



# Message **Transcript**

## What Now?

Jeff Schwarzentraub

Lord Jesus, we give you all the praise, glory, and honor for who you are. And Lord, we ask that in these few minutes that we have together, Lord, that you would speak directly to us from your word. You promise that your word is living and active. That when your word is faithfully proclaimed Lord, that you have your way through the word. And so Lord, our invitation is now speak Lord for your servants are listening.

Lord, help us to become who you say we are, help us to put into practice the things that you individually and collectively show us and help us become the people you want us to be. And so now Lord, we come before you, as your people, your covenant people trusting that you're going to do our work and all God's people who are ready to hear his word and put it into practice agreed by very loudly saying with me the word, amen.

Amen.

Amen. Six weeks before I graduated high school, I arrived at school one day like any other day parked in the back of the school, was walking through the back where I would go to put my stuff down by our football locker room and then on into class. And when I did that day, it was a day unlike any other, because when I was walking into the school, I remember my high school football coach was in an awkward position, hunched over a car. And I was trying to see what was going on. And I was like, "Coach." And he stood up and he had tears streaming down his face. And he said these words to me, "Terry Duncan is dead." Terry Duncan was a teammate of mine. He was a good friend of mine. He had just eaten dinner at my house earlier that week.

It was hard to take in. I couldn't understand. It turned out that he and another guy in our high school class had been out boating on the Illinois River. And two barges came by simultaneously swamped their boat. And officials said they would've had to hold their breath for five minutes in order to survive.

So I remember going to the funeral and I remember weeping at the time at the funeral asking myself this question, why? Like, why does tragedy happen? And God, where are you? And I was asking the questions that we ask a lot of times when we see tragedy, "God, if you're all loving, then why would you do this?" And, "God, if you're all powerful, then why would you allow this to happen?" And I was confused and it was a time where I was really trying to figure out what life was like and if there was really a God who cared.

Just this Tuesday, we got news in our city of yet another school shooting. You realize number of years ago, they didn't have a word for school shooting, now we have a word for it. And since I've even moved to Colorado nine years ago, if I hear about a shooting at a movie theater or a church or in a school, there's a strong probability that it may even happen in our city.

The suicide rate in our city among teens is one of the highest in the entire country. And you got to ask yourself the question, "Is anybody watching? Does anybody care? Is God really good? What can we do?" I mean, this grip my heart so much on Tuesday because it happens so frequently now that I felt just to move on in I Peter and talk about spiritual spouses on mother's day, which I was all planned to do,

pales in comparison to scratching where we itch as a culture saying, "God, what do we do now?"

"What are we as Christian supposed to do? And how are we supposed to respond?" And certainly we're to be the hands and feet of Jesus. I mean, certainly we're to love the victims that have been hurt by this, but what do we do? How do we put an end to this? Is there any hope at all for our future? And I believe that there is.

If you're here this morning, I want to invite you to open your Bible up to the book of Joel Chapter Two. And as you're turning there, what was going on at this time in Israel's history was there was a famine in the land. God had sent locust into the land, which doesn't sound like that big of a deal. What's the big deal with insects? Well, here's the big deal, if you're an agricultural culture, it means this, your entire food supply has been eaten up.

It means there is no food, which means you don't have anything to eat. So there's a famine. It also means you have an economic crisis. So there's an economic and physical crisis in the land and everything's going bad. And God's people are saying what's going on? And often what God did in the Old Testament was he raised up a prophet to come speak on his behalf to the people, to let them know what it was that they needed to do.

And wouldn't we as Christians like to know, "Hey God, when we see all this stuff going on in the world, what do we do?" Because it doesn't seem to be getting any better. As a matter of fact, it seems to be getting worse and yet we don't know what

to do. Politicians have answers, educators have answers, but the problem with all that is, it doesn't have solutions. God's word is the only place that we can go for a solution.

And so as we look in God's word this morning, here's what I'd like to do, I'd like to tell you four things that God tells us that we as believers in Christ must do. And the first one is this, you must realize that God's judgment, his coming judgment is imminent and it's final. You need to realize that God's coming judgment is imminent and final.

No matter how bad it gets in our world, what's about ready to come and what's about ready to happen in our world is complete, it's final and it's coming very soon. So I want to read the first 11 verses of Joel Chapter Two. We won't spend a ton of time here, but I want to give you an indication. Imagine if you were in a situation where everything was falling apart in your world, and this was the word that you got from the Lord, here's what he says.

Blow a trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming. Surely it is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness as the dawn is spread over the mountains, so there is a great in mighty people. There has never been anything like it, nor will there be again after it to the years of many generations. A fire consumes before them and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but a desolate wilderness behind them and nothing at all escapes them. Their appearances is like the appearance of horses and like war horses so they run with a noise as of chariots. They

leap on tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire consuming the stubble like a mighty people arranged for battle. Before them, the people are in anguish, all faces turn pale. They run like mighty men. They climb the walls like soldiers and they each march in line, nor do they deviate from their paths.

