

The Years The Locusts Have Eaten

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[0 : 00] For very good reasons, our society has become fixated with waste. According to the statistics, the average British person throws away half a ton of household waste every year, 500 kilograms.

Nearly 700 pounds of good food is wasted annually by each person in the United Kingdom every year.

Nearly 500 million tons of plastics are wasted every year in the United Kingdom, more than half of which is plastic packaging.

Now, over the last 10 years, the waste figures have been declining, but we still waste far too much. Never mind getting into the complex areas of energy efficiency, fuel generation, etc.

You don't have to be an environmental expert or a member of Greenpeace to see that the level at which we waste things is unsustainable.

[1 : 08] But for all that our society talks about waste, what about other kinds of waste it does not want to talk about? Waste that's even more difficult to get rid of than plastic.

Let me get to the point. What do you do if you have wasted your life? What do you do if you've wasted your life? What do you do if you've made a mess of things and you've wasted years or maybe even decades of your life?

It's like you've woken up out of a deep sleep and you've realized that everything that went before was a waste of your time and a waste of your energy. You've made a mess of it.

You're filled with shame and guilt at the kind of things you've done and the kind of person you've been. You're filled with regret at the sadness of the opportunities that you have spurned and the good life choices that you've turned your back upon.

Or perhaps if you're a Christian here this evening, you've come to a new realization that up until now you've only been playing with your faith in Christ.

[2 : 23] You have not taken him seriously enough. You have played the Christian for far too long. I know that when I look back at my life, it might surprise you to know this, but when I look back at my life, I see so many years the older generation would have called years the locust has eaten.

times of spiritual apathy, laziness, coldness. You look back at those years and you think, you know, I wasted that opportunity to get to know Jesus better.

And I wasted the chance I had to grow in my faith and in holiness. Well, to us, God comes with an astonishing promise.

I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten. I'll replace those years you've wasted with the beauty of my grace.

I'll give you back those years you've messed up. Our past will always be our past. But he'll overcome the shame of what we've been and what we've done with the beauty of future faithfulness for him.

[3 : 46] Fruitfulness for him. The fallow fields of our lives will be filled with a harvest. You don't want this for yourself.

You don't have to be an old man like me to want this for yourself. For God to restore to you the years the locust have eaten.

To replace the waste of your shame with the beauty of his grace. Time is way too short for locusts to keep on eating their way through your life.

Life is too short for spiritual apathy and coldness. It's time to engage with Joel 2, 25 and 26 and God's amazing promise.

Tonight let's consider this passage under four headings. Restoring promise. Reigning power. Rich provision. And residing presence.

[4 : 48] Restoring promise. Restoring promise. First of all. This is the fourth of our sermons. From the book of Joel. Here we are.

Restoring promise. Joel 2, 25. The people of Judah. Those to whom Joel is addressing this prophecy. Have been subject to the judgment of God.

On account of their sin. And their unfaithfulness to him. In the first instance, as we saw, they had been subject to invasion of locusts. Swarms of locusts.

Swarming locusts. Hopping locusts. Destroying locusts. Cutting locusts. What commentators speculate are the four stages in the life cycle of a locust. These locusts had eaten their way through crops and vines.

As their decomposing bodies had polluted the waters of Judah. So that not just had there been nothing to eat. The water had become poisonous to drink.

[5 : 50] The second invasion, as we saw, was that of a huge foreign army. So numerous that they're described in Joel 2 verse 2 as. Like blackness, they are spread out upon the mountains.

A great and powerful people. Verse 5. A powerful army drawn up for battle. Verse 10. Their impact is devastating.

The earth quakes before them. The heavens tremble. The sun and the moon are darkened. And the stars withdraw their shining. Here we have dabble trouble.

Swarms of locusts. And the invasion of foreign armies. And all because of their unfaithfulness to God. All because of how they have wandered in the darkened ways of the nations around them.

Their heavenly father, as we saw last week, loves them far too much to leave them in this far off country feeding pig swill. He wants them home.

[6 : 50] Now there are few more powerful images in the Bible than this one. The years the locust has eaten.

Have you had years the locust has eaten? As you look back in your life, can you just identify times you've plain wasted?

