

SESSION 8: *How Then Shall We Live?*

I. GOD'S GOVERNMENT THROUGH CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. God has given the human race great *dignity*.

We have a free will, which means we have been given the ability to make choices that make a real difference. These choices for righteousness or for sin will bring either blessing or evil to us and those around us.

If we choose righteousness, we open doors of blessings on others. The choices we make provide the legal entry point for both angels and demons to be much more active in the natural realm. We affect the quality of life by what we do. Some of our choices now will affect us forever. This life is not a practice game.

- B. God governs the universe in intimate partnership with His people through *intercession*.

The majesty and mystery of intercession is seen foremost in Jesus' relationship with the Father.

He (Jesus) always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb. 7:25)

- C. The governmental center of the universe is in "the prayer room," which includes all the holy prayers in heaven and on earth that converge in unity before the Father's Throne.

God has given His people a dynamic role in *determining some of the measure of the "quality of life"* that we experience.

We make significant contributions to the quality of life by intercession, obedience and meekness.

The Milky Way Galaxy is made up of more than 100 billion stars. Our sun is one of the smaller stars in it. There are more than 100 million galaxies in the known universe. God established a means whereby He could partner with people who had significantly less power, wisdom and love than He did. He chose intercession as the primary means in which we could govern with Him.

- D. God opens doors of blessing and closes doors of oppression in response to our prayers.

There are blessings that God has chosen to give, but *only* if His people rise up in the partnership of prayer.

You do not have because you do not ask. (James 4:2)

This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting. (Matt. 17:21)

- E. God is waiting for our persistence in prayer before Him.

Isaiah taught that He longs to release His grace and power, but actually waits until He hears the cry of His people in intercession.

The LORD longs to be gracious to you, and therefore He waits on High to have compassion on you....19 He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you. (Is. 30:18-19; NAS)

- F. Some “trust” the sovereignty of God in a non-biblical way by “trusting” God to do the role that He has assigned to us.

This is not truly trusting God, but rather it is presumption before Him.

We cannot do God's part and He will not do our part.

Some misapply the truth that if God wants something done He will do it. This is true in some of the main issues of what God will do. Yet, there are many things that God will not give us *until* we ask. God wants all to be saved, but it does not happen because God will not violate our free will in our salvation (2 Pet. 3:8-9).

- G. Ezekiel taught that God searched for one who would stand in the gap between Himself and Israel, someone who would pray in a way that would cause God's judgment to be withheld.

So I sought for a man among them who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. (Ezek. 22:30)

II. CORPORATE INTERCESSORY WORSHIP

- A. Corporate intercessory worship is the primary means God has chosen to release His *government* (power) in His relationship with Jesus and His redeemed.

It is the highest expression of government in time and eternity, and the most powerful weapon that exists. It is far stronger than the combined strength of all the nuclear weapons on Earth.

- B. God's primary call to a nation in *crisis* is to gather in solemn assemblies (Joel 2:12-17).

In other words, corporate intercessory worship is what we need most in this hour of history.

1. Corporate – God is looking for prayer that is corporate. It requires humility to embrace all that is implied in gathering corporately. The differences between worship and prayer styles, doctrinal emphases, as well as our personalities, make humility necessary if we are to gather together in a regular way.

2. Intercessory – God is looking for prayer that is intercessory in nature or prayer that asks for God’s blessing to be released to *others*. Intercession stands in the gap for others as we declare back to God what He promised to do for His people (salvation, healing, blessing, etc.)
 3. Worship – combines the issue of “I love You, God” with godly music. This provides a unique dynamic in enabling large numbers of people to feel the same truths together, in unity, for sustained periods of time. The Spirit of God is musical. Thus, the human spirit is musical. We are moved by music because of how we were created in God’s image.
- C. These three components together form corporate intercessory worship, which releases God’s judgment and blessing, and halts the *destruction* caused by the enemy.

Let the high praises of God be in their mouth, and a two-edged sword in their hand, 7 To execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; 8 to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; 9 to execute on them the written judgment— This honor have all His saints. Praise the LORD! (Ps. 149:6-9)

III. FOUR CONTRIBUTING FACTORS TO CRISIS EVENTS IN THE EARTH

- A. To review, there are four key factors in crisis events.
1. God’s Zeal
 2. Satan’s Rage
 3. Man’s Sin
 4. Creation’s Groan

These factors work together under God’s sovereignty and wisdom.