They do not crowd each other, they march everyone in his path. When they burst through the defenses, they do not break ranks. They rush on the city. They run on the wall. They climb into the houses. They enter through the windows like a thief. Before them, the earth shakes, the heavens tremble the sun and moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. The Lord utters his voice before his army. Surely his camp is very great, for strong as he who carries out his word, the day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome and who can endure it.

Now, if you're going through tragedy in your life, these are probably not the words that you want to hear. I mean, when you think about it, if things are bad and you're in a famine and you and your family can't eat, and there's no way to earn a living and there's no money, hearing the Lord say, "Guess what? You think it's bad now, it's going to get worse." There's impending judgment. I'm actually going to send in our army from the north that's going to be worse than anything that you're experiencing now. And it's going to culminate in my final judgment.

Why would God be talking like this? Well, He's talking like this because people need to repent, right? He's talking like this because the nation has gone its own way. Now we think about this. When we think about things that go wrong in the culture here is what we begin to think. Those pagan people out there, they need to repent and get

right. If it wasn't for those pagan people out there, none of this stuff would happen.

And I agree with you, all people everywhere need to repent and get right. But notice who this is written to, this letter is written to God's covenant community. He's writing to his people. He's telling them the role that they play in what they see in the culture. And what God wants to do is God has always wanted to work through his covenant people to a community. And when God's covenant people get cavalier in their worship and God's covenant people get callous in their love for one another, God is no longer able to pour his mercy and grace through his people and we begin to see all things in the world. And so God's call through his prophet Joel to the nation was, "Hey, wake up. I'm asking you as the church, you as the community of people, wake up."

When you see tragedy in the world, it's an opportunity for us who are believers in Christ to begin to ask ourselves some personal questions, "Where are we in our relationship with God? How well are we doing?" Now here's the problem. The problem with you is the same as the problem with me, we base our scorecard based upon how everybody else is doing.

So when it comes to our worship, we base it on who's not here today? Well look, and I'm in worship, I mean, look at all these empty seats, look at who didn't come today. I mean, I'm better than them, right? And I come at least three times a month, they only come once. I mean, we compare ourselves to what we consider the lowest common denominator and then we come out and we're okay.

Or when it comes to loving people, we base ourselves on I definitely love people.

I mean, I've even loved some unlovable people, I mean, you should see who I'm married to. I mean, I do a pretty good job. But see the problem with all that is God never asks us to compare ourselves to other people, God asks us to compare ourselves to Him.

And here's the question this morning, if the Lord Jesus Christ showed up here in all of his glory this morning, as you were walking down to meet him, would there be anything in your life that needs to change in your worship or anything in your life that would need to change in your love for other people, specifically God's people? And if there is that's the wake up call for us, that's what Joel was saying.

Joel was saying, "Hey, covenant people, hey, people who are loved by God, this is for you." Now here's the truth and I need to explain this and be super clear on this. God made it clear that he loved the world. And he did this by the father sending his son into the world to be our savior. When Jesus came into the world, he was born of the Virgin Mary, he lived a perfect life, he suffered under Pontius Pilate, he was crucified, dead and buried, he was raised from the dead and anybody anywhere at any time that places their trust in Jesus Christ is redeemed, is saved to the full and no one can snatch you out of God's hand. You are his, you are love forever and ever amen.

That's truth. Based upon the word of God, we can celebrate that. Here's the problem with that truth. Sometimes we take that truth to mean, because I'm loved, because I know I'm going to heaven, because I know no matter what I do, God will forgive me. Therefore, I falsely conclude I can live however I want and it makes no difference in the world. That's where we're wrong. And that's what God was calling his



covenant people to repent of. God was telling them just because I love you with an unconditional love does not mean that you do whatever you want to do whenever you want to do it.

Parents, if you love your kids with an unconditional love, it does not mean that you will allow them to do whatever they want to do whenever they want to do it just because you love them. Love involves a desire to see the best in another person. God's love for us, it's not a pampering love, it's a perfecting love. God wants you to grow into his likeness in such a way where he gets all the glory.

And so when we see tragedy in our world, instead of saying, "What do we need to do? And how do we need to respond? And what are politics going to do now? What are educators going to do? And what should we do by this or that?" It should be in a question that we're asking, "Lord, is there anything in my worship of you or my love for other people that is not paramount, that's not foundational?" The Bible on Matthew 6:33 says this, "Seek first, the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added."

Here's the question is Jesus Christ and his church and his people first in your life? Look at your calendar, look at your checkbook, look at your conversations, is Jesus Christ first place? Is he the Lord of all? I mean, is he the place? Because if not, then there's awakening that needs to happen in your own soul and say, "No, no, that's not me. I know that I love Jesus. I know that I have a relationship with God, but I'm not living out the way God wants me to live." That's what Joel was saying to the people.

That's what God is saying to our people. When we see Tragedy in our culture, it's a question to us, are we living the way that God wants us to live?

