The Wake Up Call
by Chris Famisaran

Good morning, everybody. It's so good to see you all, as well to our visitors. Thank you for joining us today. We are honored and blessed that you have chosen to worship with us today. Please consider this your home. You're welcome anytime. Let's go ahead and begin with the word of prayer. God today, we begin a new series from the Old Testament books that we really don't talk about much. So Lord, help us open our hearts and our minds as we turn to them. And Lord, what lessons we can glean from them. In Jesus name, Amen.

So many years ago, when Leisa and I first got married, we lived in a very small apartment. The kitchen was also very small. Now, I started to cook, learn to really want to cook and of course, I was watching the Food Network and the illustrious Guy Fieri had a recipe that look amazing. Onion Rings, I'm connoisseur of fried foods, and it looked amazing. And so I thought, hey, let me try to make that. So I went got all the ingredients. And I came home, I turned the pot on with a lot of oil. Made sure it came up to 350 degrees. And then I battered the onion rings with Pinkel Beck bread crumbs. So it had the extra crunch. And then also the egg mixture with the flour as well. And I started put the onion rings into the pot, and everything was going great until I heard something like this [beeping]... okay, this is not working out all right. [fire alarm beeping]

I got scared there for a second, I thought I was gonna have to pull the battery out. [more beeping] This is not planned. Behave. So how many of you have ever experienced wanting to make something and all of a sudden said alarm goes off? Amen. All right, half, not even half of you. All right, you're better cooks in us. Now, what's the purpose of the alarm? To make sure that your house doesn't burn down right. Now of course, I had most of the control in the kitchen where I couldn't control the smoke. So I had to throw open the window. So all the smoke would go in. And I'm gonna go out, not in out. And the problem though is you know these alarms when you lived in confined spaces. Are they easily heard by other tenants, your neighbors upstairs of a home? Yes. How many of you find that you love that sound? How many of you hate that sound? All right, we got more hands, right. Ultimately, this serves as an alarm as a wake up call to Hey, man, things are not right, you need to fix what's going on. So obviously, you know I turn the heat down. And I started to put less onion rings in and caused it to where the smoke would not be so high. It serves as a warning.

And so we find here in the book of Joel. Okay, let's go to Joel chapter one. Joel chapter one. And the book of Joel we find Okay, I'm gonna take this out because it's being temperamental.

All right, I need to remember to take that back home because I still gotta put it back up on the wall. We find that Joel chapter one we find who is Joel? Well Joel, his name means Yahweh is God. And then Joel chapter one well just Joel period. It's found in a series of books called the Minor Prophets. There are 12 small Prophets. You'll some other names that you'll find is Hosea, Amos, Jonah, Obadiah, which will, we're going to study at the end of the month, Micah, Malikai. But we don't really know much about Joel. We do know that his name, his dad's name is Pethuel. He probably comes from the southern kingdom of Judah. He mentions it also, I believe Jerusalem. One of the things about Joel is he's also a very excellent writer. He's very descriptive. He's able to, as he writes, bring these amazing visuals that we can think

about. He's familiar with the temple and its services. We don't know exactly when Joel was written anywhere probably from about 800 to 400 BC. But we also know that Joel also was aware of some other prophets such as Isaiah because he quotes them. Now, the kingdom here is facing a crisis of a locust plague as we're initially going to read. And it's a big, big situation. So let's go there and work. Oh boy, that's 12 minutes. We're gonna read really quickly. The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel. 2 Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? 3 Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. 4 What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have left the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts[a] have eaten. 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine; wail because of the new wine, for it has been snatched from your lips. 6 A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness. 7 It has laid waste my vines and ruined my fig trees. It has stripped off their bark and thrown it away, leaving their branches white.

So it sounds like a pretty grim picture. Amen. The whole land is destroyed. Joel also talks about he gives visuals of for instance, in verse a more like a virgin in sackcloth grieving for the control of her youth. Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of Lord. The priests are in mourning, those two minutes would be for the Lord. The fields are ruined, the ground has dried up, the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up and the olive oil fails. So all of the agriculture, their dependence on being able to make money to have food is instantly wiped out. This nation is in trouble because they have they don't have the means to survive, to feed the animals to grow wheat to harvest to trade. All economic prosperity is out the door.

Now, what next in verse 13, Joelle writes, put on sackcloth you priests and more will you who minister before the altar, come spend the night in sackcloth who minister before my God for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God? Essentially, it's a call to lament or repentance. Now, it also is interesting in Joel does not describe or indicate what the people have done wrong. But if you look through the Old Testament, you know that Israel and the people of God have not always acted well, right. For instance, have they made a false gods? As they came out of Egypt? What did Aaron and all the other people make a golden calf right. Now there's other times where it mentioned in Scripture where they were actually doing they were harming one another and they were trying to sell each other off. And just it seems like there's this recurring pattern that God's people would be good. They would fall into to sin. God had to remind them, hey, I'm still your God, everything will be kosher. And it was just as up and down battle, right? Well, it comes at this point, where, for whatever reason, the people have been bad and God has to call in and remind them, hey, I've called you to be a faithful people. You are my people. And he's saying here, what you've done is bad. There's a locust plague that has come in and destroyed everything. And, in fact, even it says here in verse 16, has not the food being cut off before our very eyes joy and gladness from the house of our God. So imagine now, everything around you the agriculture, your ability to survive is completely wiped out. The cattle in verse 18 moan The herdsmen about because there is no pasture the cows cannot eat and events If they can't eat, what's going to happen? They die. So quite the scene.

