

Lessons from Locusts: Plague, Partnership, and Purpose

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References: Joel 1; Proverbs 30, Joel 1:1-4; Proverbs 30:27; Exodus 10:4

Introduction

Wow, it's great to be here. Wow, what a bunch of beautiful, smiling faces. Isn't it wonderful to be a part of the family of God? I get pretty excited about myself.

Well, thanks to our techie here, we're going to get up and running in a few seconds. Thank you. Thank you. I usually come a half hour early and it's all working perfectly, but when it's dormant like this, I guess she just doesn't like it—doesn't appreciate that I put it to sleep. So I'm just taking a few seconds here. So we'll go back to emails. We'll go back to Roy. I enjoy your emails, Roy, every week. Even though I'm not here every week, I certainly enjoy coming and following along with you.

Okay, here we come in. Allow. Voilà. Join again. Hi, there I am. Yes. Hello, you people out in Zoom land. Good. You're on mute. I'm supposed to be on mute, I believe. And we're going to share the screen. Oh, this is working today. Thank you, Roy. I love Roy. He's one of my best friends.

We're doing a series. The people who have come here all the time, we're doing a series and it's on animals. And I'm enjoying doing it because it's all new to me. Even though I've been preaching for over 50 years, there's so much new—so many new things. Nothing new in the Bible; it's all been there. All right. All this stuff is new to me. And as you grow older and older... well, we'll stop there. God reveals different things. And it's just wonderful to be able to preach the Word of God and teach the Word of God.

Preparation and Research

A lot of people ask, "Well, how do you prepare the messages? And how do you come up with the messages?"

First, you pray. Before I prepare a message, I pray. And I pray and I pray and I pray, because I don't want to just blah, blah, blah. We hear blah, blah, blah over the television and Internet and so on all the time. And I just don't want another blah, blah, blah. So I pray. And then what I do a lot of times, the Lord reveals a scripture or a subject. And then what I start from there is I read the scriptures that the Lord has put on my heart or the subject. And I'll read... in French. And I read it and read it in two or three translations in Spanish, because the words are sometimes different. The meaning is the same; it's just that with my limited vocabulary in English, I read it in French. Je parle français, je parle espagnol.

And then after that, I do something that some people question, and I read commentaries. I enjoy some commentaries. You've got to be careful (ojo!) who you are reading. Now I'm going to quote, for instance... oh, you're wondering what I want to speak about! Well, I've already spoken about eagles here, and I also spoke about ants. I got in trouble after that because I was going like this, but it answers—and after, the deacons came up to me and said, "We don't have any ants here." No, I'm only kidding! But we talked about the ants. We had a good time there, I hope. Then we talked about some lions. I didn't act out any lions. And we talked about some snakes.

Today we're going to talk about, this morning: **locusts**. 28 to 30 times in the Bible, locusts are mentioned. So why is it in the Bible? There must be some teaching. There must be some advantages of reading about it and studying about it. Well, I've never really done it. I've read about, you know, remember Egypt—the locusts? I mean, but it's very interesting that what I did this time was I read what Dr. Jeremiah... Now, please, please be careful what you read. Maybe I shouldn't do this publicly, but I'm going to share something that Dr. Jeremiah taught me.

Dr. Jeremiah teaches that biblical locusts represent both the vast physical judgment—vast judgment from God—and in prophetic books like Revelation, symbolizes the demonic torment of mass armies. He interprets these passages to explain God's plan and His promise of ultimate restoration. So that's what he says. That's not necessarily what the Bible says. This is the best thing, and I'm not putting this down.

And so then what I did is I went and saw what John Piper said. John Piper views locusts in the Bible primarily as literal instruments of God—God's sovereign judgment sent to wake people up. He points to the Book of Joel where a massive locust swarm is God's discipline on Israel for their half-hearted love. Piper teaches that God will fight against His own people to bring them to repentance and secure their undivided allegiance.

One more, just as an example. One more, and that was John MacArthur. John MacArthur teaches that locusts generally represent literally terrifying judgment from God. He rejects

viewing them as a man-made weapon, taking the scriptures as literal. He identifies them in two main ways in biblical context: the Book of Joel and the Book of Revelation.

So I go through that, and I've got 10 or 15 good, reliable books that I read and so on. But what does God want for us here? What are the lessons of locusts in the Bible for us here in 16th?

The Key Texts

Well, the text I'm going to be looking a little bit at is Joel 1, verses 1 to 4. And then we're going to go over to Proverbs 30, verse 27. Those are the two main scriptures that the Lord led me to look on.

[Joel 1:1-4 NKJV] - ¹ The word of the LORD that came to Joel the son of Pethuel. ² 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? ³ Tell your children about it, Let your children tell their children, And their children another generation. ⁴ 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.

Locusts are mentioned many times in the Bible, as I said, between 28 to 30 times in the Bible. Sometimes they are instruments of judgment. Now, look at that. That is biblical. God uses locusts as an instrument of judgment. Okay? You can take that to the bank. I don't know if you can say that expression. But anyway, sometimes illustrations of discipline. Discipline. And sometimes examples of unity and wisdom.