And we need to realize that when God comes, his coming judgment, it's imminent and final, meaning it's going to happen soon. At some point in time, it could be during my lifetime, I believe it will be during my lifetime. But at some point God's judgment will come. And when it comes, it will be swift and it will be measured and it will be perfect and he's coming. And he says, "You think these tragedies are bad, here's the truth, it's going to get a whole lot worse for those who don't know me. And I have a purpose for my covenant people in a community when they see tragedy strike and how they need to live."

So question to you, is there anything in your heart that's out of alignment with the Lord, Jesus Christ in your worship or in your love for other people? Now there are times in a Christian's walk where that question can be asked and you can answer the question very candidly and say, "I don't think that there is." And by the way, I don't think this is something that you need to pray about for the next five weeks in naval gaze and say, "Is there anything at all Lord, show me."

I know the holy spirit to be powerful enough that when I ask questions like Lord, is there anything out of a line in my worship or Lord, is there someone I'm not treating with love? That immediately the holy spirit can show me if there is something I need to deal with and repent of. And that's his question today. It doesn't mean that everybody's sitting here needs to be rebuked or exhorted, some of you need to be encouraged. But at the same time it's an opportunity for us to look at our lives through the lens of the

holy spirit to ask, is there anything out of alignment with what God would want as far as him being priority in my life?

Now, if we understand that, then we can move on to Joel's second point, "Well, what do we do now?" Okay. I realize there's some things that need to change. Here's what he would say, return to him immediately with wholehearted repentance. If there's anything out of alignment in your worship of God or your love for other people, return to him immediately with wholehearted repentance.

Notice what he says in verse 12, yet even now, declares the Lord. Like when's now? Now is now, now is immediately, now is not yeah, I'll think about that. Now is not, I'll do that in a couple weeks. Now is not, yeah, I'll delay. Now is not, well, everybody has sin in their life and I can be disobedient for a little while. Now is now. Even now, declares the Lord, return to me. And then he says this, how should we return? Now return to the Lord, your God for he is... I'm sorry. Return to me with all your heart and with fasting, weeping and mourning. And then he says this, and rend your heart, rend means to tear, tear your heart and not your garments.

Now return to the Lord, your God for he is gracious and compassionate, right? That's what he says to do. Now, when we talk about repentance in church, here's what most people think, they don't like talking about repentance because they think that the pastor is talking about behavior and what the pastor is saying, be perfect for your heavenly father is perfect. And you have some bad behavior. You've been really naughty. So get rid of that bad behavior and start being really good. That's what

repentance says. Repentance has nothing to do with behavior.

That's right.

Behavior's a secondary issue, right? It's not behavioral, it's relational.

Repentance is not, I'm going to change my bad behavior so that Jesus and I are back in fellowship. Repentance is, I can't change who I am or I don't want to change who I am, but I believe that if I can be reconnected with Jesus, he can live his life in and through me perfectly. So repentance is not a call for you to change your behavior.

Repentance is an invitation back with the savior.

Amen.

Repentance is not something that non-believers do once, right? Repentance is an ongoing process in the life of a believer when they find themselves a living apart from Jesus, not wholly devoted in worship, not completely loving other people, not living the way that God would want. Here's the invitation, even now, immediately return to me.

Now here's how we have a problem with that. It doesn't work that way anywhere else in our culture. I mean, with the people that you offended the most, if they were like, "Hey, come on back." It's like, "No, no, thanks. I don't want to do that." Right? You offend your boss, you steal from your boss and your boss is like, "Hey, come on in my office." "No thanks." Right?

Here's the truth, Jesus knows everything you've done. He knows every way that you've sinned, it's not a surprise to him. And his invitation back is because he wants to restore relationship with you. I mean, just for comfort here, just to make everybody feel

comfortable, how many of you since being a believer have done something you wish you wouldn't have done, and if you could go back and relive it, you would do it differently? Just for comfort in the room. Okay. You see all the hands? The only reason people didn't raise their hand is because they were writing notes.

That's the only reason, right? I mean every one of us has one of those things. And here's the truth. When it comes to non-believers, we'll tell non-believers this all the time and it's completely true, no matter what you've done, no matter how desperately you've sinned, no matter how wicked you've been, Jesus Christ loves you with an unconditional love. He invites you into a relationship with him no matter what the sin, come on in. And that's true.

Yes.

Christians, the same is still true for you.

Amen.

Because here's what we do with Christians. Yeah, but you shouldn't have send that one, you should have known better. Since being a Christian you know that's a big one, that's a divorce one. Since being a Christian that's abortion, that's drunkenness, that's drug addiction, that's slander, that's whatever it was. Here's the truth, you can come back to God again.

Right.

Even now, right? That's the hope in the message and what was going on with God's covenant people then, which goes on with God's covenant people now is people

that have a relationship with Jesus are afraid to return to him because the devil's been lying so much telling you God can't use you anymore. You should have known better, live in your sin, live in your shame. And here's what God says. "No return to me. I'm inviting you back in. I want to reestablish relationship with you. Repentance is not getting your behave right, repentance is you can't get it right, but I can make it all right because that's the God that I am." Amen.

