

How to Respond to National Crisis (Joel 2:12-17)

I. CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. God has given the human race great dignity. We have free will, which means we have been given the ability to make real choices that make a real difference. We affect the quality of life by what we do with our free will. Our choices for righteousness or for sin will bring either blessing or evil to us and to those near us. If we choose righteousness, then we open doors of blessings to others. Our free will provides the legal entry point for both angels and demons to be much more active in the natural realm. When we live in righteousness, we open up legal access for angelic activity into the natural realm. When people live in sin, they open up legal entry points for demonic activity to be heightened.
- B. God governs the universe in partnership with His people through intercession. The majesty and mystery of intercession is seen foremost in Jesus’ relationship with the Father. The Father’s power is released to the nations as Jesus makes intercession for them throughout all eternity.
²⁵ *He [Jesus] always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:25)*

⁸ *[The Father said to Jesus]...Ask of Me [intercession], and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. (Ps. 2:8)*
- C. The prayer room is the governmental center of the universe. God has chosen to release His power through our prayers. Prayer transcends time and distance. Paul could change the church in Ephesus through his prayers while he was in prison in Rome. In the same way, we can change the cities of the earth through our prayers in our local prayer meetings.
- D. God has determined the primary events in His eternal plan (Jesus’ second coming, Jesus reigning over the earth as King, Satan cast into the lake of fire, establishing the new earth, etc.). Regardless of what people do, God will accomplish the main events in His eternal plan.
- E. He gives His people a dynamic role in determining some of the measure of the “quality of life” that we experience in the natural and in the Spirit. We determine this based on our response to the grace of God in our partnership with Him, particularly in prayer, obedience, and meekness.
- F. He opens doors of blessing and closes doors of oppression in response to our prayers. There are blessings that God only gives as His people ask for them.
² *You do not have because you do not ask. (Jas. 4:2)*

²¹ *This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (Mt. 17:21)*
- G. God is waiting for our persistence in prayer before Him. Isaiah taught that God longs to release His grace and power, but actually waits until He hears the cry of His people in intercession.

¹⁸ *The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on High to have compassion on you...*¹⁹ *He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.* (Isa. 30:18-19; NAS)

- H. God searched for an intercessor to stand in the gap between Himself and Israel, to pray that judgment be withheld. God did not find such a one; thus, He destroyed the land. Intercession changes the course of nations.

³⁰ *So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one.* (Ezek. 22:30)

- I. When God was angry with Israel because of her sin, Moses stood in the gap between Israel and God in prayer. God relented, or changed His plan, and did not destroy Israel.

⁹ *The LORD said to Moses, “...indeed it is a stiff-necked people! ¹⁰ Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them...”*¹¹ *Then Moses pleaded with the LORD his God, and said: “...turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people...”*¹⁴ *So the LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.* (Ex. 32:9-14)

II. CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. Corporate intercessory worship is the primary means God has chosen to release His government (power) in His relationship with Jesus and His redeemed. It is the highest expression of government in time and eternity, and the most powerful weapon that exists.
- B. God’s primary call to a nation in crisis is to gather in solemn assemblies (Joel 2:12-17).
1. **Corporate:** God requires that we gather for corporate prayer. It requires humility to embrace all that is implied in gathering corporately. The differences in worship and prayer styles, doctrinal emphases, and various personalities make humility a necessity for those who meet together regularly.
 2. **Intercessory:** Intercessory prayer is standing in the gap for others, and praying back to God the things He has promised to do for His people.
 3. **Worship:** God is looking for prayer that is based on worship. Prophetic music and singing unifies God’s people in a unique way. Through worship, thousands can remain in unity for sustained periods of time as they are strengthened and encouraged together by the truths of God’s Word.
- C. Some “trust” the sovereignty of God in a non-biblical way by “trusting” God to do the role that He has assigned to us. This is not truly trusting God, but is presumption before Him. **We cannot do God’s part and He will not do our part.**