- B. God's enemy is *sin*. He opposes it with great zeal or love.

God's zeal against sin is seen by the extreme to which He went in sending Jesus as a Man to be crushed with His wrath. Israel made herself God's enemy by her rejection of Christ's sacrifice; thus creating an adversarial dimension in their relationship with Him. The Great Tribulation is a severe expression of God's zeal against sin but not as severe as sending Jesus to the Cross.

God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us...10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom. 5:8-10)

They rebelled and grieved His Holy Spirit; so He turned Himself against them as an enemy, and He fought against them. (Is. 63:10)

Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. (James 4:4)

- C. God's *zeal* or passion is to establish His people in His love in order to bring forth a pure and prepared Bride.

His purpose in sending judgment is to remove everything that hinders love.

God's role in causing a crisis is often ignored. He is actively involved in the process. The Church talks much about the role of Satan or sinful man, yet we are hesitant and uncertain about God's role in a crisis. Sometimes He causes the crisis in a direct way. At other times, He allows other forces to work under His oversight. We need a revelation of God's zeal against sin in His judgments. God wants us to understand His role in the calamity.

- D. Satan's *rage* is permitted by God to be expressed within the boundaries that God sets. Man's *sin* can bring destruction to others. For example, terrorists make decisions that kill people. Creation *groans* as seen in earthquakes, and violent weather patterns called "natural disasters" (Rom. 8:22).
- E. The biggest problem for a nation that persists *on living in sin* is not Satan, or the violent acts of terrorists, or "natural disasters," but God's zeal is for that nation to live in purity so they can walk in their destiny.

God will continue to judge until His people repent so they can be blessed. God's zeal to rid the earth of rebellion causes great and terrible things to occur.

For the Day of the LORD is great and very terrible; who can endure it? (Joel 2:11)

The Day of the LORD is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty. (Joel 1:15)

IV. THE RESPONSE THAT GOD REQUIRES: SOLEMN ASSEMBLIES

"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." 13 So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; and He relents from doing harm. 14 Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him...? 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; 16 gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes... 17 Let the priests...weep between the porch and the altar; let them say, "spare Your people, O LORD..." (Joel 2:12-17)

- A. In this passage, the Lord tells us exactly what we are to do to receive His *mercy* and *deliverance* in a time of crisis.

We are to gather in solemn assemblies (or sacred assemblies). This involves the leaders and people joining together to fast, pray, repent for our sins and ask God to release His favor on our behalf.

The book of Joel is one of the most succinct statements in scripture that describes the extreme positives and negatives of the end-time drama.

- B. This is God's primary call to a people in *crisis*.

It is the most practical thing we can do before and during a crisis. God releases His favor and protection in response to prayer and repentance. The Jewish prophet Jonah preached on God's judgment in Nineveh (the capital city of Israel's greatest and most cruel enemy Assyria). They responded with a nationwide solemn assembly and repentance. God relented (changed His mind) and did not send the judgment that Jonah prophesied. God blessed Nineveh. Imagine Berlin, as the capital of Nazi Germany, calling a solemn assembly before the God of Israel because a Jewish prophet warned them of judgment.

Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it. (Jon. 3:10)

- C. This is the clearest passage in the Scripture that describes what God *desires* of us in times of local or national crisis.

As the global drama unfolds at the end of the age, the Body of Christ has a plain roadmap. God is asking His people for a specific response.

- D. The Lord does not leave us *guessing* as to what He desires from us.

What a holy confidence this brings! We can act with certainty in times of crisis. God will shake all that can be shaken. This will cause desperation so that there is no solution except in God. He will remove all our false hopes so that we hope only in Him.

V. TURN TO GOD WITH *WHOLEHEARTEDNESS*

Now therefore, says the Lord, 'Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping and with mourning. 13 Rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD... (Joel 2:12-13)

- A. God wants our *hearts* more than anything else.

He wants all of our love (Matt. 22:37). This reveals His heart for us, in that He requires that we respond to His love for us by loving Him back.