Amen.

And that's the invitation to all of us. There's nobody that gets left behind in this. Now how do we know that we can come with wholehearted repentance? That's what he says. Return to me with all your heart. All your heart is internal, it's a depth, right? He wants what's inside. Not what's outside. He's not looking for behavioral modifications. He's looking for your heart. And he says this, return with fasting, weeping and mourning. Well, what's fasting? Fasting is giving up food for a period of time to intentionally pursue the savior.

So think of fasting as intentional pursuit. Repentance is not, "Okay. The pastor caught me. I'm sorry. I repent." That's not repentance. Repentance is, I am coming back with you Jesus, and I am intentionally pursuing you. Okay? Coming back with what? Fasting, with weeping. Weeping is physical and emotional. Okay? Here's the question I have for you, rhetorical, when was the last time you wept over your sin? When was the last time that you realized that you are grievous in your sin and yet God is still completely loving, even though he hates and is angered by the sin you're committing, that he loves you like that.

And I'm not saying, I mean, some of you are more emotional than others. I'm not emotional and a big crier by nature. But I can tell you times where I spend time with the Lord, where I weep over my sin for realizing I've been drifting and didn't realize I was drifting and Jesus, I love you so much and I didn't even mean to do that. And it's so refreshing at the same time that it's so painful, knowing that I've been hurting my savior by my sin. So weepiness, weeping is physical, it's emotional. So come with fasting, come with weeping. Then what else Joel is saying and mourning.

Mourning means you lament your sin. You lament it. It means I'm tired of this. Repentance is not, "Yeah, I probably shouldn't do that now because I'm a Christian. I guess I won't do that anymore. I'm sorry. Jesus." That's not repentance, that's just behavioral modification that you don't give a rip about. Repentance is I want to change or Lord really don't want to change, but I know you want to change me so you have every part of me. That's repentance and I'm coming back to the Lord and letting him renew my heart and do with me whatever he would want to do.

It's relational. God wants a relationship with you. If all God cared was about behavioral modification, he would just give you a list of rules and he wouldn't have come into the world and died for your sin. He came on purpose to have a relationship with you, right? But here's the problem, how can we trust him? What if I come back and God's like, "Everybody else can come, but not, you look at what you did," right?

That's why Joel goes on to talk about God's character and how good he is, listen to what God's like. He says, and rend your heart and not your garments. That means

tear your heart, your internal and not your garments. And just a word on that. If you want to write this verse down, it's Psalms 34:18, because I know while some of you are listening to me, you're sitting there saying, "Well, this doesn't sound fun."

Like for me to weep, mourn and fast, that's not what I came to church on Mother's Day for. Like, "What's the joy in that?" Here's the joy in that, you want to hear the joy in that? The Lord is near to the broken hearted.

Amen.

And saves those who are crushed in spirit.

Amen.

I mean, if you would say, "I want to be near to Christ, I want to be near to the Lord, I want to be near to him." Do you realize that when you repent and you restore relationship with him, there's a nearness of Christ that's unlike any other time? That there's this invitation back. You want to be near to the Lord, come with humility and brokenness before him.

And how can you do that? Why can you do that? Because it tells us about his character. Notice this, now return to the Lord, your God for he is, listening to these words, gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding and loving kindness and relenting of evil.

What's it mean that God's gracious? What it means that God's gracious? It means that God's perfect. It means that God does whatever he wants. It means God doesn't treat you according to your sin. Remember the story in Luke chapter 15 of the



two prodigal sons, one stayed close to the father, one went off into a distant land. When the younger son gets to the end of his rope and decides to come back and see his father, the last time he left his father, he basically took all of his inheritance, went and blew it. Basically was him telling his dad off that I don't care about you. And when he came to his senses, he decided it'd be easier for me to be a slave in my dad's house than to just be out here on my own. So I'm at least going to go back to my dad.

And what's the next scene we see, he turns and comes to his father. Now Jesus was trying to tell the religious people today, here's what my dad's like, here's what he's like. Watch this scene. So the father that was offended by the son, the very next scene we see in the story is the father looking for his son and sprinting towards his son.

Now y'all know the end of the story. So it doesn't leave it as dramatic as if you would've heard it for the first time. But you think about this, the son offended his dad, went off and blew his entire inheritance. And the next scene in the story is the dad's sprinting towards his son. What's going to happen? I mean, I'm thinking the dad's going to kill his son, right? Or severely beat him or chastise him or tell him what a loser he is.

That's not what the father does. He sprints to him and he's compassionate. And he embraces him and he hugs him in all of his sin and he loves him and he cares for him. And he says, "My son is home," and kills the fatten calf, and throws a party, puts a ring on his finger, sandals on his feet. That's what our God's like. Amen.

Amen.

