

## **Rend Your Heart and Not Your Garments.**

*If you have a moment, read Joel chapter 2. It starts bad, but gets good!!!*

*Blow the trumpet! Like the dawn spreading across the mountains, a terrible army of God is coming! No one will be able to stand! Faces turn pale at the sight of them! Before them is like the Garden of Eden, after them is a desert wasteland. At the sight of them, nations are in anguish. Before them the earth shakes and the skies tremble. The sun and moon are darkened and the stars no longer shine. They climb into houses, like thieves they enter through the windows. Nothing escapes them.*

I don't know about you, but when I read this it seems like a movie – fantastical but not a reality. Unfortunately, though, horror like this happened numerous times in history and people have experienced immense fear and desolation through war. It just seems far off to me, because we've been blessed to never have war on our soil in our lifetime.

Because these words (some of it paraphrased) are from the Bible, though, there is some form of future reference to consider. I believe God has multiple meanings in all of scripture (thus the 'living' word) so along with learning from the historical accounts, I always take what I read and apply it to my life today. I think it's called 3-fold prophecy, with application at the time of the writing, an actual historical account, then future (2<sup>nd</sup> coming) implications.

So, as I re-read the above words, I try to imagine it actually happening today and a bit of fear and awe begin to well up in me. I wonder what it means. Is it literal? Are we going to be part of this army (raptured, as Calvary Churches seem to believe so strongly)? When speaking of the army, Joel 2:11 says, "...mighty are those who obey His command." Will I be in the army or in the Garden that becomes a wasteland? Hmm. Enlist me, please.

The main thrust of this article, though, lies in the next section of Joel:

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

Joel goes on to say that everyone; nursing mothers, brides and bridegrooms, priests, children, etc., should stop what they're doing and come together as an assembly to weep and repent before God. Then God will take pity on His people and be jealous for His land. He will restore and do great things for His children and their land! And it doesn't stop there! Joel 2:28- says that afterward He will pour out His Spirit on His people! Sons and daughters will prophecy; young and old will have dreams, visions, and see wonders!

I heard a preacher recently say to many people, "Repent." He based his whole message on Joel 2:12, but failed to cover the greater context of the rest of the chapter. How do we know to repent if we don't realize the enormity of the Day of the Lord? Why would I feel like fasting and mourning if I don't even know God is sending an army?

*Rend your heart and not your garments.*

I love this. I really do. I am fascinated by how many times God (and Jesus, when He walked the earth) spoke about changing the very things people do thinking they are doing what's right. I'm positive that the Israelites put their whole self into the 'practice' of repentance and religion. I am sure that they felt like they were doing what they were told and really going all out. It would be like if we dressed in head-to-toe black and walked around weeping every time we sinned. Can you imagine doing that? What would you think of your neighbor if he stood outside in a potato sack, balling his eyes out and yelling his sorrow to heaven? What if he did it at work? Ha! It makes me want to laugh because it's so foreign to us. But the Israelites in the times of the Bible (and often still today) fully committed to their mourning over sin and religious practices. They felt like it was what God called them to do.

Yet God says, don't tear up your garments – tear down your hearts. Don't go through the motions – give me your whole being. Circumcision isn't about the ceremony – circumcise your hearts. Ouch - literally. Ok, bad joke.

If this idea is 3-fold, and the Bible is the 'living' word of God, then these words have to somehow apply to us, too. It hurts and offends because we're really trying to honor God. We go to book clubs, studies, and even church out of the desire to do what God wants, but is God asking us to just get back to Him? I bet the Israelites didn't think they needed to get back. They thought they were with God the whole time. Do we act the same way?

All throughout the Bible God tells His people to check the things they *think* they're doing to honor Him and make sure their hearts are sincere. If we apply this to our own daily lives, then we may get a little offended and hurt. What are the garments (religious practices) that we need to stop rending in order to rend our hearts? We *may* have to change. We *may* have to quit the small groups for a while and just study the Bible, sit with God and quietly worship. [Note: I'm not saying small groups are bad. In fact they're necessary and Biblically encouraged for fellowship and growth.] We *may* have to restructure our church services to allow God to move more freely. We *may* have to do more than read devotions. We *may* have to go away on a personal retreat and give ourselves to God completely. Whatever it takes, rend your hearts, not your garments.

Why should we? Because the Lord will pour out His Spirit on this land, but not until we repent and rend our hearts to Him. Being a believer is about a living relationship, not a religion. We have to study the Bible in depth and every day. We have to worship (it's what we were created for) in depth and every day. That's the only way we can live our lives walking in the Holy Spirit, and have the strength to fulfill the commission Jesus gave us to go out, baptize, and teach all nations about Him. It is NOT easy, but it is well worth it. Am I in the army, or in the wasteland? Enlist me, please.

Don't rend your garments; rend your hearts.  
Spend some time with God today. He's astounding.