

From Ashes to Glory

First Presbyterian Church of Bakersfield
2025 Lenten Sermon Series Study Guide

FROM ASHES TO GLORY

SERMON SERIES DATES	PASSAGE	GOSPEL PRIORITIES
Week One 3/9/2025	Joel 1:1-20	Alas...
Week Two 3/16/2025	Joel 2:1-17	Rend Your Hearts
Week Three 3/23/2025	Joel 2:18-27	I Will Repay You
Week Four 3/30/2025	Joel 2:28-32	I Will Pour Out My Spirit
Week Five 4/6/2025	Joel 3:1-21	The Lord Dwells in Zion

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Week One: Alas...

OPENING:

- To get a little more insight into the book of Joel, take a few minutes to watch The Bible Project's summary of the book found [here](#). (or search "Joel Bible Project" on youtube)
- Give a weather forecast depicting your past week. What type of conditions have you been experiencing? (e.g. storm brewing; calm, sunny skies; cloudy and cold)

STUDY:

- Read Joel 1:1-12.
- Who is Joel addressing and what are his instructions for them in verses 1-3? Why?
- What is Joel alluding to in verse 4? (Read Exodus 10:13-20 for background.)
- Take 5 minutes and work in partners or triads to paraphrase or summarize the following sections in one or two sentences. 1.) **Joel 1:1-4** 2.) **Joel 1:5-7** 3.) **Joel 1:8-12** (Use modern day language. Share out with the whole group.)
- Clearly Joel and the people of Israel are in deep despair. Joel uses very strong emotional language at the end of verse 12. Have you ever felt like your joy has withered away? What or who has helped you overcome your despair?
- Read Joel 1:13-20. Joel is calling the Israelites to action. What verbs does he use in his call to repentance? (vs. 13-14)
- Verse 16-20 give more examples of despair the Israelites are facing. List the examples of their suffering.
- Why do you think Joel 1 - a chapter of great despair - is even included in the Bible?
- How does reading Joel 1 help you in your suffering and despair/dark times?

PRAY:

- Share your suffering with one another and pray that the Lord can guide you to joy and gladness even in the midst of your suffering. Pray "alas for that day" when the Lord comes and fulfills all of his promises.

Joel 1:1-20 (NIV)

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel son of Pethuel.

An Invasion of Locusts

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 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.

8 Mourn like a virgin in sackcloth
grieving for the betrothed of her
youth.

9 Grain offerings and drink
offerings
are cut off from the house of the
Lord.

The priests are in mourning,
those who minister before the
Lord.

10 The fields are ruined,
the ground is dried up;
the grain is destroyed,
the new wine is dried up,
the olive oil fails.

11 Despair, you farmers,
wail, you vine growers;
grieve for the wheat and the barley,
because the harvest of the field is
destroyed.

12 The vine is dried up
and the fig tree is withered;
the pomegranate, the palm and the
apple tree—
all the trees of the field—are
dried up.
Surely the people's joy
is withered away.

A Call to Lamentation

13 Put on sackcloth, you priests,
and mourn;
wail, you who minister before the
altar.

Come, spend the night in sackcloth,
you who minister before my God;
for the grain offerings and drink
offerings
are withheld from the house of
your God.

14 Declare a holy fast;
call a sacred assembly.

Summon the elders
and all who live in the land
to the house of the Lord your God,
and cry out to the Lord.

15 Alas for that day!
For the day of the Lord is near;
it will come like destruction from
the Almighty.

16 Has not the food been cut off
before our very eyes—
joy and gladness
from the house of our God?

17 The seeds are shriveled
beneath the clods.
The storehouses are in ruins,
the granaries have been broken
down,

for the grain has dried up.
18 How the cattle moan!
The herds mill about
because they have no pasture;
even the flocks of sheep are
suffering.

19 To you, Lord, I call,
for fire has devoured the pastures
in the wilderness
and flames have burned up all
the trees of the field.

20 Even the wild animals pant for
you;
the streams of water have dried
up
and fire has devoured the
pastures in the wilderness.

Week Two: Rend Your Hearts

OPENING:

- What is your personal experience with one or more of these words: **fasting, weeping, mourning**? Can you think of a time when you actively engaged in one of them? What effect did it have on you?

