Alarms Are Sounding – Wake Up And Repent!

By Anne Graham Lotz

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"The word of the Lord that came to Joel…Hear this, you elders, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children to the next generation…Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine…for it has been snatched from your lips. A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number… Grain offerings and drink offerings are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests are in mourning…The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed…Put on sackcloth…Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land…and cry out to the Lord. For the day of the Lord is near; it will come like destruction from the Almighty…To You, O Lord, I call…" (Joel 1:1-19).

I believe the alarms are going off in our nation today and God is trying to wake us up. The wake up message is this: Judgment is coming. God's patience is running out.

The message is **undisputable** because Joel says, *"This is the word of the Lord"* (1:1). And God does not lie. He is a gentleman and you can take Him at His word. What God says is so.

And the word is **universal**. It is for the elders (v. 2) – the old people. It is for the children and grandchildren (v. 3) – the young people. It is for drunkards (v. 5) – sinners and wicked people. It is for the priests (vv. 9, 13) – religious people and good people. It is for farmers (v. 11) – the working people. And in case we missed a category, twice in this passage it says it is for *"all who live in the land"* (vv. 2, 14). This is God's word for everybody.

The message is also **unparalleled**. It is a unique message for a unique generation. Joel asks, *"Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers?"* (v. 2). The implication is "No" – nothing like this has ever happened before. There has never been a generation like this before.

Our generation is very unique. There are things that have happened in my lifetime that have never before happened in human history on a worldwide scale. Let me just pinpoint two that are very significant from God's point of view.

The first one was the rebirth of the nation of Israel. Who has ever heard of an ancient people, after almost 2,000 years of non-existence, coming back to their ancient land with their ancient language and re-establishing themselves as a nation in the family of nations? That is a phenomenon.

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Secondly, at this very moment, the Gospel of Jesus Christ is being preached to the whole world. This does not mean that everybody in the world has heard the Gospel, but that the Gospel is being preached in the whole world through the internet, through television, through radio, through ham radio, through printed material and through live presentations. The Gospel for the first time in human history is being preached in the whole world. You and I are living in a generation without parallel.

Disasters Are Alarms

The Lord's message is underscored by the alarms that are going off – the disasters. Joel lists disasters in just about every category of his nation's life. Consider what was happening in Joel's day and then a very brief application.

Environmental disasters. In Joel's day there was environmental disaster caused by a locust plague (v. 4). In our day we have had Hurricane Katrina. There have been earthquakes, forest fires, floods, snow storms, tornados, droughts. We have always had storms, but the thing that is unusual is they are increasing in frequency and in intensity. Note how many of them are record breaking. One weather website I visited says our weather patterns are out of control. Environmental disasters – an alarm going off.

Social disasters. Joel lists alcoholism as one of the social disasters in his day (v. 5). In our day alcoholism, drugs and substance abuse are also a problem. The number one killer of teenagers is an accident related to alcohol. We spend more money on alcohol than we do on cancer. There are many other social disasters, including the random shootings that have taken place at Columbine High School, Virginia Tech, Washington Navy Yard, Sandy Hook, Fort Hood, the two Jewish facilities in Kansas City, the Colorado theatre and the list goes on. Social disasters – an alarm going off.

Financial disaster. Joel states to those in his day, *"The wine was snatched from your lips"* (v. 5). Wine was not a luxury, but a staple in Joel's day. So from one moment to the next they did not have what was needed to sustain life. Today we are looking at an almost 18 trillion dollar debt. We are looking at economic collapse. Financial disaster is an alarm going off.

National disaster. Joel states of his day, *"A nation has invaded my land"* (v. 6). He said this in reference to an inhuman army – locusts that came in and destroyed everything. If a locust plague is like a nation that is invading, what inhuman armies are invading and destroying our nation today? Pornography is an invading army, and immorality, generational hatred and prejudice, lack of faith in God, lack of fear of God – and that is in the church! Outside the church is secularism, humanism, atheism and agnosticism. An army is invading, destroying the very fabric of our nation. Such disaster is an alarm going off.

