



# SUNDAY SCHOOL OCTOBER 26, 2025

Prayer:

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## Old Testament

Joel 2:23-32

*After a drought, the prophet Joel proclaims God's promise*

### THE RAIN OF RENEWAL

O children of Zion, be glad,  
and rejoice in the Lord your God,  
for he has given the early rain for your vindication;  
he has poured down for you abundant rain,  
the early and the later rain, as before.  
The threshing floors shall be full of grain;  
the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

I will repay you for the years  
that the swarming locust has eaten,  
the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter,  
my great army that I sent against you.

You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied  
and praise the name of the Lord your God,  
who has dealt wondrously with you.  
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel  
and that I, the Lord, am your God and there is no other.  
And my people shall never again be put to shame.

### GOD'S SPIRIT POURED OUT

Then afterward  
I will pour out my spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
and your young men shall see visions.

Even on the male and female slaves,  
in those days I will pour out my spirit.

I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved, for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.

### OVERVIEW

In Joel 2:23-32 the prophet turns from describing disaster and judgment (locust plague, drought, invasion) to a promise of restoration, blessing, and a future outpouring of God's Spirit. Verse 23 begins:



*“Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before.” (ESV)*

The passage then moves into verses about “I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten...” (vv. 25-27), followed by a promise that afterward God will pour out His Spirit on *all flesh* (v. 28-29) and that “whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be delivered” (v. 32).

Thus, the overview: from devastation to renewal; from judgment to blessing; from national restoration to universal promise.

## BIBLICAL CONTEXT

Within the Book of Joel, this section is part of Chapter 2 (or in the Hebrew text, part of what is sometimes labeled Chapter 3) and forms the turning point: after the call to repentance (2:12-17), after description of the threat (2:1-11) and the lament of the locust/drought (ch.1), we reach this hopeful promise (2:18-32). The verses (2:23-32) are after the initial promise of restoration (v.18-22) and then lead into the more cosmic and eschatological (final destiny of the soul) material (vv.28-32).

In other words: this is the prophetic promise that if Israel returns to God, He will not only restore their land and crops, but also inaugurate a new era when God’s Spirit is poured out and deliverance is available.

Moreover, New Testament writers see this passage as connecting to the coming of the Holy Spirit (for example, in Acts 2:16-21 the apostle Peter quotes Joel). Thus, in the biblical context the passage bridges immediate restoration to eschatological (end-time) hope.

## HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

### Locust plague / ecological disaster

Many commentators note that the book addresses a serious ecological crisis for Judah: locusts had stripped the land, drought had followed, agricultural offerings to the temple were diminished, the economy and social order were in crisis.

In that sense, the “early and later rain” (v.23) are agricultural terms: in the ancient Near East there was an early (autumn) rain to start planting, and a later (spring) rain to bring the crop to harvest. So, the promise of abundant rain means the land will be restored.

### Political context

Because the book does not mention explicit kings or datable external events, scholars debate the exact political situation. There is reference to locusts and drought, and also later in the book to foreign nations or invaders. Some suggest the prophecy may reflect the later Assyrian, Babylonian, or Persian periods, or even the post-exilic era.

The outpouring of the Spirit and the cosmic signs (sun darkened, moon into blood) in verses 28-31 begin to move beyond the immediate local setting to broader theological and cosmological concerns — judgment and renewal for the nations.

Thus politically, the passage can be read as a promise to the people of Judah (or Israel) that despite their circumstances and despite national failure, God remains sovereign and will bring restoration — and ultimately a universal salvation that transcends the national-political boundaries.



## HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

Because of the difficulties of dating the book precisely, any timeline is tentative, but here's a summary:

- The prophet Joel is introduced in Chapter 1:1, "Joel the son of Pethuel". The time of writing is uncertain. Many scholars suggest a date in the late Persian period (5th-4th century BCE), though older dates (9th-6th century BCE) have been proposed.
- The immediate context: a locust plague and drought have already devastated the land (Joel 1). Then Joel 2:1-11 describes a "day of the Lord" coming with a mighty army (the locust imagery).
- Verses 23-32 then promise restoration and outpouring. So roughly: the "present crisis" (locust/drought) → then the promise of restoration (imminent) → then outpouring of the Spirit and final deliverance (future).
- Some interpreters see the "afterward" of v.28 ("And afterward") as referring to a time after the immediate restoration of Judah but before the final eschaton (end-time). Others see it as the eschatological future. For example, the NT application (in Acts) suggests the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.
- So, while we cannot pin an exact year, the timeframe spans: immediate restoration (agricultural/land) in the near term, and broader spiritual restoration/Spirit-outpouring in the longer term.

## SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

### Scholarly/Metaphorical Interpretation

From a metaphorical viewpoint, this passage is rich:

- The imagery of abundant rain = God's blessing, renewal, return to fertility. In a land ravaged by locusts/drought, it means hope.
- The phrase "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh" (v.28) is often taken as a metaphor for an era when God's presence is democratized: not just prophets elite, but old & young, men & women, servants & free will receive visions, dreams, prophecy.
- The cosmic imagery (sun dark, moon blood) in v.31 functions metaphorically: major upheaval, judgment, the overturning of the existing order. Some see this as literal cosmic signs, others as symbolic of political/cultural transformation.
- The concluding verse (v.32) "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be delivered" becomes a universal promise of salvation, transcending nation, gender, age. It shifts from national restoration to individual/communal salvation.

### Modern Day Context

In a modern setting, one could say:

- When communities face ecological, economic or social devastation (loss of jobs, environmental disaster, decline of infrastructure), this passage encourages hope: God can repay what's lost, restore what's broken.
- The "pouring out of the Spirit" metaphor can apply to times of renewal in churches and communities: when people of all backgrounds participate, when new forms of ministry, service, vocation open up, when the church becomes inclusive and dynamic.



- The cosmic signs remind us that change is not always incremental: sometimes societal upheaval precedes renewal—e.g., social justice movements, technological shifts, global crises prompt spiritual and communal awakening.
- The promise of deliverance to “whoever calls” invites inclusive faith: in our pluralistic world, the gospel message extends beyond cultural/ethnic boundaries.

### Grant County, Indiana Context

Bringing it home to a specific local context like Grant County, Indiana:

- Suppose Grant County has (or had) economic downturns: loss of manufacturing jobs, rural decline, farmland challenges. The imagery of restoration (rain for the land, fruitful harvest) speaks to local farmers, rural communities: God promises renewal, not just in distant metaphors, but for local economies, agriculture, communal life.
- The “pour out my Spirit on all flesh” could mean in Grant County: younger people, older people, men, women, farmworkers, factory workers all can participate in church life, community rebuilding, social outreach, visionary ministry. It challenges a situation where perhaps only some have been the “leaders”; now everyone has a role.
- The promise of deliverance and new hope could inspire local churches to engage in community renewal: urban revival in Marion (the county seat), revitalization of downtowns, supporting local farms, dealing with opioid crisis, restoring hope where despair has set in.
- The cosmic and universal dimension reminds the community that local struggles link to larger realities: economic globalization, environmental change, demographic shifts. But faith offers a hope that is bigger than local setbacks.

Thus, this passage is not only ancient prophecy but has metaphorical richness for today and for a specific place like Grant County—inviting hope, renewal, inclusion, and active participation in God’s work.

### SUMMARY

- v. 23: The children of Zion (God’s people) are invited to rejoice because God will give early and later rains — symbolizing abundant blessing.
- v. 24-27: God will restore what the locusts (and drought) have eaten. The land will be fruitful; the people will know that God is with them and that He is their God; they shall never again be put to shame.
- v. 28-29: “And afterward” (after restoration) God will pour out His Spirit on *all flesh*: your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. Even on male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.
- v. 30-31: I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth: blood, fire, columns of smoke; the sun will be turned to darkness, the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD.
- v. 32: But everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be delivered; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be an escape, as the LORD has said, among the survivors whom the LORD calls.
- **Main thrust:** From loss and devastation to restoration; from blessing of land to blessing of Spirit; from national promise to universal deliverance.