So when we're talking about repentance, we're talking about placing God first

and coming and rending our heart before the Lord. It's the same thing we read about in Zacharia 1:3, return to me and I'll return to you. There's an invitation. When we see tragedy in the world, that God is saying, "Hey church, come on back home. Your worship has been okay and your love for people has grown cold, but yet you're going through all the motions and you think that that's cool. I ain't cool with it. Come back to me. I want to be the one who lives my life in and through you. I want to restore your joy of your salvation. I want worship to be great. And I want your love for others to be great. And while you can't do that, I can definitely do that in and through, you come home."

And that's why Joel says, number three, how can we do it? We can rest in the goodness of his character. We can rest in the goodness of God's character. We've already talked about how he's gracious, he's all loving, he's all merciful. He'll never deal with you how you or sins deserve. Isn't that good news?

Yes.

No matter how much you offend God, he doesn't bring that up. He brought that up at the cross. When Jesus Christ said it is finished, it means it was paid in full. He dealt with all your sin. Meaning when you come back to him, he's not dealing with all your sin. He's dealing with your heart. He wants your relationship. That's what God wants. Isn't that good news today? Because there's some of you here that feel like you've... Okay. I know I'm a Christian, but I'm just going to keep quiet about all this sin because I know I'll get to heaven and I'll get through and I'll be forgiven. But for now, until I die, it's going to be miserable to be a Christian.

And there's empty seats in our church because some people have bought into that lie feel like, "I'm not welcome in church anymore. And God doesn't love me more." God dealt with all your sin at the cross. He's gracious and he's compassionate. He doesn't deal with sin, he deals with your heart. He's inviting you back into relationship. He's gracious and merciful. Amen.

Amen.

And notice this about God, he's slow to anger. He's slow to anger. Most people when they think about God's coming judgment, here's how they feel, they feel like God has a level of anger between zero and 10. And God's tapping his foot. He's been at about a six, in the '80s and '90s'. And now he's at about a 9.3. And when he hits 10, he's going to blow his top and just smoke the whole world.

Can I tell you, God's not like that. God is measured. God, the father set a date in the future that no one knows but him. And on that day he is going to pour out the fullness of his wrath and fury and anger on sinners. And until that time, do you know what God is doing? He's not tapping his foot and anger, he's tapping his foot waiting, patiently, hoping that none would perish, but that all would come to the knowledge of him. That's who our God is.

He is slow to anger. You're not getting under his skin, right? No matter how bad you've treated Christ, he still has a great love for you. Even if you're here today and you've never trusted in Jesus Christ, you think, "God must hate me." I got great news for you, God loved you so much he send his son to die in your place so that you could

live. And Jesus Christ rose from the dead to offer you life. And by simply admitting, you're a sinner and believing in him alone and trusting in him. You can have the fullness of your salvation, the forgiveness of your sins. That's the good news of the gospel. God is slow to anger and notice what it says.

It's the Old Testament foundation. He says, he's a bounding and loving and kindness. Your version may read steadfast love. It's God's hesed, covenantal love. It means no matter what, I'll never change my love for you. No matter how you treat me, I will always love you. Even if you offend me, I will love you. Even if you run away, I will love you because that's who I am. That's my character. I can't stop loving you.

That's why when I stand to the front of our church at the end of every service, and I say the three words, you are loved. It's based upon the authority of God's word. It doesn't mean you're likable, it doesn't mean you had a perfect week, it doesn't mean you're living for the Lord, it means based upon God's character, he can't stop loving you. It's who you are to him. Amen.

Amen.

Now, if that's God's character, why wouldn't you just want to run back to that? I mean, you can't get enough of this. This is the God of the universe that wants to display his goodness with you. And he's relenting from evil, which means even his plan to come and destroy Israel with a Northern Army. They're like, "Hey, maybe he'll relent of that. Maybe he won't do what he's doing." God's sovereign. God can do whatever he wants to do. However, he wants to do. And he's totally perfect in all of his ways,

even when we don't understand it. But God is a God who's relenting of evil. Now all these things are good. They're really good. But I had this question the other day at our first Tuesday prayer and I had two different people ask me on two different occasions. So I wanted to bring this question to you.

I wondered how you'd answer it. Because when the tragedy happened on Tuesday afternoon and we heard about the shooting and the one young man that lost his life, somebody asked me the question and all the details were rolling in and they still haven't all rolled in. But I made the assumption as in many shootings that the shooters were dead, that they didn't live. That's not the case. They were apprehended and arrested like they should have been. But the point is somebody asked me and then somebody else asked me, should we pray for the shooters? That God would be merciful to them?

Yes.

What would be your answer very loud? Should we?

Yes.

Of course, we should. Why? Because God is merciful and he's compassionate and he's a bounding and loving kindness and turns from evil. That's who he is. So do we pray for the victims family? Yes.

Yes.

Do we pray for those who were doing the evil? Yes.

Yes.

If that were my son who lost his life, I'd want to see justice completed, but I'd also want to see a higher court extend mercy to someone who's in need of the grace of the Lord, Jesus Christ and both are equally true. This is why Jonah had a hard time. Jonah knew the character of God, did you know that?

