

DEEP PREP GUIDE

Heart | December 7 | BIG GOD STORY

SCRIPTURE | Joel 2:12-13

BOTTOM LINE

God is what your heart wants, so give God your heart.

MEMORY VERSE

Change your life, not just your clothes; Come back to God, your God. (Joel 2:13a)

LIFE APP

Trust your heart to God, and guard it against the ones who try to be like God.

“Change” is a word that you’ve heard thrown around a lot in recent months. In the political sphere, virtually all candidates run on a “change” platform. Churches are sometimes the same way. My (Tim) wife is a pastor and so we’ve gone through our share of call/search committees with churches. I found a great picture to sum up a lot of what we’ve experienced.

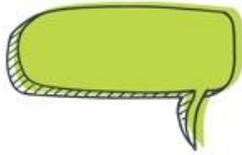


“Basically, we’re looking for an innovative pastor with a fresh vision who will inspire our church to remain exactly the same.”

Yes it is silly. In every comic, there is some silliness mixed with truth. My wife and I have had numerous conversations about how churches are interested in “fresh vision”, “change things up”, but let’s make sure it’s not too uncomfortable and make sure we can basically stay the same. Life is full of these seeming contradictions. We know change is needed, but are at times unwilling to make the necessarily actions happen.

The passage that we are confronted with in week 2 of Advent is a difficult one, especially as we wrestle a Gospel that acts out of God’s grace and the tension between preaching a text that straddles law and gospel. We are left with a tricky context in Joel, namely because the book is primarily a lament about the locusts and drought as God’s judgment on the land. God uses the judgment as a national call for the people to return to God ultimately to see God’s future blessings.

In a similar (but also not similar way), discomfort and pain is usually a sign of something wrong. God’s call to us to rend or tear our hearts is a sign that God longs for our heart to settle in with God’s heart.

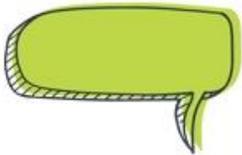


TENSION

Our Bottom Line for this week is that **God is what your heart wants, so give God your heart.**

I grew up in a very strict evangelical church. The message that I remember growing up in that church was all about what I needed to do to get right with God. I was the one who needed to put my trust in Jesus in order for God to save me. I was the one that needed to turn from my struggles and fears in order for God to have a conversation with me. I remember the first time I heard “grace” in the context of the Gospel of Jesus Christ was in college. I’m sure I heard it before, but it wasn’t a theme that was emphasized. What’s my point? This passage isn’t about an understanding of how God ultimately deals with His people. The tension that is experienced in this is that our heart is formed to be in sync and settled with God and His heart, and it’s easy for our heart to be distracted and pulled away from God.

You’ve been watching your students for a few months now. It’s maybe become clearer that the teenage years and a contradictory journey of steps forward and steps backwards, along with excitement and disappointment. You may say that this is LIFE, but this passage can have special meaning for teenagers. It’s not always about turning our heart to God as in a “one-time experience”, but rather learning to examine and recognize points in our life where we need to re-commit, re-dedicate, re-surrender, “re-rend” our heart to God. This is a special practice that we can help students learn how to do for the rest of their lives.

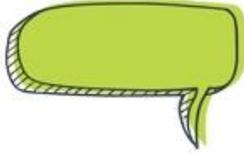


TEXT [CONTEXT]

As was shared, Joel is a very particular prophetic book for the people of Israel. It starts with lament over a great locust plague and a severe drought (1:1–2:17). Specifically the effects of these events on agriculture, farmers, and on the supply of agricultural offerings for the Temple in Jerusalem, interspersed with a call to national lament (1:1-20). Then comes a more apocalyptic passage comparing the locusts to an army, and revealing that they are God’s army (2:1-11). Finally, there’s a call to national repentance in the face of God’s judgment. (2:12-17)

The second part of the book reveals a promise of future blessings (2:18-32 or 2:18–3:5) including banishment of the locusts and restoration of agricultural productivity as a divine response to national change. (2:18-27) In the future, prophetic gifts are given to all God’s people, and the safety of God’s people. (2:28-32 or 3:1-5) Finally, there will be coming judgment on God’s (Israel’s) enemies and the vindication of Israel.

Suffice it to say, the book of Joel is very direct about what it is implying to the people of Israel. At the center of the entire book is the passage we encounter in Joel 2:12-13.



TRUTH

What does it look like to “tear a heart”? What does it feel like to surrender your heart to God’s heart? This is the ultimate need for students. They need a vision of what turning, tearing, surrender really looks like. For some, it may be as simple as a glass of water being too full and needing to be emptied. For others it may be the picture of what the Scripture leads us to of going beyond just simply changing the “outward” appearance of things. Or in a different way, the behaviors or outward signs that things may be different.

When I (Tim) was deep in my struggle with addiction, my wife and I believed a false notion that if we simply relocated and changed our geography, my struggle and our struggle would disappear. This may be an obviously false notion if you just read that sentence, but it’s a simple falsity that slips into everyday thinking. What gets at the heart of change? The point being that an outward change doesn’t always affect what’s going on in the heart. We change inwardly then reflect those changes outwardly.

The first step is always one of honesty. Any program of change starts with the honest truth of where we are at with things. Maybe the first step is saying, “I don’t know where I’m at”. That’s okay if that’s where you are at today. It doesn’t mean you have to stay there! For students, recognizing that they have a counterpoint, sync, a harmonizing with God’s heart through their life is a journey, not a destination. Our constant sorting and resorting through our motives, attitudes, values, concessions, and habits is one that happens frequently in our life. We are simply helping them learn a practice of turning/tearing their heart to settle in what God’s counterpoint in their life.

From honesty comes surrender. Surrender is recognizing our place in God’s heart, and embracing that we have found “our people” among God’s people, and that our relationship with God is contingent on our partnership with how God wants to change us. The tension in this passage is that God does not require us to change to get “into a relationship” with him. He invites us to change/rend our hearts as a sign of us turning away from what breaks God’s heart for us and towards God’s heart for the world.