## Gospel

Luke 18:9-14

### *Jesus tells a parable on the power of humility*

#### THE PARABLE OF THE PHARISEE AND THE TAX COLLECTOR

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt:

“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.’

“But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven but was beating his breast and saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’

“I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other, for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

#### OVERVIEW

Luke 18:9–14 presents a parable unique to the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus contrasts two men praying in the temple: a **Pharisee**, a respected religious leader, and a **tax collector**, a man despised for collaborating with Rome. The parable exposes the dangers of **self-righteousness** and the spiritual blindness that comes from comparing oneself to others. Jesus concludes that the humble tax collector, not the proud Pharisee, “went home justified before God,” teaching that humility and repentance are the true posture of righteousness.

#### BIBLICAL CONTEXT

This passage appears within a section of Luke emphasizing **faith, humility, and the reversal of expectations** in God’s kingdom (Luke 17–18). Just before this, Jesus told the parable of the **persistent widow** (Luke 18:1–8), showing God’s readiness to hear the cries of the humble. Luke introduces this parable with a clear purpose: “To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else” (v. 9).

In the larger narrative, Jesus is approaching Jerusalem. His teachings increasingly expose the hypocrisy of religious elites and highlight the inner transformation God desires — repentance and mercy over outward appearances and status. Thematically, it ties to the Beatitudes (“Blessed are the poor in spirit”) and echoes Old Testament prophets like Hosea and Micah who valued mercy and humility over ritual purity (Hosea 6:6; Micah 6:8).

#### HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

In first-century Judea, **Pharisees** were part of a lay religious movement dedicated to strict observance of **Mosaic Law and oral tradition**. They were admired by many for moral rigor and devotion, yet Jesus frequently critiqued them for **legalism and spiritual pride** — doing the right things for the wrong reasons.



**Tax collectors** were Jews employed by the Roman Empire to collect tolls and taxes. They were widely viewed as **traitors** and often **corrupt**, since they profited by **overcharging**. Their profession placed them outside religious respectability; they were lumped together with “sinners” (Luke 5:30).

Politically, Rome’s taxation system was a daily reminder of subjugation. For Jesus to hold up a tax collector — an agent of Rome — as morally superior to a Pharisee was **radical and offensive** to his audience. It inverted the expected hierarchy of holiness and forced listeners to confront the difference between **external piety and inner repentance**.

#### HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

This teaching likely occurred near the **end of Jesus’s public ministry**, around **30–33 CE**, as he journeyed toward Jerusalem. The Temple remained the center of religious life; its grandeur and daily sacrifices symbolized the Jewish people’s devotion and identity. The parable’s setting “in the temple” evokes both national pride and personal piety — and heightens the tension between appearances and authenticity.

Luke, writing between **80–90 CE**, addressed a growing Christian community that included both Jews and Gentiles. The parable reminded early believers that justification before God comes through **humility and grace**, not through ethnic lineage or ritual observance.

#### SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

Scholars often read this parable as a **mirror parable** — meant not to describe two men “out there,” but to help listeners recognize both figures within themselves.

- **The Pharisee** symbolizes **egoic religion** — faith built on comparison, pride, or the need to appear righteous. In today’s world, this may resemble people (or institutions) who take moral stances to elevate themselves rather than to serve others. In Grant County, this could parallel community or church divisions where people equate goodness with social standing or political affiliation, forgetting humility and compassion.
- **The Tax Collector** represents **repentant honesty** — acknowledging one’s own flaws and dependence on grace. In modern terms, this might be the recovering addict, the person with a criminal record, or anyone marginalized yet sincere in seeking God. Their prayer, “God, be merciful to me, a sinner,” becomes a timeless model of humility.

Metaphorically, the **temple** stands for the human heart — where both pride and repentance meet. The parable challenges communities, including small towns like those across Grant County, to measure faith not by who seems “respectable,” but by who is willing to bow low and change.