1. Some misapply the truth that if God wants something, then He will do it. This is true in some of the broad strokes of how He leads history.
 2. There are many things that God will not give us until we ask Him with faith and obedience. For example, God wants all to be saved, but it does not just happen, because God will not violate our free will—not even for our salvation (2 Pet. 3:8-9).
- D. Corporate intercessory worship releases blessing on the redeemed and judgment on the enemy.
- ⁶ Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, ⁷ to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; ⁸ to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; ⁹ to execute on them the written judgment—this honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 149:6-9)*
- E. Corporate intercessory worship stops the work of the enemy. King Jehoshaphat employed corporate intercessory worship when resisting the attack from the nations of Moab and Ammon. God responded by setting ambushes against Israel’s enemies.
- ³ Jehoshaphat...set himself to seek the LORD, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴ So Judah gathered together to ask help from the LORD; and from all the cities of Judah they came to seek the LORD. ¹⁸ All Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem bowed before the LORD, worshipping the LORD. ¹⁹ Then the Levites...stood up to praise the LORD God of Israel with voices loud and high. ²¹ ...he [Jehoshaphat] appointed those who should sing to the LORD, and who should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army and were saying: “Praise the LORD, For His mercy endures forever.” ²² Now when they began to sing and to praise, the LORD set ambushes against the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were defeated. (2 Chr. 20:3-4, 18-22)*

III. THE RESPONSE THAT GOD REQUIRES: SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES

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, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. ¹⁴ Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him...? ¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; ¹⁶ gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes...¹⁷ Let the priests...weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, “Spare Your people, O LORD...” (Joel 2:12-17)

- A. In Joel 2:12-17, God tells us what we are to do to receive His mercy and deliverance—we are to turn to Him in wholeheartedness. In a time of crisis, God requires that His people gather together for solemn assemblies; that is, to return to Him in wholeheartedness with prayer and fasting.
- B. A solemn, or sacred, assembly involves the leaders and the people joining together to repent and fast, and to pray for the intervention of God’s power and mercy.
- C. We are to cry out for God’s favor in solemn assemblies before and during a crisis.

- D. The response that God requires in a time of crisis is the same today as it was in Joel’s generation. He does not leave us guessing as to what He desires from us. We can act with confidence.

IV. TURN TO GOD WITH WHOLEHEARTEDNESS

¹² *Now therefore, says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning.”* ¹³ *Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD...” (Joel 2:12-13)*

- A. God wants our hearts and our love (Mt. 22:37). He requires that we respond to His love by loving Him. Turning to God in wholeheartedness involves repenting, fasting, and praying.
- B. Mankind’s very existence is on account of God’s love for us and His desire for a deep relationship with us.
- C. The place of safety in the time of judgment is in the midst of a company of people living in long-term, corporate wholeheartedness. As we respond wholeheartedly to Jesus’ work on the cross, we walk in God’s favor in a time of judgment.
- D. I want to be in the midst of a people who are developing a corporate, long-term history in wholeheartedness. I believe that corporate wholeheartedness is the safest environment on earth.

V. REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS

¹³ *So rend your heart and not your garments; return to the Lord your God... (Joel 2:13)*

- A. In Joel’s day, people tore their garments to show their grief and desperation. However, what God desires is the tearing of our heart, which speaks of dealing radically with the matters of our heart.
- B. *To rend* means to tear something violently or forcibly. We tear our heart away from every thing in our life that quenches the Spirit! Speaking symbolically of this tearing, or radical obedience, Jesus said, “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out” (Mt. 5:29).
²⁹ *If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (Mt. 5:29)*
- C. Tearing our heart is intensely personal and painful. Some want the Spirit to free them from their sinful patterns and relationships, without it requiring any personal choices that tear their heart.
- D. We cannot pursue wholeheartedness in a casual way. Some hope for a wholeheartedness that is gentle, easy, and tame. We must cry out to God that America will turn back to God for that He will intervene with powerful breakthrough.