Spiritual disasters. In Joel's day the sacrifices ceased because there was nothing to sacrifice (v. 9). The land was destroyed, everything was dried up. Since the people could not sacrifice to God they felt cut off from God, abandoned by God. And in our day when there is a disaster people come to me and ask, "Where is God?" And we feel cut off from God. We feel He has abandoned us. It affects our relationship with God when these disasters take place. We are affected spiritually – an alarm going off.

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Agricultural disaster. Joel says, *"The fields are ruined, the ground is dried up, the grain is destroyed…"* (vv. 10-12). The people in Joel's day made their living off the land, but they could no longer work. There was no work to be had. I think of our high unemployment rate today. People out of jobs or working several jobs, or not working in jobs they are trained for – anything to put food on the table. I thank God for government programs that take care of us in hard times, but when that becomes a lifestyle, it destroys respect and one's sense of self-worth, and that is a disaster, an alarm going off.

The alarms are going off. Are you waking up? The message seems to me to be unheeded because we keep making excuses for these things. We find other reasons for them such as global warming, government corruption, corporate greed or lack of education. All of these things may factor in, but what Joel saw, and what I see also, is that behind all of these disasters is the hand of God. God is trying to wake us up before it is too late.

Joel says this has been done *"before our very eyes"* (v. 16). The warning is obvious and anyone should be able to see this. Judgment is coming. God's patience is running out. And that is the word from the Lord.

Cry Out with Humility

It is time to cry out. *"…Call a sacred assembly. Summon…all who live in the land…and cry out to the Lord"* (v. 14). It is time to wake up and to put aside perfunctory, mechanical prayers. Prayer is a cry. Joel says it is time to cry out with humility. *"Put on sackcloth…"* (v. 13).

Let me share something with you about humility from the lives of two great men of God, Ezra and Daniel. Ezra prayed a prayer that God heard and worked through to deliver his nation from compromise (see Ezra chapters 9 and 10). In his prayer, Ezra used plural pronouns. For example, he begins by praying, *"O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced to lift up my face to You, my God, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens"* (Ezra 9:6). Likewise, Daniel prayed a prayer that God heard and worked through to deliver his people from captivity. In his prayer Daniel also used plural pronouns (see Daniel 9). For example, he confesses, *"We have sinned and done wrong. We have been wicked and have rebelled…We are covered with shame…"* (Dan. 9:5, 7).

It is time that we stopped pointing our finger at "them." They are sinners, dead in their sins, doing what comes naturally – sinning. But you and I are God's people. There can be no self-righteousness, no judgmental spirit. "We" have sinned and done wrong.

Cry Out with Sincerity and Urgency

We are to cry out with sincerity. *"Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly…"* (Joel 1:14). Fasting is not just going without food. It is going without anything and everything to make the time for prayer. Praise God for all those meeting across the country and around the world, setting aside time on this day of prayer to come together in a holy, solemn assembly, fasting from everything else – work, ministry, email, cell phones, housework, family…. Whatever it is we fast from, we draw aside and cry out to God.

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We also cry out to God with urgency. *"…For the day of the Lord is near; destruction from the Almighty"* (v. 15). The day of the Lord is a day of reckoning. It is a day of accountability. It is a day when God's patience runs out. It is a day of God's judgment. And can I say something that is not pleasant and is not popular? God's judgment is ugly when it falls.

But He never sneaks up and judges us by surprise. He always, always, always sends warnings. He sets off alarms to wake us up. And if what we are facing today are alarms and warnings from heaven that judgment is coming, the only antidote, the only solution is repentance from sin. If it is God's judgment, the answer is not in politics, economics, education nor in the military. The answer is to fall on our face before God and cry out to Him in humble repentance of sin.

Repentance

It is time to repent. Repentance – genuine, deep, heart-felt repentance – is a gift from God, but you can ask Him for it. King David said, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me…and see if there is any wicked way in me…"* (Psa. 139:23-24). He does not say – "in *them*," but "in *me.*" God says, *"If **My** people…"* (2 Chr. 7:14). God is looking at you and me. Judgment begins with the house of God (1 Pet. 4:17). It is time to wake up and cry out with one heart and one voice. *"If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive [your] sin and I will heal [your] land"* (2 Chr. 7:14). God's word is true. Remember – it is undisputable. This is His promise to us.