Jonah was called to Nineveh to go preach to the Ninevites. He hated the Ninevites. He thought they were evil, wicked people. So you know what he did. He hopped a boat and went in the exact opposite direction for Tarshish. So God had him swallowed by a fish. He was in the belly of the fish for three days, fish spits him out on land. He's like, "Fine. I'll go to Nineveh, and preach." He goes to Nineveh and preaches people to repent and guess what happens, nearly 120,000 people repent and give their lives to the covenant God.

Now you would think with the one of the largest revivals in old Testament history, Jonah would be fired up. That was not the case. In Jonah chapter three, verse nine. As the people are hearing the message they're saying to one another who knows, God may turn and relent and withdraw his burning anger so that we will not perish. We're hearing the message from the prophet, and we need to repent. And when God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked ways, then God relented concerning the calamity, which he had declared he would bring upon them and he did not do it.

So all these people repented and God didn't bring calamity to Nineveh. Jonah's fired up, right? He's pretty excited? But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry and he prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was this not what I said while

I was in my own country. Therefore, in order to forestall this, I fled the Tarshish, for I knew that you are gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant and loving and kindness and one who relents concerning calamity. I knew you would do that for those pagan people. I knew you would love them. That's why I didn't want to go preach to them. I didn't want to see them experience what I experienced."

And notice what he says in the next verse. I mean, it's hilarious that God can use somebody like this. It gives me great confidence. Therefore now, oh Lord, please take my life for me for death is better than my life. Kill me God. You're so good, I didn't want to see your goodness in other people. Like what should be our heart? Our heart should be drawing near to the Lord in such a way that we're experiencing his abundant compassion and mercy and loving kindness. And in such a way that we're displaying that and letting the world know there's a God and he's alive and he cares and he's all loving and he's all powerful. And he's calling you back home to be with him. Amen.

Amen.

That's the message. And how are people going to know that? Unless we're the ones living it out. If we're not fervent in our love for God and we're not fervent in our demonstration of love for one another, nobody sees that. That's why he says, realize the judgment that's coming is soon and final. So repent come back in relationship with me and then rest in the goodness of my character. And then he gives us a fourth way in Joel. Here's what he tells us to do once we're repentant. Once we're trusting that God is good. Then he says, this represent his holiness in your life and in community.

I mean, God wants you to represent the holiness that he has in your life and in the community in which you serve him, which is this church. Notice what he says. It's really interesting. I skipped over verse 14. He says this who knows whether or not he will turn and relent. Like we don't know God's sovereign. And then he says this and leave a blessing behind him. Even a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord, your God. He goes, who knows? God is so good and abundant that even though we're the ones who offended him, maybe he'll bless us in such a way that we can bring him a blessing. I mean, that's the way people should think. Isn't it good to know that even when you've rebelled against God and you've gone against him in every way that God can not only restore your life, he can redeem it in such a way that he can use you to bring blessings to him.

You guys aren't listening. I'm telling you as a Christian, one of the greatest things on the planet is knowing you can screw up your life. God's love for you is greater than whatever you've screwed up. Who knows? God may pour out so much blessing in your life. That in the way that you tried to screw it up, God will use that to bring even greater glory to himself. Is that not good news or what?

Yeah.

Religion teaches be from the time you were born until you die and then God will do good things in your life. And the fact that the Bible is nobody's done good. No, not one. The Bible is no matter how bad you tried to screw it up, God's still good. And can use a screw up like you, that relationship with Christ, God's inviting all of you. Whether



you know him or you've never trusted him back into relationship with himself. That's the joy of the Lord.

And then as we represent his holiness in life and community, this is why he goes on to say, blow a trumpet in Zion. There's a warning again. What's he want us to be aware of? He says this consecrate and fast proclaim, a solemn assembly, gather the people and sanctify the congregation. What's he calling for? He's calling for that community of people to come together fast, pray be consecrated. Consecrate means this. God, you have the entirety of my life. Do whatever you want with me today or tomorrow or the next day. My life, my life is now completely yours. Lord. I've been living for me over here in this area of my life or entirely. But Lord, I want you to know that anything I have all my resources, all my money, all my time, all my gifts, all my talents, they're all yours.

You use me however you want. He's saying call all the people together so that everybody in the congregation will consecrate themselves. Now, do you realize you can't make somebody consecrate themselves? I mean, if I had the power as a pastor to consecrate you, that would be awesome. I mean, if I had the power, like we could baptize you and you make you holy we'd sprinkle water on you all the time. I mean, if I had the power to say fast, we're going to make you a... I don't have power to do anything. You have to respond to what the Lord's calling you to do.

Right?

And this is not a rebuke to you as a congregation. I would say for us as a

congregation, we have a ton of people that come on Tuesday nights that come to our prayer and worship night, percentage wise, hundreds of people that come out, love that. But here's my question for you. If you don't come to prayer and worship night, which by the way is the most important meeting of the month. I schedule my vacations around it. I'm here. Let me tell you why the most important meeting of the month, because when God's people humble themselves and seek his face and pray, God does more than anything else that we could ever do. Right?

Right.

