



Sermon Transcription • Abbotsford

Godly Motivations - (Joel 2:12-17)

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[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

If you spend any time around toddlers you'll know that they are insistent and incessant with their question about, why. "Alright it's time to get ready."

"Why?"

"It's time to eat dinner."

"Why?"

"It's time to put your shoes on."

"Why?" You see toddlers are like mini lawyers. They are devoted to finding out the motive for what's going on. What's the motive behind the action. What's the motivation for what you want me to do. This is true, all of our actions flow out of motivations. So I'm motivated to eat better and maybe run a little bit so that I don't have to buy a completely new set of pants. And your motivated, we're all motivated to work hard at school, to get good grades and because if we get good grades in high school we can into a good college, and if we have good grades in college we can get into a masters program and get good grades there. We can get into a doctorate program and you get good grades there and will still work at Starbucks, but your motivated, for the good grades right, because of what's going to come. All of our actions have motivations that drive us to act the way that we do.

[Our Motivation for Repenting]

Joel 2, what we're going to see in this passage is we're going to see basically one big idea, which is, what is God's motivation for acting the way that he does. Or to put it another way, what's God's motivation for relenting. Which is a word that we're going to look at what it means and it's a part of our passage here this morning. So we're going to be spending our time in Joel 2, so if you have your Bible you can open it up to Joel 2, if you don't have a Bible with you, you can follow along on the screen. We're going to see what God's motivation is for doing the things that he does.

But before we jump into the text, just in case you're new with us or maybe you just want a bit of a refresher of where we've been so far in the book of Joel. The book of Joel was written in response to a natural disaster. So there was a massive locust plague, an attack, that happened in the land of Israel that destroyed everything. All the land, all the crops, everything was just devoured by these locusts. Joel is responding to this natural disaster with some theological insights about what should this lead us to do? What should this cause us to think? Joel responds and one of the major ways he encourages the people of Israel to respond to this locust attack is by saying, look this natural disaster



is a foretaste, it's an appetizer, it's a little example of what the great day of judgement is going to be like yet to come. The dread and devastation that takes place because of the locust swarm is just a little example of what's going to take place when God comes and judges rebels against him. So that's where we've been in the book of Joel. And then in Joel 2:12-14, it says,

“‘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. Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing - grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God.”

We're going to pause there. If you've been around church for a while you've may have heard the language, you know, how God is gracious and compassionate and slow to anger and abounding in love, but a word that might be newish for us is that word, relent. Relent is basically just means, you are turning away from doing something that you were planning on doing. So one of my colleagues name is Andrew, he's actually the youth pastor at the Mission campus and he's preaching this morning as well on this passage. And he told me a story of when his dad relented from brining devastation to his life. There was a rule in their family that you had three chances before the punishment. So if you disobeyed your dad three times, you had a few warnings, but then eventually the punishment would come and the punishment was usually that you didn't get to participate in the family fun night on Saturday's. The family fun night was the night that they rented the movie from Blockbuster, cause that was a thing. And then they would buy all the food and then you would eat the junk food and you would watch the movie that you rented from Blockbuster. Well this one week, Andrew didn't actually follow the rules that his dad asked him to. He had some warnings, one, two, three warnings and eventually it was time for the punishment. So his dad came to him and said, “Here's the deal. On family fun night you're going to have to sit in a chair with your back towards the screen so you can't actually see the movie, you can hear what's going on, but you can't watch it, and I'm going to duct tape your wrists together so you can't get at the candy. Alright?” Andrew was very upset as you would be about this punishment. So family fun night rolls around the corner and Andrew has to sit in the chair with his back towards the screen so he can't see the movie and the dad comes out with the duct tape and rips off a piece, <ripping sound> holds it in front of Andrew, Andrew's terrified in this moment, and then his dad says, “I'm not actually going to tie your wrists together today.” And he leaves, and Andrew's all shook and he's crying and all that kind of stuff. Andrew told me the story because he said, “Look, Greg this is what it means to relent. He said he was going to do something, but then he decided not to actually do it.” So his dad *relented* to use the duct tape as a part of a punishment. What this passage is telling us is that a part of God's character, he's gracious, he's compassionate, he's abounding in love, he's slow to anger, and he *relents* from sending disaster. That's the kind of God that he is.

