

**Victoria Ave/Emmanuel Baptist**

**Sunday, June 21, 2020**

**JOEL: WHAT'S IN A NAME?**

**Joel 1:1**

Famine and plague. Civil unrest. Political and financial uncertainty. Public and personal fear. Disease and plague. Does this sound familiar? It should – it is the times that we are living in.

We may think that we are living through unprecedented times. Everything has changed. Even the simple things seem complicated. The things we use to enjoy now bring unrest and stress. Just the other day I went for groceries and had to wait in a line with other people. Once my turn came around, I sanitized my hands, grabbed by sanitized cart and started following the arrows on the floor to get in and get out. I was watching how close I was to other people. I wondered if the items I was looking for would be on the shelves...and heaven forbid the tickle in my throat got any worse and I had to cough. I took a picture with my phone and posted it to Facebook with the caption: “Remember when spending money was easy!” Our family often went to the mall to walk around or to the local Walmart. Strangely, this was comforting or a way to relax. We many not have needed much but it was a distraction. Now it is a chore and stressful to go out and do the mundane. We long for normal!

How quickly we forget that many of our experiences are not unique in history. Names, dates, and circumstances have changed but the experiences have been similar.

Today we begin a new series on the Book of Joel. I am going to take a wild guess that many have never spent much time in this Old Testament book. I hope that you will find comfort in this minor prophet book. We will see that God is still working through our complicated world the same way that he did in the ancient past. The message of the book is also one of HOPE, hope that we can hold on to in the uncertainties of our present as we look to what the future holds.

Our scripture lesson is quite simple and short today. I would like you to read with me Joel 1:1:

***1 The LORD gave this message to Joel son of Pethuel.***

## THE BOOK

As I mentioned, we are beginning a series looking at the message found in the Book of Joel.

Joel is found in the Old Testament and part of the section we have called the "minor prophets." The term "minor" has nothing to do with the importance of the prophet, the message or the book. "Minor" has to do with size of the books. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel are good size books and are part of a classification called "Major" prophets. It is actually quite sad that many in our churches will often skip the prophets all together. I have heard some say that they are "New Testament" Christians and like to stay, for the most part, in the New Testament books. After all, in the New Testament we have Jesus and the resurrection. As 2 Timothy 3:16 tells us:

***All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right (NLT).***

When Paul wrote this to his young disciple, "scripture" referred to the 39 books that we have today. By Jesus' time, the OT Scriptures were firmly established as we have them today (though in different order of books). To elevate one section of the Bible over another is to miss the point of what God is teaching us and how it is taught. We need to have a working knowledge of the Old Testament writings to properly understand the teachings of the New. As the classic song states about "love and marriage"... "you can't have one without the other!"

## WHEN?

So, when was Joel written? The scholarly answer is...we don't really know? Joel doesn't give us much to determine this? Many of the books of

the Bible will give us historical data...names of Kings, battles and events that were happening at the time. Joel does none of these things. We can be fairly confident the prophet's message was given after the Israelite civil war. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom split over who would be king. The northern kingdom was called Israel and had the capital city of Samaria. The southern kingdom was named Judah and had the capital city of Jerusalem. Israel was much more delinquent than the southern kingdom and ended up in captivity earlier than (by about 100 years). The book gives reference to Israel already being in captivity – Joel's message was aimed at the southern Kingdom of Judah.

WHO?

If we don't know an exact time the book was written...what do we know about the prophet himself?

The honest answer is...even less. All we know is that the prophet is named Joel and his father's name is Pethuel. Joel literally means "Yahweh is God" and his father's name means "youth of/belonging to God."

SO WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

Right now you may be asking why any of this is important. As a pastor, I believe that the more you know about scripture, the better chance you have of understanding the message. Sure...we can read the Bible on a surface level and understand certain messages...but shouldn't we want MORE? I loved learning Greek and Hebrew! It was hard, it took a lot of work... but it opened up a whole new level of understanding of who God is and the message of the Bible. I once had a parishioner ask me if she had to know Hebrew and Greek to truly understand the message of the Bible and my answer was YES. We are dealing with ancient literature written in an ancient language for an ancient people and their culture. If we fully want to know the meaning then we need to know as much about it as possible.

The reality is 99% of Christians won't learn ancient languages...but there are tools and resources out there to allow us to dig deeper. It is why every Christian should be involved in Bible studies and the importance of learning

and study. The better you know your Bibles, the less likely you are to be led astray by the multitudes of false teachers who seek to lead us from the truths of God. When you seek to understand the written word of God, watch and see how your relationship with God will grow deeper!

## THE MESSAGE GIVER

The most important part of Joel 1:1 is the fact that it tells us WHO is giving the message.

### ***The LORD gave this message...***

Once again you might be rolling your eyes and saying, "Yes, I can read...it was the Lord! So...." And once again I will encourage you to take note of the small things. Who gave the message? It wasn't the "Lord" but it was the "LORD"! The distinction is in the fact that God's name is written in capital letters. Have you ever noticed that it changes throughout scripture?

There is a significant, specific characteristic intended when you read "LORD." God has many names and the most significant one is what is represented by LORD written in all capitals. This lets us in on the fact that the one giving the message is "Yahweh." This is the name given to Moses from the burning bush encounter when he asked God "When Pharaoh asks who is sending me?" and God responds, "Tell him "I AM" sent you." (Ex. 3-4).

This is considered the proper, holy name of God. It is so holy that even today, Jewish people will not say it. In Hebrew class, if we came to the name Yahweh, we would substitute the name "Adonai" for it out of respect for the tradition. LORD (Yahweh) is a personal, intimate name, whereas "Lord" indicates a hierarchy and a power structure such as "Lord and master" or "Lord of the land." If we think government, there is still a House of Lords and a House of Commons...a distinction of social dynamic.

The message giver is the God of the Covenant. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God who is the keeper of promises. It may seem insignificant...but it matters. When the people, at the time, heard that the message was coming from Yahweh...it meant something significant. It meant that the message could be trusted, and that God was there with them.

#### FOR US TODAY

In the coming weeks, I encourage you to read Joel completely each week. We will see the importance of the message from God given through the prophet Joel. It is a message given to King and commoner, to the mover and shaker and to the everyman. Yahweh, for us today, is still vitally important, but I believe that we now understand this God of intimate relationships through the name Jesus. It is a name that should be held reverently. It is why we need to be more careful how we use the name. Popular use has our Saviour being an expression of indignance, disgust, or surprise. It is often considered a type of expletive. But the name of Jesus is the name:

***There is salvation in no one else! God has given no other name under heaven by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)***

And we are told that:

***<sup>9</sup> Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,  
<sup>10</sup> that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup> and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2:9-11)***