

pastorhugh@svbc.ab.ca / General Adult

Where the Spirit of the Lord is / Joel 2:28–29

Introduction

- Greetings.
- For the past seven weeks, we have been looking at the person and work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in the pages of the Old Testament.
- If you look back at what we have covered, I believe that a clear narrative begins to unfold.
- In Genesis, we saw that the Spirit was there from the very beginning. We saw Him pictured as a hovering eagle, ready and waiting with eager anticipation for that marvellous act of creation. We saw Him as the very breath of God, carrying along the Father's spoken Word and rendering it effective.
- In Exodus, we saw Him in the desert, instilling the 3 ingredients He used in creation — wisdom, understanding, and knowledge — into Bezalel and the artisans to build a dwelling place for God.
- In Numbers, we saw God take of the Spirit resting on Moses and share it with the seventy elders to lighten an impossible administrative burden.
- In Judges, we saw Him clothe ad-hoc warriors like Gideon and Samson to deliver Israel from her enemies.
- In 1 Samuel, we saw Him empower and disempower kings, not on the basis of their actions but based on the condition of their hearts.

- In 1 Kings, we saw the focus shift from the empowering of kings to the empowering of prophets. We focussed on the archetypal prophet, Elijah, and his monumental showdown on Mount Carmel.
- At this point, we have seen the Spirit empower almost every office — the Patriarch, Elder, Judge, King and Prophet. All that remains is the Priest.
- While I wanted to include a week where we would look at the Spirit and the priests, there is only one brief account of the Spirit of God explicitly coming upon a priest.
- This brief account did not warrant a full sermon, but if you would like to take a look, it can be found in [2 Chronicles 24](#).
- Here, the Spirit of God came upon Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada. This was someone other than the famous prophet. Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, was a priest ministering in the temple courtyard during the reign of King Joash. When the nation fell into idolatry, the Spirit of God came upon him to confront the king and the people. Tragically, Joash had Zechariah stoned to death right in the Temple court.
- That said, when you look at that entire timeline, a striking pattern emerges.
- In every period of Old Testament history:
 - The Spirit was active.
 - He empowered every office—Patriarch, Elder, Judge, King, Prophet, and Priest.
- However, those empowerments were selective, temporary, and conditional.
- There is a sense in which the Spirit came in waves and His activity was exclusive.

- This left the vast majority of the people standing on the outside looking in.

Setting the Scene

- That brings us to the prophet Joel.
- The Scripture gives us almost no personal details about the man.
- [Joel 1:1](#) opens with the words “The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel.”
- The phrase “the word of the Lord came to” is a prophetic formula and so we know that he was a prophet.
- But this is the only information we have on the man. He appears nowhere else in Scripture.
- Everything else that we know of him and his book is deductive and the subject of debate:
 - Some believe he was highly educated and possibly a priest living in or around Jerusalem.
 - References to the temple in the book indicate that he was likely a prophet to the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
 - The dating of the book, and his life, is believed to be anywhere between the pre-exilic reign of King Joash (835-796BC) and the post-exilic period (around 400BC). Circumstantial evidence suggests composition somewhere between 515 and 350 BC, with 400BC as a likely date.
- This is significant because it means that Joel is positioned close to the end of the Old Testament timeline and that his prophecy points forward to the New Testament era.
- The book of Joel opens with a description of a devastating locust plague.

- Whether this was a literal plague, a metaphorical description of the spiritual desolation of Israel, or an eschatological foreshadowing of coming judgment, the reality was the same:
 - This was a nation in ruin, in dire need of rescue and restoration.
 - History had shown that a brief waves of intervention would not be enough to satiate their need.
- And right there, in the middle of a wasteland, whatever that wasteland might be, God speaks through Joel and makes a staggering promise for the future.
- He doesn't offer droplets. He doesn't offer a cup. He doesn't offer a wave.
- He promises something far greater.
- Let's read the passage together.

Joel 2:28-29 NKJV

²⁸ “And it shall come to pass afterward That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your old men shall dream dreams, Your young men shall see visions. ²⁹ And also on *My* menservants and on *My* maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

- Now, there are 4 things I would like to share with you from this passage this morning.
- I would like to do so under the headings of *What*, *When*, *Who*, and *So What*.

1. The Activity (The What): The Deluge

- Joel says that God will pour out His Spirit.

- What we need to understand is that this is not a measured, restricted, or cautious act of giving. The Hebrew word carried the idea of something that doesn't just flow—it actually *piles or heaps up*.
- Over the course of her history, Israel had only ever known occasional waves of the Spirit, where He came to rest on select leaders.
- Now, however, God announces that something more than a wave is coming.
- A deluge is coming.
- And the way in which the passage is structured emphasises this fact.
- Notice how God bookends the passage:
- Verse 28 begins: “I will pour out My Spirit...”
- Verse 29 ends: “...I will pour out My Spirit in those days.”
- Through the structure of the passage, God places a double emphasis on this single truth: at a specific, appointed stage in human history, God will open the floodgates and pour out His Spirit in unreserved abundance.
- Notice also that included in those bookends is a description of when this will occur.

2. The Timing (The When): The Final Era

- When does this happen?
- Verse 28: “Afterward.”
- Verse 29: “In those days.”
- Joel is looking out across time to an undefined future period.
- Now, it is incredibly important for us to try and understand what period is he talking about. Could he be referring to

- The period after Israel repents?
- The period after the locusts are cleared?
- Or the final horizon of human history?
- We need to answer this question because if we do not, we cannot know if this promise has implications for us today.
- Thankfully, we don't have to guess, because the Apostle Peter clears it up for us.