But before we can answer the big question of why does God relent, there's a bit of a cul-d-sac, a little bit of a detour we need to take on this main journey, just ask ourselves the question, what actually makes relenting possible? Like what turns God from saying I'm going to bring this, to not actually bringing it. What makes that move possible for God, and this passage actually tells us that so let's do



a quick detour of the main idea and just look at what this passage has to say about repentance. Cause the idea that this passage brings up is that God is going to relent *if we* repent. So Joel 2:12, the Lord says, "Return to me." So that language of return to me sounds a lot like a story in the New Testament called the prodigal son. It's actually a story about two sons, but one of the sons gets a lot more air time than the other one. And the story goes that there's two sons, the younger son comes to his father and he says I need you to give me my inheritance, which is basically like going up to your dad and saying, I wish you were dead, give me my money. The dad gives him his money and the son takes the money, he goes off into a far away land and he wastes it on booze and women and gambling and all kinds of things and his life deteriorates around him and gets to the point where his only meal is available by finding the food trough that all the pigs are eating by and trying to get his head in there to actually get some food. His life's disintegrated around him and he has this moment that he thinks to himself, I should return to my father. My situation is desperate, it's devastating, I should return to my father. This is the image that God is calling his people, through Joel, to do. Return, leave the slop, return to your loving father. And he tells them in what kind of way to return. You should return with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. God's calling his people for a legitimate repentance. Not just an outward demonstration, but an actual inward, a desire, a recognition of the wrong that has been done and an actual sorrowing over the sin that has been committed. The language is, rend your heart and not your garments. So rend, just means to rip, to rip something apart. One of the ways that you would grieve in the ancient world, is you would Hulk style, rip your clothes. That's an outward demonstration of your grief. What God is telling his people is don't just rip your garments, rip your heart, make your sorrow over your sin, be about the sin, not just about the consequences, but over the wickedness of the act of sin itself. We all know the difference between a legitimate repentance and an illegitimate repentance. A real one and a fake one.

Imagine you have a brother and you punch your brother right in the mouth and your mom sees you do this and your mom tells you, you need to apologize to your brother. So what do you say to your brother? You say something like, "Well I'm sorry that when I punched you in the mouth it hurt." It's not actually an apology, it's an apology about the consequences, but it's not actually a heartfelt recognition of the wickedness of the act itself, what God is calling his people to do, he's saying look if you heartfelt recognize the wickedness of the act itself, I will relent. If you have a legitimate repentance, I will relent in bringing the disaster but the repentance comes first. It's an important word for the people in Joel, it's a word people like you and me as well. Look, our sorrow, over our sin, shouldn't just be because of the consequences *from* the sin, our sorrow over sin, should be because we recognize the wickedness of the act itself. We recognize the wickedness of the act of being a bully against those who are a part of our class or a part of our workplace. That's because it might get us a detention or might get us fired, but we recognize that the act *itself* of bullying is wicked. Or on our device, you know if we search the right words we can get certain pictures, which now we end up treating people like objects not like people made in the image of God. And we could be sorry because someone might see our search history and what are the consequences if someone finds out, *or* we could be sorrowful over the wickedness of the act itself.

See God is calling his people, God is calling us, for a legitimate repentance, not over the potential consequences, but over the wickedness of the act itself. And look this is one of the kindest, that the



Holy Spirit does in our lives. It's the Holy Spirit's work that actually comes into our hearts and say, that thing that you're doing is wicked in and of itself. Not just the potential consequences of how that could go wrong, but the action itself needs to be turned away from, just like how the younger son had to turn away from his crazy living and stop eating back to his father. You need to turn away from those actions and return to the Lord with a heartfelt, legitimate repentance. Cause if we repent God will relent.

[God's Motivation in Relenting]

Back to the main road though, the question still remains is what is God's motivation for relenting, from not bringing the disaster. Well let's go back to the text. Joel 2:14-17,

“Who knows? He may turn and relent and leave behind a blessing - grain offerings and drink offerings for the Lord your God. Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. 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. 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?””

