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DON'T LET LOCUSTS EAT YOUR BLESSINGS!

Today's Bible Text: Joel 1- 2: 27

Extracts:

The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land, “Has anything like this happened in your days, or even in the days of your fathers? ... *What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten....* Now, therefore”, says the Lord, “Turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping, and with mourning.” *So, rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the Lord your God for He is gracious and merciful.... [so that the Lord] “will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten; the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust”* [Joel 1: 1, 2, 4; 2: 12, 13, 25]

*In one of the James Bond movies, **Live and Let Die** [1973], the British spy, 007, escaped from being fed to crocodiles by the drug magnate, Dr. Kananga's men. As he fled at top speed in a fly boat through the extensive Louisiana creeks (USA), hotly pursued by Kananga's men, he came to a narrow beach jutting into the sea. There was a wedding ceremony taking place there. In desperation, James Bond, followed by his pursuers, 'flew' his boat through the section of the beach set out for the wedding reception. Before the celebrants knew what had just happened, the wedding cake was gone and the place reserved for the reception was in disarray. Instead of joy, the young couple wept.*

Some of us may blame James Bond and his pursuers for messing up the young couple's special day. However, some others may wonder why the couple chose the beach instead of a ball room for their wedding. By choosing such a vulnerable venue, they had actually invited what happened to them. Therefore, they should share a greater part of the blame.

In like manner, God has blessed us with material things, good health and a wonderful family, among others. However, through our sins, we have invited (or allowed) devourers to attack or eat up our prosperity. In today's lesson, God uses the attack of locusts on the southern kingdom of Judah to drive this point home to the people. What are the locusts in your life right now and what are they doing to your blessings? How can you prevent their attacks in the future? Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in today's lesson.

1. Introduction: Locusts devastate Judah

Locusts are insects of the same family as grasshoppers, but they travel together in a swarm.¹ They are herbivores, that is, live on herbs. A swarm of locusts can have as many as 40-80 million locusts, packed into less than one square kilometer (half-a square mile) of space, and each of them can eat as much as two grammes of vegetation per day. In other words, such a swarm can eat in one day enough food for 400,000 people in one year! That is why they pose a major threat to human food supply, especially in the desert areas of Africa, the Middle East and Asia.

Since they are also looking for food, locusts alight where they find *enabling environmental conditions* such as *green plants*. They *do not eat after sun set* and they *can only operate during the day* when the *temperature is warm or hot*, such as between 25°C (77°F) and 30°C (86°F). Nevertheless, they strike *unexpectedly*. In a matter of hours, locusts can strip every living green bare. For example, when God brought the plague of locusts on Egypt during the time of Moses, here is how it was described [Ex. 10: 12-15]:

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the land of Egypt for the locusts, that they may come upon the land of Egypt, and eat every herb of the land....” So Moses stretched out his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind on the land all that day and all that night. When it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts, and the locusts went up over the land of Egypt and rested on all the territory of Egypt. They were very severe... for they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land darkened; and they ate every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees... So there remained nothing green on the trees or on the plants of the field throughout the land of Egypt.

The prophet Joel used the invasion of locusts and the hunger and famine that it had brought about to draw the attention of the elders and people of Judah to the imminent (judgment) day of the Lord [Joel 1: 1-2]. He summarized the ravaging work of the locusts as follows, “What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” [v. 4]. The prophet then warned that a worse calamity awaited the people in the form of an invasion from a nation “strong and without number; his teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion.” He would lay waste the vine, ruin the fig tree, strip it bare and throw it away, and make its branches white [vv. 6-7]. He called on them to ‘consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly; gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the Lord (their) God, and cry out to the Lord’ for ‘the day of the Lord is at hand (and) it shall come as destruction from the Almighty’ [vv. 14-15]. Clearly, just as Pharaoh’s sins attracted the plague of locust to Egypt,

¹ Based on the following sources: The Open Door Web Site, www.saburchill.com/facts/facts0007.html, and National Geographic, ‘Locust,’ <http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/locust.html>

so had the sins of the people of Judah brought on their nation the plague of locusts in the form of insects or human invaders.

2. The locusts in our lives

We know that those that will live godly in Christ shall suffer persecution [2 Tim. 3: 12]. However, today's discussion is not addressing such cases. Instead, we are looking at attacks that we attract to ourselves on account of disobeying God's word and remaining in sin. What happened to the nation of Judah can also happen to us today. What have we done with all the blessings that God has poured on us? Have we used them to glorify Him? Have we reciprocated by showing gratitude and appreciation? In most cases, we have not. Instead, we have paid Him back with sins and wickedness. Consequently, He has allowed locusts to strip our rich pasture that we rely on for cover. According to today's bible text, such locusts could come in the following forms:

a) *Chewing locusts*

The invading locusts chew up the greens before eating them. They may not eat everything that they chew. Therefore, chewing locusts represent *wastage or destruction*. In the case of Judah, their fields were wasted, the grains ruined and vinedressers wailed because "the harvest of the field (had) withered away" [Joel 1: 10-12].

