

Guest Preacher - Rev. George Macaskill

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Preacher: Rev. George Macaskill

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn in our Bibles to the passages of Scripture which we read in the book of Joel. And as indicated, I like to speak really on most of the whole book, but we'll just read again from chapter 2, verses 25 to 27.

Joel, chapter 2, verse 25. I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army which I sent among 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 am the Lord your God, and there is none else.

And my people shall never again be put to shame. The message of Joel is not so much a prophecy. [1 : 37] It is much more a wake-up call to what is happening around you right now.

You see, the locust plague which this whole book of Joel is about, it happened during a time when Judah, the people of God, were exceedingly prosperous.

It took place in a culture of great affluence and success. Those who know their history, it was written apparently at a time when the Iliad and the Odyssey were written.

And the wealth, the tremendous wealth of Israel at this time was equivalent to what we would see when we see in Saudi Arabia these great oil sheiks strutting around displaying their wealth. That was the situation. And then, all of a sudden, in Judah, the locust plague came. And within hours, within hours, they knew austerity.

[3 : 02] The plague stripped away the source of all their income. And as we said, in a matter of hours from having an exceedingly prosperous lifestyle, they were now in sudden austerity.

Never seen before in history, apparently. And in that darkness, the people, the oil sheiks were reeling.

They didn't know what happened. But right in the middle of it, Joel comes with this message. And in the message, there is good news.

But there are two things. Two things in his message which absolutely stunned and shook the wealthy there. In fact, the whole people of God.

The number one thing was this. Who was responsible for sending the plague?

[4 : 14] They couldn't believe Joel's answer. It was the God of Israel. It was the God who had blessed the people of God so wonderfully by taking them out of Egypt.

It was the God who parted the Red Sea when the Egyptians, their enemies, were following them. And then closed up the Red Sea once the Israelites were safe on the other side and destroyed their enemies, the Egyptians.

God. Their God. The God who prospered them. The God who multiplied blessings upon them. That was the God who had sent this locust plague that destroyed all their wealth in a matter of hours.

God sends plagues. God sends tsunamis. God sends hurricanes.

[5 : 28] Floods. God sends political unrest. God sends pandemics. He's got a purpose.

His people are not listening. They're not heeding warnings. He's got a purpose. And before they'll even think of him again and look up for help, he has to, from time to time in history, send plagues and pandemics.

So that was the first thing that absolutely rocked them about Joel's message. But then there was a second thing he said. The plague.

This disaster. It was only a precursor of worse to come. That was the second aspect of his message.

You think this is bad. What about the day of the Lord that is to come? He speaks about it in chapter 1, verse 15.

[6:39] Alas, for the day, for the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes. One of the other prophets, Jeremiah, said, listen, if you can't keep up with the footmen, how will you contend when horses come?

You think this locust plague is terrible. It is terrible. But there's far worse to come. How will you deal in the swellings of Jordan if you can't put up with the odd flood now and again?

God is speaking. Learn the lesson. Take a lesson. There's a day of judgment coming. And it's very similar to our day when we see and are hearing on our screens all the misdeeds that are going on as if there's no day of accounts.

We often say, oh, there's no justice in this world. The wicked get off with it. Yes, but only for a while. Only for a time. There's a great day of accounts coming. It's called the day of the Lord. Sometimes it's called the day of judgment.

[8:07] Sometimes the day of wrath. Sometimes the day of salvation. Because in that day, sinners who've pled for mercy, sinners who've confessed their sin, the people of God, in other words.

Listen, the people of God are sinners. But they're sinners who have confessed their sins to God and asked for forgiveness because Christ died for sinners.

It'll be a day when they'll be acquitted. They weren't deceived. They depended on the death of Christ for pardon.

That day is yet to come. It'll be a terrible, terrible day for the wicked. But it'll be a glorious, glorious day for the righteous whose hope is in Jesus.

And that great day is coming nearer and nearer and nearer and nearer. A wonderful day for the righteous.

[9:14] A terrible day for those who refuse to listen to God. We cannot stop that day coming.

We cannot avoid participation in that day. But we can prepare for it. We can prepare for it.

And the only preparation for it is to flee to Christ. To confess you've done wrong things. Confess your sins. And accept Christ's death as a sacrifice for your sins.

