



# THE EXHORTER

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***“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40***

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. ([prchurchofchrist.org](http://prchurchofchrist.org))

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## Jump Start # 1379

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**Joel 2:12-13** *“Yet even now, declares the Lord, ‘Return to Me, with all your heart, and with fasting, weeping and mourning; and rend your heart and not your garments.’ Now return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and relenting of evil.”*

Troublesome times are here, are the opening lines of one of the hymns we sing. Troublesome times, sums up the situation facing the nation that Joel was addressing. The second chapter of Joel begins with a warning sound, "Blow a trumpet in Zion." The day of the Lord was coming. It was described as a day of darkness and gloom. "There has never been anything like it," as a coming nation was being sent by God to punish His people.

For too long the people had ignored God, compromised with idolatry and lived with indifferent hearts. God's patience and pleading had reached an end. Trouble was coming. It would be severe. Lessons would be learned.

Our verses today, remind us that God still held out hope that some would repent and come back to Him. Twice in our verses, the word, "Return" is used. God was wanting His people back. His goal was not to wipe them off the planet, but for them to be sorry for their sins and dedicate themselves to the Lord. That desire of the Lord has never changed. It is what God wants for us. The greatest command is to love the Lord with all of our heart, mind and soul. All-totally, completely in, all or nothing.

One expression from our passage today that is noteworthy is, "rend your heart and not your garments." The word 'rend' means to tear or rip. Often the Scriptures tell of people tearing their garments.

- Reuben tore his garments when he found that Joseph was no longer in the pit that he had been put in (Gen 37)
- When Joseph's brother brought the bloodied and shredded coat of many colors to their father, Jacob tore his clothes and put on sack cloth and ashes (Gen 37).
- When Israel grumbled against Moses, Joshua tore his clothes (Num 14).
- When David received word that Saul and his sons were killed in battle, David tore his clothes (2 Sam 1).

(OVER)

That expression is used often in the O.T. It is found in times of extreme grief, panic and shocking news. Our culture doesn't do that. We don't tear our clothes on purpose. We don't put on burlap. We don't pour ashes on our head. We simply cry. I've been around families that received sudden and shocking news of death. The tears flow. Some collapse in grief. It's tough to witness such sorrow.

I expect our clothes cost too much and maybe we think too much of them to tear them. It's just something that we do not do in our times. Our passage is telling the people to not tear or rend their clothes, but instead to tear their hearts. Tearing your clothes, back then, showed others how pitiful things were. It illustrated how broken up you were. Some could tear their clothes on the outside but not be affected much on the inside. God was wanting the inside. God is always more interested with our insides.

Jesus warned the multitudes about praising God with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him. David said that God was more interested in a broken and contrite heart than sacrifices. Here in Joel, it's a torn heart, not torn clothes, that God was seeking.

Torn hearts brought about change. It meant that the people recognized their wrong. It was the first step leading to spiritual change. The prodigal experienced that when he came to his senses. He had a change of heart. His father was now worth coming home to, not running from. What happened? His heart was torn.

The torn heart, from our passage, is connected to weeping, mourning and fasting. The person with the torn heart isn't happy. He's done wrong. He recognizes that. He has sinned against God. Whether he was caught or not, whether others ever found out or not, he knows it's not right. He's played around with sin. He has not taken God seriously. His worship, his life, his attitude all reflect someone who has taken God for granted. He did what he wanted to do. He ignored God's command. He thought he could break the commands without any difficulty or trouble. He lived on top of the world. But now he realized what a fool he has been. He neglected God. He has been acting like nothing matters, when it did. He has disappointed, angered and broken the heart of God. The Lord was angry with him. The Lord was ready to be done with him.

God was calling for this person to tear his heart. Rend, not your clothes, but your heart, is what the Lord was seeking. God was willing to forgive. God is compassionate. God is gracious. Return to God. Rend your heart.

We must wonder where we are in all of this. Could it be that we are just a step or two from where ancient Israel was? We worship on Sunday, but does that affect us on a Tuesday? We gather, smile, enjoy, have a good time, but do we feel sorry for the wrongs that we do? Have we found soft and nice ways to excuse indifference to God's word? Have we found comfortable ways to hide our sins? Has mourning, fasting and tearing of our hearts long escaped us? Other than the time we initially become Christians, have we taken a liking to sin and found that it's really not all that bad? Have we for too long played at church and worshipped our jobs? Has God taken second place to sports, weekend get-a-ways and "our time?"

Rend your hearts, may be the message for our times and our people. Tear your hearts. Rip your hearts. Take a look at where God is in your life. Are you and the Lord strong in your relationship? Are you getting closer to the Lord? Are you pleasing the Lord?

Rend your hearts-not fix them, not mend them, not patch them up. Faithfulness to the Lord begins on the insides. It's an inside out direction.

Wonderful passage. It makes us think. It makes us look at ourselves. It makes us wonder.

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