It also resonates with civic life: when local leaders or citizens boast of their virtue (“we’re not like them”) rather than working toward shared compassion and justice, they echo the Pharisee. But when a community admits its struggles — poverty, addiction, division — and seeks renewal, it mirrors the tax collector’s posture before God.

#### SUMMARY

In Luke 18:9–14, Jesus contrasts two prayers: one of **pride**, one of **repentance**. The Pharisee boasts of his moral superiority and ritual discipline, while the tax collector humbly pleads for mercy. Jesus declares that the latter is justified before God, for “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”



The parable's message endures as both **personal and societal correction**: righteousness is not about proving oneself better than others, but about recognizing one's need for grace. Whether in first-century Jerusalem or modern-day Grant County, humility remains the true measure of holiness — the quiet courage to say, "God, have mercy on me," and to live that mercy outwardly toward others.





## Addendums

### Scripture Comparison

Joel 2:23-32 and Luke 18:9-14 (the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector) actually share a *theological thread* about **humility, restoration, and the universal reach of God's grace**.

Let's explore their **common message** through five short sections.

#### 1. Common Thread: Dependence on God, Not Self

- **Joel 2:23-32** portrays a nation humbled by disaster. The people cannot save themselves; locusts and drought have stripped the land bare. Only when they repent and turn back to God does restoration begin.
- **Luke 18:9-14** shows the same spiritual principle on a personal level. The Pharisee boasts of his own righteousness; the tax collector beats his chest and cries, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

**Shared truth:** Salvation, renewal, and restoration come *only when pride is abandoned*. Whether a nation or an individual, healing begins with humility before God.

#### 2. God's Response to the Humble

- In **Joel**, God responds to repentance by sending rain, fruitfulness, and ultimately His Spirit on *all flesh* — not just priests or prophets.
- In **Luke**, God declares that the humble tax collector goes home "justified before God," while the proud man does not.

**Common insight:** God's favor descends like rain — it cannot be earned or forced; it is *poured out*. Both passages describe a God who lifts up the lowly and fills the repentant with life again.

#### 3. Universal Reach of Grace

- Joel's prophecy culminates with: "*I will pour out my Spirit on all people... even on servants, both men and women.*" This erases social, gender, and status barriers.
- Jesus' parable breaks the same walls: a despised tax collector becomes the model of righteousness, while a respected religious leader becomes the cautionary tale.

**Common message:** God's kingdom overturns human hierarchies. Grace does not flow through social rank, religious privilege, or public reputation — it comes to those who open their hearts.

#### 4. Modern and Grant County, Indiana Context

If we bring this shared theme home:

- **Joel's "rain"** could symbolize a community renewal after economic drought — new opportunity, cooperation, and compassion sprouting where pride once caused division.
- **Luke's parable** calls out the quiet arrogance that sometimes creeps into churches, politics, or even small-town culture — the assumption that "we" are righteous while "they" are not. Together, the two texts challenge Grant County Christians to pray for *spiritual rain*: humility that waters relationships, inclusion that transcends status, and genuine repentance that leads to community healing.

It's a reminder that revival — whether economic, social, or spiritual — doesn't begin with louder boasting, but with lowered hearts.



## 5. Common Message Summary

Theme	Joel 2:23-32	Luke 18:9-14	Common Message
<b>Condition</b>	National devastation and repentance	Individual pride and repentance	Brokenness opens the door to grace
<b>Divine Action</b>	God restores rain, land, and Spirit	God justifies the humble sinner	God's mercy restores the humble
<b>Recipients</b>	"All flesh" — universal	"Whoever humbles himself" — individual	God's grace knows no boundaries
<b>Outcome</b>	Renewal and spiritual awakening	Forgiveness and justification	New life born from humility and faith

### In short:

Both passages proclaim that *true restoration — personal or communal — begins when pride yields to humility, and when dependence shifts from self to God.*

Joel's rains and Spirit symbolize what happens inside the heart of the tax collector: a dry soul becomes fertile again.

### REALITY CHECK

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