I am convinced that there are only two solutions to what is going on in our nation. One is the return of Jesus Christ to earth, which I believe is imminent. The second is the revival of the hearts of God's people. And where does revival begin? Revival begins when you draw a circle around yourself and you make sure everything inside that circle is right with God. And the only place you get right with God is at the foot of the Cross of Jesus Christ. You come to the Cross and you confess your sin and tell God you are sorry for your sin – not their sin, but your sin. We acknowledge that we are sinners and ask God to forgive us, to cleanse us with the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and to come into our hearts and take control of our lives.

Draw the circle. Make sure everything inside your circle is right with God. Let this be a time of rededication when you return to the Cross and put your faith in the only One who can save us from God's judgment – and that is Jesus Christ.

Our Prayer-Answering God

It is time to wake up. It is time to cry out to God. Joel says, *"To You, O Lord, I call…"* (Joel 1:19). Joel was crying out to:

…the same God that Moses cried out to, and God parted the Red Sea and the Israelites crossed on dry ground.

…the same God that Joshua cried out to and the walls of Jericho fell on the enemy and the fortress was overcome.

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…the same God that David cried out to and the giant fell and the battle was won.

…the same God that Elijah cried out to and the fire fell and the priests of Baal were overthrown.

…the same God Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego cried out to in the fiery furnace and not one hair of their head was singed.

…the same God that Daniel cried out to and the mouths of the lions were shut.

…the same God that our Lord Jesus Christ cried out to from the Cross when He said, *"Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit"* (Luke 23:46), and He bowed His head and gave His life, and three days later God *"raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and…placed all things under His feet…"* (Eph. 1:20-22). Amen.

You and I are crying out to a God who is the same yesterday, today and forever. He has not lost His power, and He still inclines His ear to hear His people crying to Him. He is a prayer-hearing, prayer-answering, miracle-working God.

It is time with one heart and one voice that we cry out to God, turning from our wicked ways, asking Him to hear our prayers, forgive our sins and heal our land. Just because the National Day of Prayer [has ended] does not mean we stop praying. This is the beginning. It is up to you to cry out to God. I challenge you to pray, and to keep praying, and keep praying, and keep praying until God in heaven hears our prayer, forgives our sin and heals our land.

Lord of the universe. Lord of this planet. Lord of the nations. Lord of our hearts. We look to You...

In the darkness, You are our Light. In the storm, You are our Anchor. In our weakness, You are our Strength. In our grief, You are our Comfort. In our despair, You are our Hope. In our confusion, You are our Wisdom. In time of terrorism, You are our Shield. In time of war, You are our Peace. In times of uncertainty, You are the Rock on which we stand.

We make our prayer to You using the words of the Prophet Daniel:

O Lord, You are the great and awesome God, who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and keep His commandments. You are merciful and forgiving. You are righteous, but this day we are covered with shame because we have sinned against You, and done wrong. We have turned away from Your commands and principles. We have turned away from You.

Yet You have promised in Second Chronicles 7, that if we – a people identified with You – would humble ourselves, pray, seek Your face, and turn from our wicked ways, then You would hear our prayer and heal our land.

So we choose to stop pointing our finger at the sins of others, and examine our own hearts and lives. We choose to acknowledge our own sin – our neglect and defiance and ignorance

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and even rejection of You. This day we choose to repent.

In response to our heartfelt repentance, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Father of Jesus Christ, in keeping with all Your righteous acts and according to Your promise, turn away Your anger and Your wrath from the United States of America. Hear the prayers and petitions offered to You on this National Day of Prayer, as we give You our full attention. Give ear, our God, and hear; open Your eyes and see. We do not make requests of You because we are righteous, but because of Your great mercy.

For the glory of Your name hear our prayer, forgive our sin, and heal our land.

We ask this in the name of Your Son Jesus Christ who offers us salvation from Your judgment, forgiveness for our sin, and reconciliation with You through His own blood shed on the Cross. Amen.

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