So here's my question. I'm not saying I get you have vacation times sometimes, I get there's times you miss, but if you consistently never come, here's my question based upon what the Lord will tell you, what in the world do you have going on in your life that's more important than seeking the face of God with the people in your community? And I'm not asking you as a pastor where you have to feel bad to talk to me because you don't, we can be good friends. Even if you never come. I'm talking about if Jesus Christ were here in all of his glory asking you, "Hey, what's more important than seeking me and loving your people?" What would you tell him? What do you got going on that's that important?

Because I can't find anything in my Bible that's more important than gathering with saints and seeking his face and loving one another. I can't find anything. But again, I can't make you, but I exhort you and I'm encouraging you. And even if you're like, "Well I've never even prayed out loud." It's cool. Just come, you can pray silently and we'll teach you how to pray out loud and it'll be great, but come and seek. And this is

what he was telling Israel. You want to see a difference in your land, gather up all the people who are called by my name and pray and seek my face.

You say, "Well who's invited?" And he tells us, he says, assemble the elders, those in charge, gather the children and the nursing infants, that's the youngest. Then he says this, really interesting. Let the bridegroom come out of his room and the bride out of her bridal chamber. Then you got understand, and at this time when people got married, they would be married, their honeymoon would last a year. You were not allowed to enlist in military service. A husband's job was to please his wife for the entire first year. Really cool honeymoon. Honeymoon's a year long, I vote for that. That's a good thing.

Here's what he's saying. This is so important that my people pray and seek my face right now in the midst of trial and tragedy and their culture that even if they just said their ideas at the altar, get the bridegroom and the bride at that prayer meeting, get them there it's that important. Get the elders, get the young kids, bring everybody together because I want to know that this group of people is actually seeking my face.

And notice what he calls the priests to do, those who are leading worship of the day. He said, and let the priests, the Lord's minister weep between the porch and the altar. Now I did some study on this. I'm not sure I get this right, but here's what I do know, between the porch and the altar, there was a ton of space, which means this, get all the priests there because the job of a priest was twofold. The job of the priest was to intercede for God's people, right? That was a job of a priest.

So whether the people were living for God or not, the priest was called to pray that they would be. And then the second job of the priest was to honor the Lord and walk in holiness. That was the job of the priest. If I could add a third, it would be proclaiming God's word faithfully. But first two were the job of a priest. Here's what he's saying. Get all the priests together, get all the priests interceding for all of God's people.

Now why was he having to tell him that? Because my guess is, at that time in Israel's history, much like today, many of the spiritual leaders don't pray for their people. And it's the most important thing that pastors can do is interceding for the saints. By the way, can I just give you another word, especially for those of you who write prayer requests, we pray for your prayer requests. We love praying for your prayer request, but I got to let you know. When I became a pastor, I didn't get a special hotline to God. Like I don't have any more access to God than you do.

Like we all have access to God through one mediator to God, man, Jesus Christ, which means this, Jesus lives to intercede for us. Here's the question, are you interceding for all the saints in our church? Because we usually do a good job of interceding when things are bad. Somebody's marriage is about ready to break up, we intercede really hard. Somebody's got a physical ailment, they're about ready to die, we pray really hard. Somebody's got a challenge at work, they have no money, we pray really hard. And by the way we should. But how about when the marriage is going well? How about when the kids aren't wayward? How about when health is okay? Do we still pray that God will continue to do his work and establish it?

Are we interceding for the saints? Are we as a group walking in holiness?

Because sometimes people think, "Well, the pastor's supposed to be holy." I'm not a pastor, I don't wear a clergy collar. I don't wear a clergy collar either. I'm just telling you, some people have the view that the pastor's job, it's all of our job to walk in holiness and it's all of our job to pray for one another. And if God's people would walk in holiness and pray for one another, it allows God to do things that God otherwise doesn't do. It doesn't limit God. God's sovereign. God can do whatever he wants to do. But God's design was always to live through his people so that name would be great through his people.

So he's inviting the priests to come and he's probably saying most priests don't pray. So bring all of them because there's plenty of room for all the priests who are going to pray for the people and let them weep, let them be bothered by what they see in the culture. And let them say this, spare your people oh Lord. Means intercede for God's people to be the way God wants them to be and do not make your inheritance a reproach, a by word among the nations.

Why should they among the people say, where is their God? Here's what we're doing, we're making an appeal to God that he would uphold his covenant and not abandon us. We are praying in such a way that when the world sees tragedy, that they don't look on at us and say, "Where's your God. I don't see you guys worship any different than I do. I don't see your love for people any different than I got. There's really no God in the world."

They're praying that they would see a community of people that worship the Lord so much that are heartbroken by the tragedy that they see in the culture and genuinely want to be the hands and feet of Jesus to the culture because they know that being the hands and feet of Jesus to the culture is the way that the light of God gets sent out into the world. Amen.

Amen.

And so that's what God is calling all of us to do. And you say, "Well, why all this and why all this on Mother's Day?" Because this is right where we're living as a culture because what you're going to hear and you've already started hearing, I'm sure if you watch the news, which I've stopped doing. But if you do, you're going to hear all solutions that will stop these problems.