And all will go well on that day. On that day. But in the meantime, the people of God were not listening.

So God sends this plague to remind them they're not in control. God is in control. Listen to his warnings.

[10:20] And he brings, amongst this devastating plague, he brings good news. And here is the good news.

The words, I think we can summarize it in the words of our verse. You're saying there's no hope now. You see, all the wealth, you're saying, the source of our wealth is gone.

They were saying, God has forsaken us. God has left us. But here's God saying, no, no. I haven't left my people. I haven't left my people that turn to me, that depend on me, that love me.

I will restore to them the years which the locust has eaten. I will restore. Isn't there some principle in mathematics and economics which says that one can never make up for something that's truly lost or wasted?

There's some kind of principle there. But listen, God can. God is not a man. God is not a mere human.

[11:38] God created the whole world, the whole universe. He can do anything. He can do anything. And in that gloom and doom of the locust plague, God said, I will restore to you the wasted years of your life.

What an encouragement this verse is. To old people looking back on your life and say, oh man, what a failure I've been. What a mess I've made of life.

Hear God speaking. I will restore to you the years which the locust has eaten. What tremendous encouragement.

You know, there's another verse. God is speaking about he can make up. When he sends Christ, he'll make up for the wasted years of sinfulness.

And there's a wonderful verse in Isaiah chapter 65, verse 24. And it says, before they call, I will answer.

[12:50] Isn't that a wonderful verse? Do you feel it's a waste of time praying? Do you? Read Isaiah 65, 24.

You know, some people often come to me. Will you pray for me on Tuesday at 5 o'clock? There's some crisis happening. You know when I say I do. And I forget to put a buzzer in my phone. And it comes to 6 o'clock. Oh, I've forgotten to pray. I quote this verse. It's not too late. Before they call, I will answer. You see, that's impossible. Not for God. God is not confined to time. God is an eternal being. And before you call in sincerity on him, he has answered your prayer.

[13:58] That's a wonderful promise. This word, restore. I will restore to you the wasted years of your sinfulness.

That word involves, no, it involves a kind, the word is, if I remember correctly, it's actually translated elsewhere as reward.

It's not just he'll bring you back to the status quo. He'll give you an increase. He'll give you a profit. He'll prosper you. There'll be a reward. There'll be a plus.

It's like interest. Always remember an old elder saying to me, the longer God keeps you waiting to answer your prayer, treat it as interest in the bank.

The longer you wait, the more interest you get back. Listen to God. I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten.

[15:00] And it has in that origin. One of the wonderful things about the original languages is they're far richer than English. And they have several meanings.

The word restore means rewarding. And it means making peace and befriending. It could make up all the wealth that they'd lost.

But what's the use of that? If there's warfare. If there's war going on. And it's not safe to go out of your house. Becoming a millionaire or a billionaire is no use to you.

You can't get out of your house in case you're bombed. But he says there's a whole idea. There'll be peace. There'll be peace. There'll be blessing. There'll be prosperity.

There'll be a reward. There'll be peace. And in the word as well, there's the idea of safety and security. Permanent safety and security.

[15:57] What a wonderful thing it is to be a Christian. To have God as your friend. He not only forgives.

He blesses. He restores with a reward. Giving peace and permanent safety and security and blessing.

Verse 25 in Joel 2 is a wonderful, wonderful promise. But so is verse 26.

Look at the end of verse 26. And here's the plus. Here's the interest.

And my people will shall never again be put to shame. Are you ashamed of yourself?

[16:56] Are you ashamed of your Christian witness? Listen to God. My people shall never again be put to shame.

And you know, that is in response to the question. Well, it's in response to what was said in chapter 1. We didn't read it, actually.

But chapter 1 in verse 11. The people are told, be ashamed. Be ashamed. Be ashamed. Be ashamed. To these same people.

He says, when I restore to you the years that the locust has eaten, you will never again be put to shame.

Isn't that wonderful? Isn't that the gospel? Only God can do these things. The things that are impossible with men are possible with God.

[18:01] And again, another prophet Isaiah saying something similar. Saying, for your shame, you will have double.

For your shame, you'll have double. That is double blessing. God doesn't bless. He's not minji.