Look at how much of our blessings we fritter away in ways that we cannot understand. A freak accident, a careless fire, or the loss of a vital document. A sudden drop in the value of your stocks and shares. A promising business deal that unexpectedly goes wrong after sinking in so much money. What of a false report about you circulating in the office or in the media? What of failure in a certifying test that you were so sure that you would pass? Are you so sure that it is your enemies at work or that you have invited the chewing locusts into your pasture?

b) *Swarming locusts*

When a swarm of locusts arrives in their targeted zone, the whole place turns dark because they prevent the light from reaching the ground. Such a day is "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" [Joel 2: 2]. Therefore, swarming locusts represent *great strength, darkness or hindering*. Like their human counterparts in the day of the Lord, "they run like mighty men; they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks...; the earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness" [vv. 7, 8, 10].

See how hard you work and yet you have nothing to show for it. Why is your contribution to the success of your business or church or office being covered up? Why are you not getting due credit for all you are doing for your larger family? There does not seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel. Who is hindering you? Is it your enemy or your sins? Find out!

The prophet Haggai describes such a situation as follows [**Hagg. 1: 6**]:

You have sown much, and bring in little; you eat, but do not have enough; you drink, but you are not filled with drink; you clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; and he who earns wages, earns wages to put into a bag with holes.

The people had such difficulties because they had left the house of God in ruins while they themselves lived in paneled houses [v. 4]. They had invited swarming locusts to their rich pastures.

c) *Crawling locusts*

The crawling locusts are those ones that *linger* on even when the swarm has passed on. They are not in a hurry to go. Therefore, they do mopping up operations! Like their human counterparts in the day of the Lord, “they run to and fro in the city; they run on the wall; they climb into the houses; they enter at the windows like a thief” [**Joel 2: 9**].

As long as we persist in disobedience, God will be on our case. He will allow the crawling locusts to keep up their pressure on us. For example, He visited Pharaoh with ten plagues to force him to allow the children of Israel to leave Egypt. The worst plague was the last one, when the king lost his heir-apparent. Therefore, crawling locusts will linger on in your rich pasture unless you repent and remove the enabling environment for them to remain.

d) *Consuming locusts*

The cumulative effect of all the attacks of the locusts is that the green is stripped bare, thus precipitating hunger and hardship. In the case of the people of Judah, the harvest perished, the trees of the field (the fig, the pomegranate, the palm and the apple) all withered [**Joel 1: 12**]. The seed shriveled under the clods; storehouses were in shambles; barns were broken down, and the grain withered. The animals groaned and were restless because they had no pasture [**vv. 17-18**].

How many churches and ministries have seen their rich bank accounts and assets depleted by mismanagement and fraudulent practices or court settlements on account of their unfaithful priests, pastors and leaders? How about the economic hardships being experienced all over the world as a result

of the weakening American economy? Are all those random events or we may be facing the work of consuming locusts on account of the growing wickedness of the world?

3. A call to repentance

In the event of a disaster, such as famine, only a few countries can fend for themselves. Even so, local governments in the affected areas are likely to seek help from the central or federal authorities. For example, in the United States, states affected by natural disasters, such as hurricanes, fires or floods, always reach out to the Federal Government for emergency relief. Therefore, it is not out of place for human beings to look up to God for relief.

God's way is quite easy. All He desires from us is *genuine repentance*, that is, to turn away from sin and turn to Him. He said to the nation of Judah, "Turn to Me with all your hearts, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. 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" [**Joel 2: 12-13**]. When you repent as God wants it, He will do the following for you as He promised to do for repentant Judah:

a) *He will launch an economic relief programme*

The Lord will refresh your pasture that has been devastated by locusts. He will "send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them." He will no longer make you a reproach among your peers or others [**vv. 18-19**].

b) *He will grant you victory and protection*

The Lord will remove far from you all the devourers of your blessings and rich harvest and drive them away "into a barren and desolate land." You will no longer have cause to fear for the "Lord has done marvelous things." The beasts of the field will have the open pastures that are springing up again; the trees are bearing fruits; and the fig tree and the vine are yielding their strength once again [**vv. 20-23**].

c) *He will restore your prosperity*

The Lord "will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten; the crawling locust, the consuming locust and the chewing locust" [**vv. 24-24**]. Interestingly, your restoration will be in a reversed order- from the hardest to the easiest! When the locusts came, the chewing locusts struck first and the consuming locusts last. In your restoration, God first removes the swarming locusts (those that darken your way), followed by the crawling (lingering), the consuming (hardship-causing) and chewing (wasting) locusts. You will in deed be satisfied!

d) *You will move from shame to praise!*

The Lord assured Judah (as He is saying to you right now), “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 be put to shame*” [vv. 25-26] Those who had written you off as ‘finished’ will come to know that the God you serve is forgiving and He is still with you. He has turned your shame to praise!

4. Conclusion: protect your blessings!

If in deed the peace of mind that you have comes from God, you will do all in your power to protect it by *continuing* to fear Him in all your ways. When you succumb to temptation, behave like the sheep (that fights its way out of mud), not like the pig (that enjoys dirt and marsh and remains there). Repent and be restored, failing which God will allow locusts to ravage your estate. Do not leave it to chance. Put it in God’s care.

Don’t let locusts eat your blessings.