See in verse 14, relenting, God, his act of relenting, from not bringing the disaster that he said he was going to bring. That act actually brings a restoration to the land. So one of the great problems with the locust attack was that it so destroyed the land and all of the crops that the very way in which God's people were supposed to worship him, were completely cut off from them. Now God is saying, look if you repent, I'm going to restore to you grain offerings and drink offerings are going to actually be available for you now. So what God is saying to them is, look if you repent I'll relent from bringing the disaster and the good news is that you get to worship me again. That's why I'm doing it. You actually get to worship me, you couldn't before because there was no way to get the grain and drink offerings, but now you can worship me again. That's why I'll do this. Verse 17, the priests are coming to God to relent and to plead for him to relent and one of their appeals that they make is they say, what do you want people to think about you. Like when other nations look at our situation, what are they going to say about our God.

Alright, imagine you're, you've a child who plays the recorder. And the big recorder concert's coming up, on a Friday night and you can think of everything else that you'd want to do in your life than listen to this recorder concert right? Cause one of them usually is not that great, but put like 40 in them in a room and that's basically torture. So you're thinking to yourself. I don't want to go to this recorder concert. But then one of your friends comes up to you and says to you, okay but what are people going to say if you don't go to your kids concert. What's that going to look about your reputation. How you act in other words, actually proves your reputation of it's a good reputation or not. And what the priests are pleading before the Lord is they're saying, look if you don't act this way, if we repent but



you don't relent, what's that going to say about your reputation. In other words, God's motivation for relenting is for his own worship and for his own reputation.

This point is made explicit, it's made really clear later in Joel 2:26-27, where it says, so the Lord is speaking to the people of Israel about the restoration he's going to bring and here's what he says,

“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. 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.”

See God relents from bringing the disaster. When people repent God relents for his own glory. That's why he does it, that's his motivation for doing what he does, is to bring glory to his own name. It's for his namesake that he does it. Which I think is a really helpful piece for us to think about because I think if we were asked by someone, what is God's main priority, his main motivation in everything he does. I think we would probably answer by saying something like, he does things so that he can save sinners. That's why God does what he does, so that he can save sinners. And look it's a wonderful, beautiful truth, that rebels like you and I, when we repent are actually offered salvation. That's a beautiful thing that God offers to us. Gracious and abounding in love, kind of thing. The Scriptures are clear, God doesn't act merely to save sinners, God acts *primarily* for his glory. That when God moves in the course of history he does so for his own glory.

Glory's kind of a hard word to define. It's kind of a Christiany word and we don't really know how to define it right, cause the glory of God is not like an object like a baseball, where you can hold it in your hand and say it's white and it has red laces and you can throw it. It's a baseball. The glory of God is not like an object that we can describe, the glory of God is more like beauty. When someone says, how do define beauty? You say, let's look outside, that's beautiful. Or let's look at this painting, that's beautiful. You point to other things and that's how we understand what beauty is. The glory of God is very much like this. Look the glory of God is us recognizing the characteristics of God, so God gets glory when we recognize that he is just, or we recognize that he is gracious or abounding in love or the kind of God who relents from sending calamity. When we know about who God is and we describe those things and we recognize those things, God gets glory from those. So to put it another way, one definition for glory might be something like, it's the recognition and demonstration of God's intrinsic and infinite worth. That to glorify God means that we recognize because it's been demonstrated to us the intrinsic and infinite worth of God. And when we see who God is and we praise him for who he is, God gets the glory. And God does things, God's motivated to act in history for his own glory. Or for his name's sake. This is the point that's made in the Scriptures repeatedly, Psalm 23, which is like a great coffee cup verse. I might get one of these for Father's Day, that'd be amazing. Psalm 23:1-3,

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. [Look that all sounds like he's doing that for me right? Verse three,] He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.”



Why does God give me the refreshment and the nourishment and the restoration, why does God do all these kind things, lead me beside still waters? He does them for his name's sake. Isaiah 48:9-11,

“For my own name's sake I delay my wrath; for the sake of my praise I hold it back from you, so as not to destroy you completely. See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction. For my own sake, for my *own sake*, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.”

Or Ezekiel 36:22-23,

“Therefore say to the Israelites, ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: It is not for your sake, people of Israel, that I am going to do these things, but for the sake of my holy name, [I'm going to save you Israel, not for you, but for me.] which you have profaned among the nations where you have gone. I will show the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, the name *you* have profaned among them. Then [when I act, when I do these things to save you, then] the nations will know that I am the Lord, declares the Sovereign Lord, when I am proved holy through you before their eyes.”