He doesn't just give you the minimum of God to give according to the law. No, no. He loves blessing, multiplying, increasing. For your shame.

How ashamed were you? You'll have double blessing for your shame. Never again will you be put to shame. Because you'll have a double blessing from me.

Oh, whatever you do, stick with God. Stick with God. The God who forgives. The God who blesses.

[18:59] Stick with him. He'll give you double reward. Double blessing. And if 25, verse 25 and verse 26 is great, so is verse 27.

And you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel and that I am the Lord your God.

Then, as it could be translated, and or therefore, then you shall know.

And you see, that verse 27 is really in response to the question that's asked at the end of verse 17. Where's their God?

You see, the devastation of the locust plague was so severe that people were saying, oh, their God's forsaken them. Their God's left them.

[20 : 04] This God that took them out of Egypt. This God that prospered them. He's left them. He's forgotten about them. He's turned his back upon them. When they say, where's their God?

Here's their answer. Where's their God? Right in the midst of Israel. Right among your people. That's where God is. You know, when 9-11 happened, people said, where was God? Do you know where he was? Where he always is.

He was in heaven. And you know what the Bible says? God dwells in heaven and with him who is of a humble and a contrite heart.

Do you have a humble and a contrite heart before God? God dwells in your midst. God is there.

[21 : 09] God is with you. Then you'll know that I am in the midst of you. And then it goes on to say, not only will you know that I am among you.

Do you feel something that God's left you? Do you feel something that God's not hearing your prayers? Do you feel something that God says? Do you feel something that God says? Do you feel something that God says? Do you feel something that God says?

I am the Lord your God. Whatever you feel. Listen. Don't go by what you feel.

Go by what God says. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Turn to me.

Call upon my name. As we read there. Even now. Here's a God coming to them. The stage was late. The people were devastated with the plague.

[22 : 19] Their prosperity was gone. They're saying, God's forsaken us. Judgment is coming. It's too late. But look at verse 12. Yet, even now.

Even now at this late stage. Declares the Lord. Return to me with all your heart. With fasting. With weeping. With mourning. And rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God. For he is gracious and merciful.

Slow to anger. Anger. Abounding. In steadfast love. Turn to him.

Confess your sins. And he says, I will never ever leave you. Or forsake you. I am in the midst of you.

[23 : 16] And I am the Lord. Your God. He doesn't say, I am the Lord.

And I can do what I want. He says, I am the Lord. Your God. Not only have I all power to do what I want.

But I'm your God. And I've sworn to bless you. I'm saying, although things look so grim, so dark at this time.

I will restore to you the years which the locust has eaten. Is anyone asking?

How can I know? How can I know God is in my midst? How can I know him?

[24 : 11] His blessing. That he's my God. Well, you know, in 2 Chronicles 33, one of the most wicked people in the Bible, one of the most wicked people in the Bible, was King Manasseh.

What a wicked man he was. He was the son of a godly father. And the first thing he did when he got power on the throne, you know what it was?

You often say, what's the first thing a new president does? A new prime minister. What does it do?

You know the first thing King Manasseh did? He undid. He undid the godly reforms of his father.

And he gave up worshipping the God of Israel. And he turned to worship the sun, the moon, and the stars.

And he turned to worship the pagan god, Molech. And of course, things went from bad to worse.

[25 : 19] And his enemies came and brought him in chains, brought him to Babylon. And 2 Chronicles 33, verse 12 says, When he was in distress, this evil, wicked king Manasseh, when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the Lord his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.

He prayed to him. And what did God say? Did God say to him, Manasseh, you gave me up?

You turned to worship the sun, the moon, and the stars, and this pagan god, Molech. Turn to Bollock now that you're in distress. Don't come to me. Friend, God's not like that.

Anyone, anywhere, anytime, who turns in repentance to him is heard. And what's the next thing you read?

The end of verse 13, 2 Chronicles 33, verse 13. Then Manasseh knew that the Lord, he was God.

[26 : 35] Then, you ask a question, How can I know God's in my midst? Then, when you turn to him, you know whatever you feel, your prayer is heard, and God is in your midst, and God is your God.

The way to know that God is in your midst and with you is to taste his mercy. Put him to the test. Confess your sins to him.