- B. What does it look like to *turn* to Him with all our heart?

We are to turn from sin and flee from all that is contrary to what He wants. Turning to God with all our heart involves repenting, fasting, and praying.

When we turn to Him, we position ourselves to receive His favor.

- C. The place of *immunity* from God's judgments is in corporate, long-term wholeheartedness for God.

The only place of safety is found in being in the midst of God's people who develop a long history in God - one of prayer and obedience. In this way, we receive God's favor and are kept in a place of safety even during the judgments described in the Book of Revelation. We are safe from the primary cause of pressure; that is God's zeal for His people as seen in His judgments.

VI. *REND YOUR HEART AND NOT YOUR GARMENTS*

So rend your heart and not your garments; return to the Lord your God... (Joel 2:13)

- A. Traditionally, in the generation that *Joel* prophesied, the people would tear their garments to show their grief and desperation.

To rend means to tear something violently or forcibly.

- B. What God desires is the rending or tearing of the heart, which speaks of dealing *radically* with the matters of our heart.

This is the most challenging aspect of Joel's exhortation. We must separate ourselves from anything that is displeasing to God.

- C. We must tear our heart away from *sin*.

God desires the tearing of our heart. Joel essentially cried out, "Tear your heart open! Spare not! If there is an issue in the way that is quenching the Holy Spirit, get rid of it!"

Speaking symbolically of this radical tearing, Jesus said, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out (Matt. 5:29). He was talking about a radical pursuit of obedience that painfully tears the heart in the process. In other words, forsake all compromise!"

If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out...for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell. (Matt. 5:29)

- D. It can be painful when confronting the root systems that support sinful bondage in our lives.

Sometimes it hurts to press through until we get a breakthrough, yet it is the way to freedom. We want the Lord to somehow cause our problems to evaporate without any cost or struggle or without the pain of tearing our hearts.

This tearing of the heart is typically the part that is most overlooked in the process.

We might not mind missing a few meals in fasting or give a few hours to cry out a little bit in the prayer room. *Yet the tearing of the heart gets intensely personal.* It is painful. The Lord will help us in this. He will empower us.

- E. We cannot pursue wholeheartedness in a *casual* way.

Casual wholeheartedness is an oxymoron. We sometimes hope for a wholeheartedness that is gentle, easy and tame.

Does it hurt to continue to press through until we get a breakthrough? Yes, but it is the only way to breakthrough. We naturally desire the easiest road. Our hearts must be torn. This is a foreign concept to the Western Church.

- F. God is against much of what the Church labels as having our “*liberty in grace.*”

Many of the “liberties” that the Church fights for are the very things that God is fighting against. The way we spend time and money; the way we seek honor; the way we speak and relate gives evidence of not having torn away from that which holds us in darkness.

I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints. 4 For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ. (Jude 3-4)

- G. God the Father’s heart was *torn* when He gave Jesus’ life away and it continues to be torn in His patient longsuffering with His people as they refuse to respond with repentance.

Jesus tore His heart when He went to the Cross. It is not a mystery why God wants us to tear our hearts in love for Him.

He tears His own heart in His pursuit after us; He has proved that He does not love us in a detached, distant way.

To fully enter into this love, our own hearts must be torn. How foreign this concept is to the Western Church!

VII. REPENTING WITH *CONFIDENCE* IN GOD'S TENDER HEART: A FIVE-FOLD REVELATION

Return to the Lord...for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness; He relents from doing harm. Who knows if He will turn and relent...? (Joel 2:13-14)

- A. Joel summons the people to return to the Lord, giving *five reasons* why this is doable and wise.

God is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and He relents from doing harm. He desires to make a way of deliverance.

The knowledge of God's heart for us gives us courage to tear our hearts in repentance. If we take one step toward Him, He will take ten steps toward us.

- B. First, the Lord is *gracious* in that He evaluates us differently than anyone else does. He remembers our frailty and that we are but dust (Ps. 103:14).

He is not like a harsh military leader or an angry coach who rejects any form of weakness. God's style of relating is human-friendly. His requirements are within the reach of the weak. He will make a way of deliverance for us.