So what can we take from this? Well, the land has been devastated beyond repair. What does this mean for everybody? The crops are barren, the economic impact is untold. They have no ability to make money. But I, you know, I'd never thought of this before until this week. If there are no cows, and there

are no animals, when they go to the temple, what are they not able to do? No sacrifices. So it's not just a financial, it's not just a physical impact. It's a spiritual impact on the people. Pretty heavy. Amen. All right. And not only that, it's just not a few people who survived suffer from this. Everyone suffers from this catastrophe from this plague. There could have been a few people who were faithful, but yet, even then, as a group, it impacts sometimes we make mistakes. It doesn't just affect us, it affects everybody. So verses 13 to 20. At the heart of this is God is seeking repentance from the people. God is desiring that these people recognize their mistakes and take ownership.

Now, let's go to chapter two. Okay, let's just briefly go over there. There's now this was in the past, this or this, it just happened. But there's no so now and another impending situation, another calamity that is brewing. Actually another army of locusts. And in verse, chapter two, verse one, it says, blow the trumpet in Zion sound, the alarm on my holy hill, that all who live in the land tremble for the day of the Lord has come in and is close at hand. And this is also a theme in the book of Joel, the day of the Lord. What does that mean? Well, the day of the Lord, it's essentially God's sovereign universal rule of goodness. And sometimes in some cases, impending doom is coming. And in this case, there is an army another army of locusts. One could say it could be another nation, signifying it could have been probably Babylon, that they were going to come forward. So God is basically saying, You guys have been misbehave and I'm basically I needed to get your attention now, now that I have your intention. There is another impending calamity coming, please get your act together.

And then in verse two, it says, Let all who live in the land tremble for the day of the Lord has come in and is close at hand, a day of darkness and gloom a day of cloudiness, and blackness, like dawn spreading across the mountains and a large and mighty army come such as never was in the ancient times, nor ever will be an ages to come before the fire devours behind them a flame blazes before them. The land is the Garden of Eden behind them a desert weighs nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses, they gallop along like Calvary with Cavalry with the noise like that of chariots. They leap over the mountains like the crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. At the sight of the nations are in anguish, every face turns pale. Can you imagine being faced with a big huge army coming and bearing down at you would you not be scared? Especially if they got horses, the Cavalry and they're great warriors. They charge like warriors they scale walls like soldiers, they all marched in line. They not swerving from their course they don't jostle each other, they are orderly. impending doom, they rush upon the city, they run along the wall, they climb into the houses like thieves and entered windows before the earth shakes. The heavens tremble. The sun and moon are darkened. Stars shine no longer the Lord thunders at the head of this army. All of a sudden the flip scripts in God is bringing this army into the land. The Lord thunders of the head of the Army, his forces are beyond number and Mighty is the army that obeys this command. The day of the Lord is great. It is dreadful who can endure it?

So this is a second scene. In the book of Joel there are four scenes. And then Joel writes something here. That's very important, even now declares the Lord. It says God's given an opportunity Return to Me with all of your heart with fasting and weeping and mourning and the Old Testament essentially is turned from your ways come to me in humility and repentance. And in verse 13 is especially says rend your heart and not your garments. Now, in the past in the Bible, Old Testament, when somebody did something wrong, or they were in mourning, they would tear their garments. But here it says, Don't not necessarily do that. But rend your heart and anybody know what rend means I had to pick this up. Surrender, to tear your heart open to examine, to look upon what you have been doing and ultimately,

be accountable for the choices that you have made, especially the bad choices. He says, return to the Lord your God. And this is the beautiful thing where it says, for he is gracious and compassionate. This is verse 13, slow to anger abounding in love. And he relented from sending calamity. So even in his picture of this, this impending calamity, God says, Look, I want you to return to me but you have to walk away from your bad choices from your sin and everything that you're holding on to because it is taking it away from me. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion declare a holy fast call a sacred assembly. And Joel is saying hey, get everybody together, bring the elders gathered the children and like a bridegroom leave his room and let the bride her chamber that the priesthood Minister before the Lord week before the portico and altar, let them Spirit say spare your people, Lord, do not make your inheritance and object of scorn a byword among the nations. Why? Among what who should they say, among the peoples where is their God?

