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Book of Joel

“Which Way are you Looking?”
Joel 2:28-32

I have noticed a trend in current pop culture – which I call the “look inside” trend. Let me illustrate it for you. A current movie is Percy Jackson and the Olympians. Percy is a normal teenager who discovers that deep inside - he is really the son of Poseidon, God of the Sea – he is a demigod. Another example: Harry Potter was a sad orphan, but he found deep inside that he was really a powerful wizard. Another: In the popular book series “Eragon,” Eragon is a poor peasant boy who found that deep inside he was actually the last Dragon Rider. One more - the movie Sky High was about teenagers who discover they are children of superheroes with special powers – the powers were deep inside, waiting to be discovered. I could go on and on, but do you see the philosophy? The anthropology? The message is that deep down inside you is the superhero person you have always wanted to be.

Now every person has worth and value as they reflect the image of God. Everyone has been given some talent and gifts from God. But, what we have seen so far in the book of Joel is the opposite of the world’s philosophy. We have learned that when God looks inside of us – he does not find a latent superhero. What does He see? Sin; and makes him what? Angry. When God looks inside us it is not a pleasant experience – he sees what the Prophet Jeremiah saw, **“The heart is deceitful, and desperately wicked?” (Jer. 29:17).** God sees what Paul described as **“all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; gossip, slander, insolence, arrogance, boasting, evil intentions, disobedience, etc., etc., etc., (Romans**

1:29-31). Therefore, Paul says, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men...” (Romans 1:18).

The problem we have with sin - is like the problem of the sugary breakfast cereals I sometimes buy for my children. Where do they look for the prize some offer? Inside – the treasure is inside. But, my wife professes that what is inside (prize or not) is not good for you. It may taste good, and look good – but it is not healthy. Just like sin may look good and taste good – but it is not good. But, I still buy the cereal arguing, for example, that Cookie Crisp contains: “Whole grain and...it is a good source of Calcium and Vitamin D.” Aren’t those good things? But Tammy tells me it does not take a degree in nutritional science to see that cookies are not a good breakfast option. There is nothing good in there! And, likewise, it does not take a degree in theology to agree with Paul that: “Nothing good dwells in you.” (Romans 7:18)

If you are looking for some help and assistance in your life – where do you look? The world says, “look inside.” But the Bible is going to have a very different answer. Turn with me to Joel Chapter 2:28-32. Where do we look? Joel is going to tell us to look up, look out and then look at Him.

Look UP (28-29)

First we look up. Question – Where is Jesus today? He has ascended and is at the right hand of the Father in heaven. So, if you need help, don’t look down, look up. Peter says in his sermon in Acts chapter 2: [Acts 2:32](#) “This Jesus God raised up again, to which we are all witnesses. [Acts 2:33](#) “Therefore having been exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He has poured forth this which you both see and hear. Now you may not be aware of it, but Peter is preaching on the day of

Pentecost, the day God's Spirit was sent down from heaven to earth. And Peter quotes our passage, all five verses. God has sent a powerful helper to us.

[Joel 2:28](#) "It will come about after this That I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; And your sons and daughters will prophesy, Your old men will dream dreams, Your young men will see visions. Joel is looking forward in time to the Day of Pentecost – we are looking back on that day – when God poured out spirit. The prophet is saying that the Spirit will at that time be available to everyone – children, adults and the elderly. And with the Spirit comes revelation. The older people (who enjoy their sleep) will dream dreams. The young men who are leading the people into the future will have visions. The children, who have the least knowledge, will prophecy the truth of God.

Joel continues: [Joel 2:29](#) "Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My Spirit in those days. This is an awesome verse of grace. Who did the Spirit of God visit, or come upon in the Old Testament? The elite – the prophets, the priests and Kings. But Joel saw the day when the Spirit of God would come - not only be all ages, but to people of all socio-economic levels. Joel predicts our age of grace where Paul would say: [Gal. 3:28](#) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

The Spirit comes to help us. To help us live a life pleasing to God. Jesus said: [John 14:16](#) "And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever. So, don't look inside for help – look up. Look to Spirit poured out from heaven who will help you and be with you forever.

When I was about 19 years old I was on my way back to college when my tire blew out. So I called out to my father for help, and my Dad came to rescue me and we got a new tire. That is like the Old Testament. The Spirit would come when the people were in trouble and

the leave again. But today I have a AAA card – that is with me 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Just like now the Holy Spirit goes with you wherever you go, and is there to help you live in a manner pleasing to God.

Look OUT (30-31)

We look up to God for help. But, Joel also says to **Look Out!** Because the Day of the Lord is still coming. Verse 30: [Joel 2:30](#) “I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, Blood, fire and columns of smoke. Joel says – don’t get too excited just yet – hold those horses! Remember the locusts? Remember the destructive army? Remember God’s wrath?