Let's take a look at [Acts 2:14-16](#)

Acts 2:14–16 NKJV

¹⁴ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵ For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is *only* the third hour of the day. ¹⁶ But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17–18 NKJV

¹⁷ *‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; And they shall prophesy.*

- On the day of Pentecost in [Acts 2](#), after the Spirit had come upon the believers in the Upper Room, and they begin to exhibit some signs, the crowd asks what is happening. Peter quotes this exact passage, but clarifies the timeline in the process.

- You see, while Joel only had partial information and was only able to say “afterward,” and “in those days,” Peter, under the inspiration of the Spirit, is now able to clarify that what Joel was referring to was “the last days,” and as he goes on to explain, this refers to the era inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus.
- Friends, this is good news.
- That means this promise is not for some random, unknowable period of time.
- This promise was made for the era we are living in right now!
- Now, there are some folk who argue that the special impartations of the Spirit that we see in the New Testament were for the Apostles only. They argue that they needed the Spirit to instil good theology within them even as they were penning the Scriptures and that they needed special manifestations of the Spirit to confirm the legitimacy of the gospel message.
- While this is true, it is only part of the story, and does not fully consider who Joel says will be the beneficiaries of this outpouring.

3. The Beneficiaries (The Who): The Radical Democratisation

- Who receives this deluge?
- The recipients are peppered throughout the passage.
- There will be a pouring out of the Spirit upon all flesh—sons, daughters, old men, young men, menservants, and maidservants.
- Now, we cannot take “all flesh” in an unqualified, universalist sense.
- God will not pour His Holy Spirit out on those who reject Him and want nothing to do with Him.

- As the broader context of Joel makes clear, this promise is for those who *call upon the name of the Lord*, those who have denied self and have expressed confidence in God.
- What is radical about this promise is that while the gift of the Spirit had previously been limited to elite leaders—Moses, the elders, the judges, the kings, the prophets—and while He would certainly come upon the Apostles, He would be extended to *everyone* who calls on Him, regardless of gender, age, or social standing.
- Think about how revolutionary this was in the ancient world!
- In a culture structured by rigid hierarchies, Joel announces a radical democratisation.
- Joel says the flood is coming, and it will level the playing field entirely.
- The lowest of the low will stand on the exact same ground as Moses, David, or Elijah!

4. The Implication (The So What): The Answered Prayer

- You may be thinking, that's all very nice, but so what?
- What happens when the Spirit is poured out?
- Joel says, "They shall prophesy, dream dreams, and see visions."
- Now, we shouldn't try to compartmentalise and prioritise these things.
- It's not that only old men dream dreams and only young men see visions and only official sons and daughters prophesy, with orphans excluded.
- This would undo the promise of democratisation.

- Furthermore, dreams and visions were the primary means through which prophets received divine revelation. There is a sense in which dreams and visions form part of the broader category of prophecy. Prophecy is actually fore-fronted here.
- Joel is using these terms not for us to start to compartmentalise and prioritise and restrict, but to see that the Spirit will come upon all flesh not just for the purpose of empowerment, but to facilitate direct divine communication and mission.
- Now again, there are some folk who, disillusioned with some of the abuse they have seen in certain circles of Christianity, have argued that certain acts of the Spirit were limited to the first century only, and that once the bible had been written, there was no further need for these things. They often single out word gifts, namely, prophecy, tongues, interpretation, words of knowledge and wisdom.
- If I am honest, I sympathise with them, because I am also disillusioned with the abuse I have seen and I believe that there will be many so-called prophets who will need to answer some hard questions one day.
- I have also developed something of a cautious disposition, but friends, it would be incredibly foolish and limiting for us to discount and dismiss the promises of God because of the abuse of charlatans.
- The point of our series thus far was to demonstrate that the promise of Joel was not just some isolated, vague assurance from some lonely voice in the wilderness.
- It is a promise that God had been working towards for the entire Old Testament.

- Friends, if there is one thing you take home with you, let it be this: Joel is pointing to the ultimate fulfilment of a ancient prayer.
- Can you recall [Numbers 11:29](#), when Moses was exhausted, when God began to share His Spirit and two men started prophesying in the camp? Joshua tried to stop them, but Moses cried out:

Numbers 11:29 NKJV

“Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD’s people were prophets *and* that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!”

- Friends, for over a thousand years, Moses’ words hung in the air like an unanswered longing.
- But here in [Joel 2](#), God answers Moses.
 - It’s coming.
 - A day is coming when the Spirit won't just rest on the one at the top—He will dwell in all of My people.

Conclusion: The Need for the Mediator

- Today, the first part of our series comes to a close.
- What I want us to see is how, throughout the Old Testament, the Spirit came in waves, empowering select leaders for the accomplishments of His purposes.
- But through that, God was also demonstrating how sub-optimal that solution was.
- As we reach the end of the Old Testament, we see Joel pointing towards a better future.

- As the canon closes, his promise is still hanging in the air.
- Why?
- Because the Holy Spirit of God cannot be poured out into unworthy vessels.
- Someone had to come and make a way for us to be transformed into vessels within which the Spirit of God could dwell permanently.
- That is why we don't end the story at Joel.
- That is why, next week, we turn to the Gospels—to see the One upon Whom the Spirit rests in all His fullness as our ultimate Prophet, Priest, and King, the One Who would ultimately make a way for the floodgates of heaven to finally be thrown open for all who would position themselves for the promise.