And find out, will he forgive? And if he doesn't, you're the only one in the universe. Everyone who turns to him and confesses his sin is forgiven forever.

And God will never, ever abandon you, whatever you feel. But we must just close by mentioning what we read in chapter 3, verse 14.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision. For the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision.

[27 : 52] I used to think there were multitudes and multitudes there in the valley about to make a decision.

Are they going to make the right decision or not? That's not what it's saying. That's not what's here. That's not what's in Joel 3, verse 14. What's in Joel 3, verse 14 is this.

Not multitudes about to make a decision. It's multitudes awaiting a final decision from God.

How the tables turn on the great day. The multitudes had already made their choices.

They had already made their decisions. Their lives are over. They've made their decisions. They said, I'm not interested in this, God. And now they have to wait for God's decision.

[28 : 55] That great day. The locust plague was only a precursor of its come. And God makes a decision.

It's interesting. The word decision, the valley of decision, is elsewhere in Daniel 9.25. It's translated, the original translated, a wall.

Because it's a dividing wall. It's a fearful day for the wicked. Fearful. But it's a dividing wall day.

The righteous will be so wonderfully blessed. God's about to make his decision.

Maybe you've, maybe, maybe you know very well you've done wrong things. You know very well you've sinned.

[29 : 53] You've prayed to God. And nothing happened. Oh, I tell you something's happened in heaven. You might not have felt anything on earth.

You see, it's by faith. It's not by feelings. It's by faith. It's not feelings. God's done something in heaven. If you've truly confessed your sin to him and repent.

The day, the valley of decision will be a great, in fact, the word is also strangely translated elsewhere as gold. Gold refines. And your faith is as gold.

Though your precious faith, though it be tried as gold is tried. And that day, that glorious day of Jesus Christ, what a glorious, wonderful day it will be.

For those who have turned to him. For those who have turned to him. For those who have confessed their sin. And those who are seeking to follow him.

[30 : 59] So, one final question. How can I be sure? How can I have this blessing of Amos chapter, sorry, Joel chapter 2, verse 25.

How did it all begin? You know how it all began? In chapter 1, verse 14. A cry. A cry from the Lord.

14. Cry out to the Lord. How does a newborn baby begin life? Am I right?

You nurses can tell. This spank it. So it'll cry. Life begins with a cry. Spiritual life is the same.

It begins with a cry to God. And that is why verse 32 ends.

[32 : 06] It shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. That's the summary.

That's the blessing. That's where it lies. Cry to the Lord. You can't say to him, Lord, I'll do my best. You can't say, I've been good.

You can't say that. Just tell the truth. I've sinned, but I'm sorry. I repent. And I ask forgiveness. I appeal to the mercy, to that mercy that Christ purchased when he died on the place called Calvary.

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Hear the word of the Lord. It saves the soul. May God, the Holy Spirit, make his word, his truth, effectual to every one of us.

[33 : 18] Let's bow our heads. Our Father in heaven. We ask for your Holy Spirit who is present. To unite us by faith to your Son.

That we confess our sins. And that we take his sacrifice, as your word says, a sacrifice for sin. Our sin. Unworthy though we be. Bless us around the glorious gospel we pray thee. For we pray only in Jesus' name and for Jesus' sake.

Amen. Well, let's conclude our service of worship by singing from the Scottish Psalter, Psalm 90. From Psalm 90, we sing from verse 14 to the end. Now that's page 350 on their blue praise book. Page 350.

[34 : 24] Psalm 90 and verse 14. Oh, with thy tender mercies, Lord, as early satisfy, so we rejoice shall all our days and still be glad in thee.

Down to the last verse. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be us upon. Our handiworks establish thou, establish them, each one.

Psalm 90 and verse 14. To God's praise. Psalm 90 and verse 14. To God's praise. O with thy tender mercies, Lord, as early satisfy, So we rejoice shall all our days and still be glad in thee. According as the days appear, wherein' we grieve the heart, And years wherein' we ill have seen, so do thou make us glad.

O let thy work and power appear, thy servants face before, And show unto their children dear, thy glory evermore.

[36 : 36] And let the beauty of the Lord our God be us upon.

For our handiworks is the place of peace, the place of peace, the place of peace, the peace, one. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, Now and forevermore.

Amen.