In the Old Testament “blood and fire” refer to warfare. For example: [Is. 26:11](#) O LORD, Your hand is lifted up...indeed, fire will devour Your enemies. In chapter one (v19) we heard, To You, O LORD, I cry; for fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field. And 2:3 of the army: fire consumes before them, and behind them a flame burns. Fire is a symbol of God’s judgment – that ultimately is seen in where? In the fires that will never be quenched, the fires of hell.

The columns of smoke here may refer to the smoke of the fire (of burning villages), or more likely to God’s presence in the destruction, like God said to Moses [Ex 19:9](#): “Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever.”

[Joel 2:31a](#) “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes. The blocking out of the sun is probably a total eclipse which as you can imagine terrified ancient people who did not understand such things and it was a symbol for judgment. The prophet Amos said (5:20): “Will not the day of the LORD be darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it? The moon turning to

blood is often associated in the Bible to earthquakes. [Rev. 6:12](#) I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and...the whole moon became like blood.

Remember Joel is looking into the future. In the present – the people are reeling from the devastation of the locusts. Everything else is in the future for them. God says, through Joel, “If you take the locust seriously and get right before God, then I will restore your land, and then one day I will send My Spirit.” But Joel says, “look out now” - don’t celebrate God’s goodness, until you know that God’s wrath and judgment have been taken care of. Which leads to the third point in our text this morning, where God says, “Look at me!”

Look at ME! (2:32)

My mom used to say, “Craig look at me when I am talking to you. Right here.” And now I say that to my kids. The LORD God of Israel through his prophet says to the people, “Hey there – look at me.” Here is the key verse of our passage: [Joel 2:32](#) “And it will come about that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Will be delivered; For on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem There will be those who escape, As the LORD has said, Even among the survivors whom the LORD calls. Joel says, “Over here! Call on the name of the LORD.” To call on the name of the LORD mean to approach Him for help. And then what? Three key words: (1) Then you will be Delivered / saved (2) then you will escape be rescued from the destruction and (3) you will be a survivor. You will live.

I want to end by asking you to consider the question, “Why wouldn’t you cry out to God to be saved?” Why wouldn’t you want to become a Christian? And if you are a Christian why wouldn’t you go to Christ with your problems and fears?

I think there could be many reasons. Let me share two. First, to call upon another for help, means you have confess their superiority and your weakness. We just don’t like to do

that because of our pride. With the men this past Wednesday we talked about Psalm 23 – one of the most popular passages in the Bible. And I asked, “Why do you think Psalm 23 is so popular?” One reason we talked about was because it is a pretty good deal for us – still waters, green grass, comforting rod and staff, fearing no evil. That is good news! But the benefits only come if we understand the first line of that Psalm which is what? “The Lord is my Shepherd.” We don’t call on the name of the Lord because we don’t want to admit we are a sheep. We don’t want to confess that we are not important. We are weak. We are dumb. We are very, very limited in our understanding. If you call God’s name, you are admitting you need Him, that you can’t look inside any more for the answers. You’ve tried that and it hasn’t worked.

Another reason we don’t call on the name of the Lord is because of unanswered questions, or fear. Some of you have doubts about God, and the whole Christian thing. Or, you believe in God, but you are not sure about Jesus. I still don’t understand this or that. You are not sure about the Bible, or you don’t understand the Trinity. Many people don’t call out to God, because they don’t feel they are ready to call. Because of unanswered questions. Now some questions you can get answers to if you really want them. Talk with me, or one of the elders. But let me remind you that faith is believing in things we do not see. Faith is stepping out without all the answered. I still have many unanswered questions, and yet we are called to live by faith.

Some of us don’t or won’t call on the name of the Lord because we don’t want to confess that we are weak, the answer is not inside. And also, because we don’t feel we are ready and have too many questions. I’d like to conclude and challenge you with this poem entitled “help” by Shel Silverstein.

HELP

I walked through the wildwood, and what did I see
But a unicorn with his horn stuck in a tree,
Cryin', "Someone please help me before it's too late."
I hollered, "I'll free you." He hollered back, "Wait--
How much will it hurt? How long will it take?
Are you sure that my horn will not scratch, bend, or break?
How hard will you pull? How much must I pay?
Must you do it right now or is Wednesday okay?
Have you done this before? Do you have the right tools?
Have you graduated from horn-savin' school?
Will I owe you a favor? And what will it be?
Do you promise that you will not damage the tree?
Should I close my eyes? Should I sit down or stand?
Do you have insurance? Have you washed your hands?
And after you free me--tell me what then?
Can you guarantee I won't get stuck again?
Tell me when. Tell me how.
Tell me why. Tell me where...."

I guess that that unicorn is still standin' there.

Where are you looking for help? Are you looking to yourself? You can't free your own horn from the tree of sin, you are stuck Like Cookie Crisp – sin tastes good, but it is not good for you. Help will have to come from outside. You've got to admit that at least. Look up – God can help you – he can save you. He is ready to give you His Spirit! You've got questions. Ok – but make sure those are not just an excuse. And look out – because you don't have much time to decide – God's judgment will come upon sin. So look to Him and call on his name. Let God help you this morning. Come to him with the faith you have – even with unanswered questions, and He will save you.