And I don't care what side of the political aisle you sit on. If you want to know which one, just come ask me, I'll tell you, but I don't care. At the end of the day, I don't care what your view is on guns. That won't change people. I don't care what your view is on education, that won't change people. Here's the only way tragedies will ever stop in our culture. If sin is eradicated in the heart of man and people worship the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Amen.

And the only hope for that is the church. So here's the promise. You want to hear the promise? I mean, I wish I had time to preach this whole text today, I don't. But if you flip over to Joel Chapter Two and verse 25, here's what God promises. If people

are repentant and trusting in his goodness and living out holy lives and community and loving and praying for one another, here's what he says. Then I will make up for you the years that the swarming locust have eaten. Isn't that good news? You see how bad at it's been, you see how awful it's been, I'll make up whatever happened to you. And he talks about the swarming locust have eaten, the creeping locust, the stripping locust and the [inaudible 00:43:04] locust, my great army, which I sent among you.

In other words, I was sovereign overall, but you didn't even know there were that many locust, did you? You would, if they ate all your crops, right? You're aware of the pain in your own life. And you're aware of all the different ways that pain happens. And here's what the Lord says. No matter how many years or how much time it's taken to get to the spot that you've gotten to. And no matter how dark it ever gets, I can change all the years that the locust have eaten, meaning all the time that was spent going bad. In a moment I can flip a switch and make it go my way all over again. That's what I do. I am a Lord. Amen.

Amen.

And here's what that means. Christians, you need to pay attention to this is a big deal. Most of us as Christians, we lose our faith in times of trial. And here's what we say. "I know it's bad, but one day God's going to make it all right." He will. But here's what we tend to say that for because we're living in fear and we say this, there's no way he can make it good now. On the authority of God's, he could totally make it good now. If all God's people would be repentant in relationship with him, trusting his goodness and walking out in holiness and praying for one another, God can do

supernaturally more than ever you could ask or imagine. Amen.

Amen.

And that's what he's talking about. And that's why we got to be careful with Old Testament promises that we're given to Israel because America is not Israel. God didn't make a promise to America, but here's what he made to his covenant people. In II Chronicle, 7:14, you're familiar with this. He said of my people who are called by my name, my covenant people, the ones that I know, that would be all believers in Christ, humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways. Then what will he do? Then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.

That's the promise. Now who's the promise too. The promise promises to the church, the promise is to God's people. You see tragedy in society, we can't change tragedy in society. Jesus said in this world, you will have tribulations, but take heart I've overcome the world. Here's what we can change, as individuals and as a community of people, we can say, God, you are worthy of being sought and I repent and restore my relationship with you. And I trust in your goodness, and I'm walking out your holiness and God, now I'm praying and I'm seeking your face and I'm being humble and I'm turning for my wicked ways. And Lord, we're doing this as a community. Here's what God says, "You do that, I'll do all the work out there."

I'm the one that saves people. I'm the one that redeems people. I'm the one that changes cities, nations and the world. Here's what I believe as your pastor



wholeheartedly, Jesus Christ can change the city of Denver, that Jesus Christ can change the state of Colorado. That Jesus Christ can change the United States of America. Why? Because he says this, righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is an abomination to any people. It's interesting when you see crisis in the world, what does God say? I'm talking to my people.

Meaning in I Peter, we're going to see in a few weeks, I Peter four judgment begins at the house of God. I mean, God's talking to us and saying, well, you may not have had any responsibility for any of the tragedies you see, here's the truth, if your worship for me and your love for other people, aren't good, I'm not able to do what I want to do through you. So will you please return to me so that I can live my life through you? And if individually and collectively we do that, God can and will change our world in our generation. Amen and amen.

Would you stand with me as we pray? Just want to give you the opportunity to trust Jesus Christ as your Lord. And for those of you who know him, if there's any area in your life where the Lord's been poking on an area where you're not living holy, this is just your time to say, Lord, I give you my life. I repent. I may not even want to change, but God, I want to do what you want me to do.

So Lord, we come before you right now. And if you're here today and have never trusted Jesus, here's how you can pray, Lord Jesus, I know I'm a sinner and separated from you, but I believe you died the cross for my sins and rose from the dead. Right now I confess you as my personal Lord and savior. Come into my life and change me. And Lord for the rest of us, we're believers. We love you and we thank

you for your love for us. But Lord, you may have been showing us some things today during this message that are out of a line with you. Lord, you may have even shown us that we've been blaming the world when we ourselves aren't even worshiping you and loving your people. Lord, forgive us and have mercy on us according to your loving kindness.

Do not give us what we deserve, but give us your grace. And Lord, may we walk in your holiness. We repent of any of those things you show us and Lord bring us your peace, your peace individually, your peace collectively. Lord, let us have peace with you and Lord, we trust that you're going to do a great work in our city, nation, and world for your glory. Amen and amen.

Amen.