And we're going to look at these, because there's a message for 16th here, and you are 16th. This building is not 16th; this is just a building. I could talk to that building a million times, hours on hours, and won't teach the building nothing. But these lessons are for us from the scriptures. And we're going to get these small creatures—they teach us great spiritual truth. Sometimes we talk on these animals—and I have done what is now 17 messages on different animals—and some of them are pretty small. And locusts are relatively small also.

So what lessons can we take? Well, I'm going to do it in three ways very quickly—I only have 10, 11 minutes: **plague**, **partnership**, and **purpose**. What do the plagues have to do with us in 16th Avenue Gospel Chapel? What is the partnership—how can we apply this to our partnership here? And what is the purpose of the locusts?

1. The Plague: Sin Consumes

Sin always consumes more than we expect. That's the first lesson I learned in that. I mean, like locusts, we're going to see that they eat everything. They come in swarms and they go in and they eat everything. You know, sin also does the same thing. Sin consumes us, takes over us. What the locust swarm has left, the great locust has eaten. They devour everything; there's nothing left. The locust comes in waves like that—waves, stripping the land bare. Joel uses this devastation as a picture of the destructive effects of sin and God's judgment.

Sin is terrible. And that's why we as a community, this is why we as a church, this is why we as a hospital have to work together, pray together. And we're going to see that in the message. We've got to work together.

I thank God for the local assembly. I was asked—because they think I speak three languages—I've been asked to go full-time with the Gideons and with Lighthouse Ministry. I was there five years with Billy Graham. But anyway, all of these things... You know why I didn't? Because I believe that what you're doing here at 16th, at 10th Avenue, at Cascade Gospel Chapel, at Hennepin Chapel—I believe that is God's institution. That's what God wants. And so I refused. I was offered some good money, but I said, "No, thank you. I'll do a job for you. I'll do a project for you, but I ain't joining your organization. I'm a part of the family of God, and I want to help at Cascade Gospel Chapel and 16th Avenue and so on."

And when we watch the locusts, we're going to see really what happened. That's what it looks like. Look at green. Isn't it beautiful? Life is beautiful. But sin comes in our lives and it destroys everything. It destroys our reputation. It destroys our name. It destroys everything. But now look what happens when the locusts come. Oh, what an ugly picture! What an ugly picture.

And sin is ugly. And I'm not preaching to the choir right now, because we all are fighting against sin. And we're going to see from this message and the next message that we can only, only overcome sin—by ourselves? No way, Jose! No way. We can only overcome it by God: the work of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit in our lives, and working as a group, an assembly, a body. We're the body. Sure, I'm the body. I'm not the arms anymore. I used to be the arms in the body. I used to rake, make trenches, I used to work at the church, cut grass. I can't do that. I'm not the arm anymore, but some of you are the arm. And each of us have a different job and a different thing.

Now in Exodus chapter 10 verse 4 we have the Old Testament of the plagues. And of course, God sent locusts upon Egypt because Pharaoh hardened his heart.

[Exodus 10:4 NKJV] - Or else, if you refuse to let My people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your territory.

The locust devoured everything left after the hailstorm. God used the locusts as a tool of judgment on Egypt. Persistent rebellion eventually brings consequences. That's talking to me. That's talking to a Christian. That's talking to a child of God. I'm born again, regenerated. But if I persist in doing things against the Lord, it brings consequences. It brings consequences.

And there's consequences in my body today because I've done things wrong. I mean, for whom, yes? Left hip, right hip replaced, right knee replaced, open heart surgery. A lot of that was because of my own stupidity, because I didn't do what God... I can remember my elders saying, "Ron, Ron, your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Don't do that." And what did I say?

So sin in your life and in my life brings consequences. See, I'm not one of those preachers going to stand up and say, "Well, dear brothers and sisters, we have to be careful." No, I have to be careful. I've run through it. I'm still going through it. I'm still fighting. The next message after this one, after coffee, is on the scorpion. And I was bit this week—a scorpion bit me! We won't go into that now, but remember: persistent rebellion against God, His will in your life, will bring consequences.

Literally, I want to give you examples. We have the example in the Old Testament of Egypt. Now in the New Testament, think about the prodigal son. Think about the young man's inheritance, his dignity, his joy—he lost it all because he persisted. He went against God. He went against the will of God, and all he had was misery. He went down, down, down. And we'll do the same thing if we don't look up. Sin devours lives just as locusts devour crops.

I hate sin. But Satan's always there—tempting, tempting, tempting. But you know, ask yourself: what locusts are eating away in my walk with God? What is in your life that's limiting you? What in your life is not giving you the blessing that you could have? What is in my life that has taken away joy—real joy, wonderful joy? What are the locusts in my life?

Yes, we're sitting here. We just had a wonderful time of worship. We're Christians; we're part of the family of God. But are there things in your life, are there things in my life—is there something consuming my spiritual effectiveness? 16th must—we must, we must—16th must guard against spiritual erosion. And that's why we have elders and deacons. We're going to be talking about that later on.