Now God is there, that God is calling them to turn away from whatever they were doing at that time. God is calling them to be a faithful people, to be obedient, to follow what God has called them to do, as, as we read as well, to be reminded of the words that was shared to the people to lead them out, to have God be their sovereign and only God. So God has called this people to please come back, walk away from your bad ways, and return to me and to be faithful.

Now we see here that this is kind of a it's a negative, scary picture, right. But yet, as we will read next week, and especially God is going ... the people will find salvation, and not just that, but the Holy Spirit. And then finally, in chapter three, Bill's going to talk about God restoring the land. So while it seems bleak, there is hope, as we will learn more next week, and also the following week.

But what are some of the takeaways that we can take from this story so far? God desires that we be in relationship with God, but also to be faithful to God. You know, the last couple of years and kind of in many respects, been a wake up call. We've learned a lot of things about ourselves and others and things that we thought were true, were not so. And yet, for some, it's been an opportunity to be able to draw close to the Lord. And yet even doing so lately, it seems like maybe perhaps are we becoming too comfortable still. When things start to get comfortable, it's easier to get complacent. In our relationship with God, we can never afford to be complacent. Amen. In the hard times, but especially the good times.

Noted philosopher Soren Kierkegaard brings an illustration where he talks about a duck that was flying north with a flock of wild duck. And in the Danish countryside. There's a particular duck that was spotted by a barnyard where tame ducks non wild ducks live and the duck dropped down. He hung out with the ducks and he saw that there was fresh corn that he could easily go to, and pick up and eat and he stayed there a while. And the hour turned into the day, turned into a week and then turned into a month. And then as I believe it was a fall crisp day, some wild ducks were flying overhead. And instantly he he reacted by wanting to fly away, but he'd become so tamed. He had had all of the food that he could eat. His wings didn't operate as well because he had gained weight. He couldn't just pop up and fly away with the other wild ducks so he just decided to stay there. Winter came, spring came. He continued to eat and hang out with all of the team ducks but Then overhead, he heard the wild call of the other ducks. And instinctively again, he would try to fly and tried to join them. But then gave up, he couldn't quite get there. It's okay, I'm comfortable, I still have all of this wild. So all of this corn that I can eat, I can be content, I have my friends. Finally, again, in the fall, the following year, the Ducks were flying

over. And the Wild Duck had become no more a wild duck but a tame duck. And as the ducks flew overhead squawking, he did not even hear them. He'd become comfortable. And he said, You know what, my life here is safe, it's good, I will be okay. And he didn't even pay the slightest attention.

My friends, God wants to be in relationship with you and wants to spend time with you. May we not become so complacent. But hear the voice of God at all times. And to be faithful to God's teaching to God's word. You know, today or tomorrow is going to be Mother's Day. I'm sure all of our moms at some point have maybe had a difficult time with us as children, amen. I thought it was gonna be a little louder. Now, as children, we sometimes we can be intentionally bad. And sometimes we're just curious. And as a parent, sometimes though, we have to be firm. And I see God in this picture, not wanting to just be mean or punishing. But sometimes God had to get the attention of God's children. And sometimes that had to be very firm, amen.

And so, when I look to the Old Testament, sometimes God can be seen as a vengeful, angry god, I think God is a loving God. And if God truly loved God's children, sometimes God had to be firm with God's children to remind them to come back. I look back on all the times that I was disciplined. My mom wasn't trying to be mean, she just didn't want me to get hurt, or go down the wrong path. I think we sometimes forget that as children. And even in the children of children of God. In Israel, they also sometimes got seduced by being they would see wonderful, great things, supposedly, and yet, it would turn them away from the most important thing. So God is calling them back, hey, please, come back to me be accountable.

So reflection, where in your life do you need a wake up call? Where in your life do you need a wake up call. And whatever that wake up call is pray for and bring accountability to that which you struggle with, might mean not only praying for but maybe you may need to seek help of a professional friend, have somebody to help you be accountable. And that may God also seek the Lord every day. And actually, as well, maybe there's something that we need to pray for. That God can work in our lives, to remove, that we may be made whole, but also continue to be faithful to the Lord.

Let us pray. Father in heaven, Lord, today, we've had to blitz through the first third of our discussion here on Joel, the Lord, may we be reminded that although Lord sometimes you can be firm. It's not that you're trying to punish us more, but you're drawing us back to you because you love us. May we be faithful to you, Lord, if there is something in our lives, that is negatively affecting us and also was not in alignment with your love and commands and priorities, Lord, help us to overcome that, to give that up, to surrender it to You. And Lord, if we need to find accountability or to have help, Lord, help us to get that. And as well as help us, Lord to support one another. May we be the faithful ambassadors that you've called us to be? Lord, abide with us. Lord, we also know that you are a God who is rich in love, as we will continue in our our state that will be certainly evident in that. But Lord, we also know as we read that you are a God who is slow to anger, who was gracious and compassionate. May we never forget that in Jesus name. Everybody said amen.

May God bless you, as well. Thank you visitors for joining us. Today we'll see you all next week as we continue in our journey through the book of Joel. Take care.