STUDY:

- Read Joel 2:1-11.
- According to verses 1-2 what is coming, what is the overall tone or mood about it, and what images does Joel use to get this point across?
- Using verses 3-10 describe the army. What does it look like? Sound like? Feel like?
- What is the Earth's response to this army? (vs. 10)
- What is the Lord's role in this army? (vs. 11) What is the "day of the Lord" and why is it dreadful?
- Now read Joel 2:12-17.
- How does the tone of these verses contrast verses 1-11?
- What does the Lord ask of the people?
- What actions does Joel tell the people to make?
- How does Joel describe the Lord in these verses? How does this description compare/contrast to the description of the army and the Lord in the first half of the chapter?
- What does it mean to "rend your heart" to the Lord? How does one do this? Is it something you do once or multiple times?
- How do fasting, weeping and mourning play into your everyday spiritual life? Do you think these actions should play a role in modern Christianity? Why or why not? And if so, how?

PRAY:

- Spend time "rending your hearts" to the Lord. Ask the Lord to reveal his grace, compassion, and love to you. Pray for a blessing over one another.

Joel 2:1-17 (NIV)

An Army of Locusts

*1 Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy hill.*

*Let all who live in the land tremble,
for the day of the Lord is coming.
It is close at hand—*

*2 a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness.*

*Like dawn spreading across the mountains
a large and mighty army comes,
such as never was in ancient times
nor ever will be in ages to come.*

*3 Before them fire devours,
behind them a flame blazes.
Before them the land is like the garden of Eden,
behind them, a desert waste—
nothing escapes them.*

*4 They have the appearance of horses;
they gallop along like cavalry.*

*5 With a noise like that of chariots
they leap over the mountaintops,
like a crackling fire consuming stubble,
like a mighty army drawn up for battle.*

*6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish;
every face turns pale.*

*7 They charge like warriors;
they scale walls like soldiers.
They all march in line,
not swerving from their course.*

*8 They do not jostle each other;
each marches straight ahead.
They plunge through defenses
without breaking ranks.*

*9 They rush upon the city;
they run along the wall.
They climb into the houses;
like thieves they enter through the windows.*

*10 Before them the earth shakes,
the heavens tremble,
the sun and moon are darkened,
and the stars no longer shine.*

*11 The Lord thunders
at the head of his army;
his forces are beyond number,
and mighty is the army that obeys his command.
The day of the Lord is great;
it is dreadful.
Who can endure it?*

Rend Your Heart

*12 "Even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting and weeping and mourning."*

*13 Rend your heart
and not your garments.
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and compassionate,
slow to anger and abounding in love,
and he relents from sending calamity.*

*14 Who knows? He may turn
and relent
and leave behind a blessing—
grain offerings and drink offerings
for the Lord your God.*

*15 Blow the trumpet in Zion,
declare a holy fast,
call a sacred assembly.*

*16 Gather the people,
consecrate the assembly;
bring together the elders,
gather the children,
those nursing at the breast.*

*Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her chamber.*

*17 Let the priests, who minister before the Lord,
weep between the portico and the altar.*

*Let them say, "Spare your people, Lord.
Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn,
a byword among the nations.
Why should they say among the peoples,
'Where is their God?'"*

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Week Three: I Will Repay You

OPENING:

- Think of a time in history, a book, movie, or TV show that depicts great hardship or loss. What words or imagery come to mind to describe this period/time/event?

STUDY:

- Read Joel 2:18-27
- Make a 3 column chart. Using only the text of Joel 2:18-27 - fill in the following headings and compile a list. (*Take special note of repeated words/phrases in the text.*) Then talk about what stands out to you.

- 1) The actions of the Lord
- 2) The good things that are coming/ happening
- 3) Commands/actions/emotions of the people

- Compare & contrast the tone of Joel 1:1-2:17 with the tone of these verses. What do you notice?
- Reread verse 21. Have you been struggling with fear lately? If you are comfortable, share your fear with the group.
- What great things has the Lord done in your life? How can reflecting on these things help you not be afraid?
- What can you do this week to be in a mindset of rejoicing and being glad in the Lord?

PRAY:

- Pray for the Lord to help you not be afraid. Ask Him to meet you in your hardship and bring you out of it. Thank Him for the great things he has already done.

Joel 2:18-27 (NIV)

The Lord's Answer

18 Then the Lord was jealous for his land and took pity on his people.

19 The Lord replied to them:

"I am sending you grain, new wine and olive oil, enough to satisfy you fully; never again will I make you an object of scorn to the nations.

20 *"I will drive the northern horde far from you, pushing it into a parched and barren land; its eastern ranks will drown in the Dead Sea and its western ranks in the Mediterranean Sea. And its stench will go up; its smell will rise."*

Surely he has done great things!

21 *Do not be afraid, land of Judah; be glad and rejoice.*

Surely the Lord has done great things!

22 *Do not be afraid, you wild animals, for the pastures in the wilderness are becoming green.*

The trees are bearing their fruit; the fig tree and the vine yield their riches.

23 *Be glad, people of Zion, rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the autumn rains because he is faithful.*

He sends you abundant showers, both autumn and spring rains, as before.