But it's working together. We see a brother falling—dear brother, just like Jesus when He put His hand out for Peter: "Can I help you, brother? I see you're falling. You're having a problem with this thing or that thing, or you're doing this or you're doing that." In love. Not, "You shouldn't have done that." With love, care, joy, go to them. People have gone to me in my life. My elders have done that many times. One unresolved problem can spread through the congregation. So work together. Leaders and members must deal with issues before they become infections. There's a problem? Nip it in the bud. Remember that expression? Do they still use that in English, "nip it in the bud"? No? Anyway, she's probably having trouble with that one; I shouldn't have used it. The plague of the locusts.

2. The Partnership: Unity and Strength

Now, the partnership of the locusts: work together to accomplish what individuals cannot. There's so much that I cannot accomplish. I'm a part of Cascade Gospel Chapel. I'm only there once a month, but I'm a part of it. I do what I can to help them to advance the kingdom of God. Next week I'm going to be 81 years old, and I'm going to be working with children in DVBS. Good! I don't know if it's good; last year I did it and that was rough! But I can't do other things anymore. They didn't ask me to lead the games. One thing they asked me to do is make the barbecue. So I'm going to dress up as a gaucho. Takes a couple hours. Dress up as a gaucho, and I'm going to make a barbecue at the end of it for all the parents. We've got to work together.

[Proverbs 30:27 NKJV]

The locusts have no king,
Yet they all advance in ranks;

Locusts have no visible leader, yet they move forward with remarkable unity. Let's think a minute here. Where's the Pope? Oh, gee, there's no Pope here. Okay, I mean, I'm not criticizing any group or another, I'm just saying, where's the Pope? There's no Pope. Where's the bishop? I'm talking about the position. We have bishops here, but I mean, they're not named with a capital B. Now, how about the rabbi? Any rabbis here? No? We don't have a king here, do we? We don't have a pastor, "the Most Reverend So-and-So."

But you know, the thing here is, yes, we do have elders and deacons. And that's what the Bible talks about. It's a plurality. It's a family. It's togetherness. It's unity. And that's just like the locusts. We don't see anything in the Bible about locusts having a king or anything. They just... and they did their job. They did their job.

Locusts speak of the mystery of unity and power. That's what it talks about. They have no leader and lack strength individually, yet working in amazing unity, locusts demonstrate the mystery of unity and power. Unity.

Do you read it? Roy, don't go to sleep there! No, he wasn't sleeping; he was looking down praying for the meeting, I'm sure. But he does this, and I look at it every week and I pray. And it's good.

Now, Nehemiah built the wall, for the people had a mind to work. Do you have a mind to work? Do you have a desire to encourage or build up in intercession? The locusts worked together—boom!—and they had results for what they did. The wall was rebuilt because everybody worked together. And together here, we're going to see success.

Now, the early church, for instance: believers were united in worship, they were united in fellowship, they were united in prayer. That's why we have prayer meetings here. I go to prayer every Wednesday at my local assembly. Monday morning I spend an hour with a group and we pray. Saturday morning from 9:00 to 9:15 I'm in a Zoom prayer meeting. Why? Because I like prayer? No, I'm a mover, I'm a shaker! I don't want to just sit there, but it's necessary. And it's effective: prayer together and ministry.

3. The Purpose: Transformed Communities

Unity multiplies effectiveness. One locust doesn't change anything—one person. There's no one here that can change what is being changed in this neighborhood and in the families around 16th. It's togetherness. It's that swarm of Christians, a cloud of Christians working together. Millions together transform a landscape, and dozens here will change the landscape.

Likewise, one believer has influence, but a united assembly can transform a community. I pray for this community. God never intended Christians to serve alone. We aren't soldiers alone. There's no Lone Rangers. Remember that one? ¡Ho-yo, Silver! No, you're all too young! But that was the Lone Ranger. He was a cowboy. Yeah, he was always alone—Tonto was with him. But we need to have fellowship together: encouragement, accountability, cooperation.

The challenge is, ask yourself, "Am I contributing to unity or division? Am I serving alone, or am I serving alongside others?"

16th Avenue, here's the church. Here's the assembly. Here's a group of Christians. A healthy assembly functions as a body, not a collection of individuals. With members united around Christ's mission, ministry flourishes and communities are reached.

I could go on and on, but I hope you got the picture of locusts. I hope you got the challenge. This is a challenge for you because you're here at the Lord's Supper. You love Jesus; that's why you're here. And all of you up in Zoom land, I know you would like to be here, but keep praying and we hope to see you back. I know health-wise we can't always do what we want to do. And a lot of them, most of them, for one reason or another... and it's nice to see Josh here this morning. He lives in Swinigan, don't you know? Is that where you live? That's a long way to come, but he needs the fellowship. I need the fellowship. You need the fellowship.

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, in the precious name of Jesus, thank You for the example of the locusts. Thank You, Heavenly Father, for the lessons that we can glean from this message of the locust. Help us, guide us, and use us. We pray for the upcoming DVBS, and we have so many other things to pray for. We thank You for the food downstairs and for the little "locusts" downstairs that put everything together so we'll have a good cup of coffee and tea and so on. Bless us, guide us, and use us, and bless this message we ask in Jesus' name. Amen.