He has not dealt with...nor punished us according to our iniquities. (Ps. 103:10)

- C. Second, the Lord delights in *mercy*.

God delights in watching the heart awakened in us when we understand that He gives us a new start after each failure. He loves the responses of His people as we encounter His relentless mercy.

Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity...because He delights in mercy. (Mic. 7:18)

- D. Third, the Lord is slow to *anger*. Jesus spoke of this to the church in Thyatira.

He gave them time to repent of their immorality (Rev. 2:20-22). He is not quick to judge but gives time to repent.

- E. Fourth, the Lord has great *kindness*.

When we believe in God's kindness, then we have confidence to press through the hindrances and reach full repentance. Our repentance will never be met with rejection. This gives us the courage to tear our hearts knowing that God desires to restore our fellowship with Him.

- F. Fifth, the Lord relents from doing harm.

This does not mean that God randomly changes His mind, surprising Himself. Rather, He honors the free will of man without violating His justice.

VIII. THE LORD RELENTS FROM SENDING JUDGMENT

Return to the Lord...for He is gracious ...He relents from doing harm. (Joel 2:13)

I sought for a man...who would make a wall, and stand in the gap before Me on behalf of the land, that I should not destroy it; but I found no one. (Ezek. 22:30)

- A. God is willing to relent, or to *cancel* the decree of judgment, instead of issuing it over a nation.

Judgment comes because the people refuse to relent (change). When people relent and turn to God, then He relents. Instead of releasing the judgment they deserved, He sends blessing.

Gather yourselves together...2 before the decree is issued... before the LORD's fierce anger comes upon you...3 Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth...it may be that you will be hidden (protected from judgment) in the day of the LORD's anger. (Zeph. 2:1-3)

B. There are two *stages* in God's decrees.

1. The decree is established in the heavenly court.
2. The decree is issued as God releases angels to execute the judgment (Ezek. 9-10) or else the decree is canceled.

C. In response to our prayer, God changes what He releases in our lives.

The end result of a coming disaster can be changed (Gen. 18:22-32; Ex. 32: 9-14; 2 Sam. 12:15-23; 24:10-14; 2 Chr. 34:22-28; Jer. 18:7-10; 51:6-8; Ezek. 18:21, 22, 28; 33:10-14; Dan. 4:29; Amos 5:1-3,14-15; 7:1-6; Zeph. 2:1-3; Hab. 3:16-19; Jon. 3:4-10; Mal. 3:16-4:6).

D. There are three steps in our *partnership* with God.

First, God initiates what He wants by declaring it in His Word and stirring our hearts.

Second, we respond in obedience and prayer to God's initiative.

Third, God answers our responses by releasing blessing that He would have withheld had He not heard our cry. Our prayers matter, even when we do not feel their power.

- E. Because of Jesus' work on the Cross, we receive the gift of righteousness.

We respond to this with a commitment to walk in righteousness. Therefore, we can receive God's favor (2 Cor. 5:17-21).

The place of immunity from the judgment of God is to live in His favor.

Joel calls a people to corporate wholeheartedness in response to a crisis in their nation. God will release His favor to geographic areas as a result of the people in that area coming to Him over the years, in love, through corporate intercessory worship.

The greatest place of safety is in the midst of a company of people living in long-term, corporate wholeheartedness. I am committed to be in the midst of a people who develop a corporate, long-term history in wholeheartedness before God.

IX. THE MYSTERIOUS "PERHAPS OF GOD" RELEASING "POCKETS OF MERCY"

Seek the LORD, all you meek of the earth...seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be (perhaps) that you will be hidden (protected) in the day of the LORD's anger. (Zeph. 2:3)

- A. There is a mystery in the grace of God that has moved the hearts of the redeemed throughout the ages.

I call it, "the mysterious perhaps of God." It is this place in God's heart where He may turn and relent from sending judgment. He may do this if His people respond to Him in humility.

- B. The New American Standard says, "Perhaps you will be hidden."

The Lord is not trying to keep us guessing, as if it were a game. Rather, He hides the full implications of all of the factors in the equation—all the reasons behind His actions and His silence—so as to keep us from seeking to fulfill an equation without relating to Him.

