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***THE VITAL ROLE OF SACRED ASSEMBLIES IN GOD’S END TIME STRATEGY – COREY STARK***

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I. THE ESCALATING WORLDWIDE CRISIS (PSALM 2), AS IN THE DAYS OF NOAH (Lk. 17:26)

A. Jesus likened the decades preceding His return to the “days of Noah” (Lk. 17:26-27). Noah’s generation was totally corrupt (Gen. 6:5), yet in mercy God forewarned them of an unprecedented worldwide shaking soon to come. He made a way of escape for all with “ears to hear” by giving Noah a divine blueprint to build a life-sustaining “ark of safety” that would not just endure, but *prevail* through the coming storm (Heb. 11:7).

***Lk. 17:26 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man... (Mt. 24:37-39)***

B. In Psalm 2 King David also spoke of a worldwide crisis in society that would crescendo in the generation of the LORD’s return. Charles Spurgeon [1834-1892] described Psalm 2 as theatrical drama having four acts.

ACT I *Kings’ opposition*: Seeking to remove the influence of God’s Word in culture and society (2:1-3)

ACT II *Father’s declaration*: Exalting Jesus as King and confronting the rebellion against Him (2:4-6)

ACT III *Jesus’ intercession*: Interceding in agreement with the Father’s decrees about Him (2:7-9)

ACT IV *Holy Spirit’s exhortation*: Calling people to gratefully engage with God in reverent joy (2:10-12)

C. ACT I: The kings of the earth (i.e. heads of state) and rulers in society rage in defiant opposition to Jesus’ rightful leadership. They seek to completely remove the influence of His Word from culture and society, including the sanctity of life, marriage and sexuality (vs. 1-3). They describe Scripture, as “bonds” enslaving them to archaic ways and “cords” that hinder their personal freedom and humanity’s full potential.

***Ps. 2:1 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? 2 The kings of the earth [i.e. heads of state] set themselves, and the rulers [i.e. leaders in society] take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying, 3 “Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us.”***

D. The rage in society against Jesus will escalate far beyond people merely *voicing negative opinions* against God’s people and His truth to kings and world leaders using their authority and state resources to *war against God’s plans and His people* via hate crimes, prison, and even death (Rev. 11:7; 12:17; 13:7; 17:14; 19:19).

E. ACT II: The Father responds by laughing at the attempt to nullify His Word (v. 4) and by declaring His purpose to exalt Jesus as rightful King over the nations (v. 6), while distressing the kings with judgment (v. 5).

***Ps. 2:4 He who sits in the heavens shall laugh... 5 He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure: 6 “Yet I have set My King [i.e. Jesus] on My holy hill of Zion.”***

F. ACT III: Jesus responds to the escalating crisis by *simply agreeing* with the Father’s will as expressed in His Word (2:7-9). Why? Because *faith-filled words of agreement* are the *primary way* that God establishes His divine will and releases His governmental power on the earth (Mt. 6:10; Heb. 7:21, 25; 1 Jn. 5:14-15).

***Ps. 2:7 “I will declare the decree: The Lord [i.e. Father] has said to Me, ‘You are My Son... 8 Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession.”***

G. ACT IV: The Holy Spirit exhorts the kings to be wise and rethink their position, while calling everyone to gratefully engage with God in reverent joy that flows from affection not just duty (vs. 10-12). In context, this includes *speaking God’s message* (vs. 5-6) and *engaging in prayer* for His will to be accomplished (v. 8).

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**II. THE PSALM 2 CRISIS REQUIRES A JOEL 2 RESPONSE, RESULTING IN AN ACTS 2 OUTPOURING!**

A. The divine pattern in Joel was graciously given to us by God to teach His people how to respond to Him in national crisis when there is no human solution, so He can intervene with great power, mercy and deliverance.

B. Due to God's merciful nature, He progressively shakes a nation, giving them time to respond in voluntary agreement (Ps. 107). If they refuse, the pressure continues to escalate (Lev. 26:14-45; Am. 4:6-12). Since the purpose is to remove disagreement with His will (rebellion), shaking need not occur where there's agreement.

***Lev. 26:27 'After all this, if you... walk contrary to Me, 28 then I... will chastise you seven times more...***

C. Joel 1 begins with unprecedented *natural disaster* (1:2) and God releasing four waves of *locust* that devour the land (1:4-6), followed by *drought* (1:8-12), *famine* (1:16-18), *economic crisis* and finally *wildfires* that destroy Israel's agricultural reserves (1:19-20). Joel rightly attributed this crisis to the LORD (1:15) and called Israel to gather before Him in a "sacred assembly." Why? Because of His earlier promise (2 Chr. 7:13-14).

***Joel 1:14 Consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. 15 For the day of the Lord is at hand...***

***2 Chr. 7:13 When I shut up heaven and there is no rain, or... devour the land [natural disaster], or send pestilence... 14 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 I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin and heal their land.***

D. Due to Israel's inability to discern God's involvement and lack of wholehearted response, what began as *natural disaster* (1:2-20), escalated to a *military invasion* (2:1-11) in God's desire to get their full attention.

***Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble... 2 A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will ever be...***

E. In Joel 2 God gives us a divine pattern, as in the "days of Noah," empowering His people to confidently respond to Him during a *national crisis with no human remedy*, so He can intervene with great power, mercy and deliverance. We gather together in a "sacred assembly," *turning to Him* with all of our heart (2:12-17) and praying for a *great outpouring* of the Holy Spirit (2:28-31), while asking Him to *relent in mercy* (2:13, 17).

***Joel 2:12 "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... 15 Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; 16 gather the people... the congregation... the elders, gather the children and nursing babes...***

F. The result of our "sacred assembly" (2:12-17) is the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit (2:28-32), as seen in the book of Acts (Acts 2:1-4). Peter appealed to Joel 2 when accused of being "drunk" (Acts 2:15-21)!

***Joel 2:28 "It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions... 31 Before the coming of the... day of the Lord. 32 And... whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."***