Or Psalm 79:9,

“Help us, God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins [for our sake, no, deliver us and forgive us our sins] for *your name's sake*.”

Exodus 14:4,

“I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the Lord.”

And Ephesians 1:5-6,

“He predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves”

The reason why God acts, God is motivated to move for his glory. God's motivated to relent, to not bring the disaster among the Israelites in the book of Joel, and God is motivated to not bring us the destruction that our rebellion deserves for his glory.

This has some implications for us. I think it has some personal implications for us, cause I think often times when it comes to the Christian life, we often operate by asking ourselves the question, *can I do this thing, or that thing?* Like am I allowed as a Christian to do this, am I permitted to do that. That's one of the primary driving questions we ask, *can I do this?* But if it's true, that the reason why God does everything in the course of human history is for his own glory, then surely we should have the



same kind of motivation as his followers right? Look the question shouldn't be, am I allowed to do this as a Christian, the question should be, can I give glory to God by doing this? That's why God prohibits all kinds of different activities. That's why the Bible says, thou shalt not, on a whole bunch of stuff, is because when we do those things, God is not glorified. So it's clear in the the thou shalt not parts of the Bible, don't do them cause God won't get glory through that, but there's all kinds of like gray area, right? It's not like a prohibited sin, but there's no like, thou shalt, or thou shalt not, so what do we do in these kinds of situations. Rather than asking ourselves the questions, "Man am I allowed to do this, or am I permitted, is this as far to the line as I can go while still being counted as a Christian behaviour? The question we should ask ourselves is, how does this give God the glory? How does this action, demonstrate a part of his majestic, just, kind, merciful, gracious, caring, father-love for his children, kind of character, how does the way I act, actually give God glory?

This is why in 1 Corinthians 10 when Paul is addressing a really controversial issue for the church of Corinth, the issue was, should we eat meat that's sacrificed to idols or not. Cause in the ancient world the way you would buy your meat in the marketplace often times, if not always, if there was meat there that's available for sale, that's because it was previously sacrificed or given as a act of worship to another God in another temple. So the majority of the meat that you would find at Safeway was a part of a worship ceremony to another god. So the question is, can we actually eat meat, can we buy the meat from Safeway and barbeque it on Father's Day, if we know that that meat was a part of a worship service for another God. See some people when they thought about it, they thought, you know what, I can't eat that because I know what eating that meat signifies for so many people, and I know that if I ate that meat it would look like I'm on board with worshipping these other gods, so I can't eat it. And other people were saying, well it's not the meats fault. We don't think God's not real, so it's not like the meat is tainted, just barbeque it up man. Both Christians, both having been led by their conscience to do two very different things. Paul's response in 1 Corinthians 10:31 is,

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

But Paul's answering the question of can I, by saying, look this isn't an expressed prohibited sin, this is a gray area, depending on your conscience and the people around you, how they're going to see your actions. So whatever decision you make, make the decision that you're going to act for the expressed purpose of the glory of God. So when it comes to the things in our life where we're trying to figure out, man should I do this, should I drink that alcohol even though I know that there's people around me who might see me drink and that might be a stumbling block for them to start drinking, whatever the issue is, if it's one of those gray area issues the question is not, can I do this to express my freedom, the question is, how can I give glory by doing this? This should be a motivating principle for us as believers to give God the glory in all that we do, if we eat or drink or whatever it is that we do, that God gets the glory.

