has been stripped away in your life recently, whether spiritually, emotionally, or practically? How have you seen (or hoped to see) God restoring that?
2. Joel called out spiritual numbness — comfort, distraction, doomscrolling. What are some ways you've gone spiritually numb without realising it, and what would "waking up" look like for you?
3. **"Rend your heart, not your garments."** God doesn't want showy repentance, but a genuine heart return. What's one hidden or untended part of your heart that you sense God asking you to bring back to Him? What's stopping you?
4. Joel prophesied that God would empower *everyone* — old and young, men and women, everyday people. Where might God be inviting *you* to speak, serve, or lead — even if you don't feel ready? Who in your life might need reminding that God isn't finished with them yet?

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Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email info@windsorpark.org.nz and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. The Bible Project has excellent resources for the book of **Joel**. Start by clicking on this link, <https://bibleproject.com/guides/book-of-joel/>, and follow your nose at the bottom for more.
2. The '**Day of the Lord**' is mentioned many times in Joel. But what is The Day of the Lord? Click on the following link from 'gotquestions.org' to consider what this day is and what it means in your life: <https://www.gotquestions.org/day-of-the-Lord.html>
3. The **Spoken Gospel** provide free resources that come alongside Bible readers to explain what they're reading and how it points to Jesus. Click here to engage in their study materials for the book of Joel: <https://www.spokengospel.com/books/joel>