- C. The Lord desires to relent from judgment according to the *response* of His people. God desires to transform would-be disaster zones in various geographic areas into revival centers.

X. GATHER THE PEOPLE AND SANCTIFY THE CONGREGATION

Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; 16 gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes... (Joel 2:15-16)

- A. How should we respond? What can we do about the worldwide crisis we know will take place? The Lord has handed us a clear and effective battle plan, though it will take faith to carry it out.
- B. We are to blow the trumpet in Zion to call a solemn assembly.

The elders assemble and gather the people; even the children are to be part of this gathering. Since no one will be exempt from the coming crisis and judgment, no one is exempt from crying out to God for mercy. Then we consecrate a fast. Fasting positions our hearts to experience the grace of God in a greater way.

1. Blow the trumpet – boldly proclaim the coming judgment and the solemn assembly.
2. Consecrate a fast – put fasting on the schedule and take it seriously.
3. Call a solemn assembly – gatherings that are *sacred* in their priority to our schedules.
4. Sanctify the congregation – leaders sanctify the people under their care by laying aside ministry programs to make seeking God the top priority in terms of their time.

- C. Joel describes the wholehearted response that God desires by emphasizing the necessity of earnest prayer.

We cry out for His visitation of mercy with earnestness.

Let the priests...weep...let them say, "Spare Your people, O Lord...why should they say among the peoples (unbelievers), 'Where is their God?'" (Joel 2:17)

XI. ESTABLISHING A JOEL 2 SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. (Joel 1:2-3)

- A. The first exhortation in the Book of Joel is "*hear* and give ear" or to pay close attention and learn by what happened to Israel in times of God's judgments (Joel 1:1-2:9).

The call to "hear and give ear" is to learn from history.

It is also a call to hear what Joel said. In our context, we do this by studying the Book of Joel. It is the call to hear God's heart as we prepare for future glory and crisis.

Joel challenges them to hear, which includes embracing a lifestyle that enhances hearing. We must go deep in the message that is presented in the book of Joel!

- B. This hearing does not come *automatically* because we are Christians.

It requires an intentional, deliberate cultivating of understanding of the Book of Joel.

- C. Joel emphasizes the *unprecedented* magnitude of the coming judgments.

He asks, in essence, “Have you seen anything like this? Is this normal?” The significance of the message is that what is to come is unprecedented, thus, it is unfamiliar to us. This makes it difficult to hear.

Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? (Joel 1:2)

- D. We are entering a new season on the divine calendar. His glory and judgments will shake everything that can be shaken.

We are in a unique period for which we have no frame of reference. Noah is an example of embracing a prophetic message that was unfamiliar to him. His prophetic message was unprecedented, thus, it was hard for the people to receive him.

God told Noah that it would rain for forty days. However, it had never rained in history up to that point. Up until that time, God watered the ground from below and not as rain descending from the sky.

XII. TELL THE CHILDREN – ESTABLISHING A DYNAMIC SPIRITUAL CULTURE

Tell your children about it, let your children tell their children, and their children another generation. (Joel 1:3)

- A. Joel gave the elders a four-generational mandate that all understand his message about the Day of the Lord, revival and judgment, rather than being ignorant or indifferent to what it was.

- B. God wants a holy spiritual *environment* of faith and revelation established in the Church.

Prayer with fasting must be a key part of the spiritual culture of the end-time Church. This is what God is after in commanding everyone to “Tell the children.”

The spiritual culture in the Western Church today has a scoffing and passive spirit that considers it “extreme” to believe God’s Word about the End Times. It was one of Peter’s *priorities* to warn us about this mocking spirit (2 Pet. 3:3).

Knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days... (2 Pet. 3:3)

INVITATION: Join IHOP-KC in our monthly Global Bridegroom Fast days. See www.IHOP.org for info.

Session 8 Study Guide Questions

- What does it mean for God to give us great dignity? How can I live for eternity and righteousness?
- What is my dynamic role in determining my quality of life with God?
- How does worshipping corporately differ from worshipping privately, and what might I learn from it?
- “Rending our hearts” is a difficult concept to wrestle with. What might He be asking me to release my grip on in order to live more wholeheartedly?