Look I think there's more than just a personal implication to this idea that God acts for his own glory. I think there's a church implication for us. Here's what I mean by that. In a few days we have a congregational meeting. And this congregational meeting, if you're a part of Northview, if you're a member at Northview, I really want to encourage you to come and if you're just interested in these



things you're more than welcome to attend as well. At this congregational meeting we're going to be talking about a multiplication vision that we have for our church putting forward. The vision was kind of preached on a few weeks ago, by Pastor Jeff, our lead pastor. And the idea is this, that we think that the best way to make disciples of Jesus is through the multiplication of healthy local churches. So that means that what we want to be a part of as a church is being involved in helping to multiply healthy local churches so that people can be made disciples of Jesus. Now look there's implications to that, like, money and time and other things. And we're going gather together as a church family to talk through and hopefully affirm the direction that we believe the Spirit of God has been leading us as leaders to go in. That God wants us to do these things. Now look one of the key passages that we've been thinking through as a leadership when it comes to this idea of multiplying healthy, local churches is the parable of the talents. Where you have a master who comes to his servants and he gives to different servants a different amount of money to invest and to double for the master's glory. And so to one guy he gives five units, five talents, another three talents, one, one talent, and then he leaves and then he gives them the orders, make more of it, okay, multiply it. So the way that this story goes is that the guy with five talents, he actually doubles it, and he's commended, the guy with three talents, he doubles it, he's commended by the master, the guy with one talent just buries it, doesn't double it, just keeps it away nice and safe and the master comes back and he says what are you doing I asked you to double it. Us as leaders, we've been looking at what the Lord has invested in us as a church. And we've decided that we can't just bury this thing, we've got to act aggressively and proactively to actually try to multiply it.

So here's one mistake we could make as a church. We could make the mistake by saying, look God hasn't really invested in Northview very much, or it seems like, I don't know, weird to talk about how's he invested in us. Kind of like unCanadian, not very humble. But look we should take seriously as a church the fact that in Canada around 5% of the churches are over 350 people. So about 95% of churches in Canada are under 350 people. So throw money and buildings outside the window, that's just people with gifts that they can use for the kingdom of God. That we have more than 350 people who call Northview their home church. We have, God has invested in us as a church family a lot. And he's requiring us to actually act on that investment, to actually double it. So we can't just look down on what the Lord has given us, we have to actually take it seriously and say how can we use this for his glory.

Here's the second mistake we can make. We can start believing the hype about ourselves. We can start getting really proud of that little, *n*, logo. Start thinking to ourselves, man we're awesome. Cause you know that only like 5% of the churches are 350 people or more in Canada. We're more than that. We could actually start doing things, by trying to ask the question, how does this make Northview look good. Right because if I look good, God will look good. So let's make Northview, let's focus on Northview, let's focus on how we can build the brand, how we make Northview amazing, but actually the motive for multiplying healthy churches, to make disciples is so that God gets the glory. Not for us to build a brand, not for us to show how great we are as a church. But to show how great God is, who has saved us to be his church.



Imagine with me that you have friend who knows about this cave seven hours north where there are the most majestic diamonds inside of this cave. And he says, here's the deal, I need to you to grab your flashlight, we're going to drive seven hours north, we're going to go into this cave and we going to look, we're going to turn on our flashlights and we're going to look at the diamonds. So come with me and let's go look at the diamonds. So you go and you bring your flashlight and you're really excited and you go into the cave, you turn on your flashlight, you point it towards the diamonds and you see the majestic diamonds before you, no one in that moment says, "Cool flashlight bro." Everyone says, "Look at the diamond! It's amazing. I've never seen a diamond like that before." Matthew 5:16,

"In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and *glorify* your Father in heaven."

See look, I'm excited about the multiplication vision, because what we're doing is, we're saying, hey let's get more flashlights and bigger flashlights and better flashlights so people can see the glory of God. But the point is not the flashlight, the point is the diamond. God is the one we are pointing to, see churches and pastors, we're not supposed to be paintings that you stare at and marvel at, we're supposed to be windows through which people see the glory of God. Churches and pastors aren't supposed to be the beverage that quenches peoples thirst, churches and pastors are supposed to be the ones through which the living water flows. So yeah we need to take seriously what God has invested in us and we need to take seriously how we can multiply it for his glory. That's why God does anything. That's why we should do what we do. To God be the glory great things he's done. Let me pray for us.

Father, you're good, we don't deserve your goodness but you save rebels like us when we repent. So Father I pray that right now you would turn hearts to be sorrowful not over just the consequences of our sin but over the sin itself. That we would come to you repentant and that we would trust that you're the kind of God who offers grace to those who repent. Father, would you mobilize us repenting sinners, to be the kind of people who grab our flashlights and show the world how great you are. Help us do that well for your fame and in Jesus name. Amen.