24 *The threshing floors will be filled with grain; the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.*

25 *"I will repay you for the years the locusts have eaten—*

the great locust and the young locust, the other locusts and the locust swarm— my great army that I sent among you.

26 *You will have plenty to eat, until you are full, and you will praise the name of the Lord your God, who has worked wonders for you; never again will my people be shamed.*

27 *Then you will know that I am in Israel, that I am the Lord your God, and that there is no other; never again will my people be shamed.*

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Week Four: I Will Pour Out My Spirit

OPENING

- If your mood were a color today, what color would you be? Share why, if you feel comfortable.
- How can something be both great and dreadful? Can you think of an example?

STUDY

- Read Joel 2:28-32
- When is “afterward”? Could afterward include today?
- Pull out all of the verbs or actions of the Lord in these verses. What do you notice?
- How do you think the people of Joel’s time would respond to the Lord “pouring out His spirit”? What meaning would this have had to them in Old Testament times?
- Is this “pouring out His spirit” still applicable for today and if so, what does it look like?
- Who are these promises for? What conclusions can you make based on the people groups listed?
- How does this “Day of the Lord” compare/contrast to the Day of the Lord listed in verse 2:1-11?
- What is the outcome of this outpouring as described in verse 32?
- How do these verses give you hope?

PRAY

- Thank God for calling you and saving you; thank Him for delivering you and for all of the blessings in your life. Pray that the Lord would continue to pour out His spirit on you. *(Note: if you are unsure that God’s Spirit is in you, could this be a good time for you to “call on the name of the Lord”?)*

Joel 2:28-32 (NIV)

The Day of the Lord

28 *“And afterward,
I will pour out my Spirit on all
people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your old men will dream dreams,
your young men will see visions.
29 Even on my servants, both men and
women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those
days.
30 I will show wonders in the heavens
and on the earth,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
31 The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and
dreadful day of the Lord.
32 And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be
saved;
for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem
there will be deliverance,
as the Lord has said,
even among the survivors
whom the Lord calls.*

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Week Five: The Lord Dwells in Zion

OPENING

- Use one word or phrase to describe your previous week.
- Define the following terms: **judgement; restoration; justice; mercy.** How do you think these terms are related? Which term is easiest for you to relate to your image of God? Why?

STUDY

- Read Joel 3:1-16.
- Outline these verses in a journalist style - finding the 5 W's and 1 H: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How?
- How do you respond to the words in verse 4: "I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done." How does this fit your image of God?
- Reread verse 16. What is the image of God in this verse?
- Read Joel 3:17-21.
- Using these verses, compare & contrast Zion and Egypt.
- What is the link between hope and despair; justice and mercy?
- What sort of emotional response do these verses bring about for you? Why?

PRAY

- Pray that God would reveal his hope to you in the midst of your despair or struggles. Pray that you can find rest in His justice and mercy. *(Likewise, you can pray for those around the world that are waiting for God's justice and mercy to prevail in their situations!)*

Joel 3:1-21(NIV)

The Nations Judged

1 "In those days and at that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,
2 I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will put them on trial for what they did to my inheritance, my people Israel, because they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land.
3 They cast lots for my people and traded boys for prostitutes; they sold girls for wine to drink.

4 "Now what have you against me, Tyre and Sidon and all you regions of Philistia? Are you repaying me for something I have done? If you are paying me back, I will swiftly and speedily return on your own heads what you have done. 5 For you took my silver and my gold and carried off my finest treasures to your temples. 6 You sold the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the Greeks, that you might send them far from their homeland.

7 "See, I am going to rouse them out of the places to which you sold them, and I will return on your own heads what you have done. 8 I will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away." The Lord has spoken.

9 Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors!

Let all the fighting men draw near and attack.

10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears.

Let the weakling say,

"I am strong!"

11 Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there.

Bring down your warriors, Lord!

12 "Let the nations be roused;

let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side.

13 Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come, trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow—so great is their wickedness!"

14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

15 The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.

16 The Lord will roar from Zion and thunder from Jerusalem; the earth and the heavens will tremble.

But the Lord will be a refuge for his people, a stronghold for the people of Israel.

Blessings for God's People

17 "Then you will know that I, the Lord your God, dwell in Zion, my holy hill. Jerusalem will be holy; never again will foreigners invade her.

18 "In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water.

A fountain will flow out of the Lord's house and will water the valley of acacias.

19 But Egypt will be desolate, Edom a desert waste, because of violence done to the people of Judah, in whose land they shed innocent blood.

20 Judah will be inhabited forever and Jerusalem through all generations.

21 Shall I leave their innocent blood unavenged? No, I will not."

The Lord dwells in Zion!