Not just minutes. Not just hours. Months. Years. For some of us, decades. Time flies. Whether you waste it or whether you don't waste it.

But how have you spent that time? As you drive past Carmile on the M74 extension to the southeast of Glasgow, you begin to smell decomposing rubbish.

No surprise, really. To the north of that road is the biggest rubbish dump in Scotland. With rubbish having been dumped there for decades. Many decades. As you look back in your life, do you smell decomposing rubbish?

[7 : 58] The waste of decades all piled on top of itself. I'm not talking here about wasting your career or your money or relationships. I'm talking about wasting your spiritual life.

Wasting your soul. I can think of many of my contemporaries who over the years made far more money than I'll ever dream of. Have got far more fulfilling careers, I suppose, than I have.

Have better marriages, if possible, than I have. Are better parents than I am. But spiritually speaking, the locusts have eaten all their years.

They've wandered far from God. At worst, or at best, are going through the motions of being a Christian. But really and truly, they're colder than the North Sea.

They've traded Christ for painted stones called gold and the temporary pleasures of this world.

They're losers because they have allowed the locusts to eat their lives.

[9 : 06] I'm being very serious tonight. I've been minister of this congregation for 18 years. This is especially important for teenagers among us.

I've been minister here for nearly 18 years. And over those years, I've formed relationships with hundreds of young people. Same kind of relationships, perhaps, I have with many of you.

I've invested in their spiritual development. And I've watched with great joy as they grow in faith during their time with us in Glasgow City. And yet, one after another, after they left us, many have grown spiritually cold over the years.

They have traded in a living relationship with Jesus Christ. The locusts are eating their years. And I would spare them the bitterness of looking back and realize they've wasted whatever time they were given in this world.

I would spare you that, teenagers, young people. I would urge you never to get to a place where the locusts are eating your life up.

[10 : 20] I would urge you never to choose gold over God. Never to backslide. Never to grow cold.

Never to become apathetic about Jesus. But always to press on to better and higher experiences of His grace and of His love. However, for all of us, to whatever extent the promise comes, I'll restore to you the years the locust has eaten.

Okay. Suppose you have 50 years left in your life. And spiritual wandering costs you 40 of them. God will make the last 10 at the end as the overall 50. He'll increase the joy in your spiritual life in those 10 years four times over.

Even now the promise comes to us. The Christ whom you have rejected, He wants you back. And His promise to you is more forgiving, generous, and gracious than you could ever believe it to be.

[11 : 33] He will restore every year you've made a mess of. He'll heighten your joy in Him and deepen your experience of Him to levels you never thought possible.

And all because you believed His promise. And you returned to Him. Lord God, by my own sin and folly, the locusts of spiritual apathy have eaten my life.

God, restore to me those years, I pray. Luke, I would spare any of you the wasting of any of your years.

But this is the restoring promise of God for all of you. A promise which was very dear to a man like John Newton, who spent the healthiest years of his life as a disgusting trader of slaves.

Until he met with the amazing grace of Christ, and was a changed man. A promise dear to a man like Thomas Chalmers, who spent the most vigorous years of his life as an unbelieving and unfaithful minister, though he was a professor at St. Andrew's University, before he met with Christ, and was a changed man.

[12 : 51] A promise dear to a man like Douglas Macmillan, our beloved previous minister in this congregation, who you all remember, many of you remember, who had spent his youthful years drinking and partying, thinking nothing of God, until he met with the God of all grace, and was a changed man.

None of you have sinned boldly, like Newton, Chalmers, or Macmillan, but perhaps you've backslidden from the reality of an earnest and growing faith in Jesus, and the locusts are munching your years.

Well, now is the time to hear the promise of God, and through the repentance, return to him in faith, and experience the powerful fulfillment of this promise.

I will restore to you the years the locust have eaten. Restoring promise. Second, reigning power. Reigning power. As you pass through to the second part of verse 25, you realize that the locusts and the army have their source in the mysteriously loving will of God.

[14 : 13] Look at the text. My great army, which I sent among you. If you saw last time the locusts belonged to God, that great invading army, was sent by God with this one purpose in mind, to bring his people back to their senses, to return to him in repentance and renewed faith.

The sword may be in Cyrus' scabbard, but it's the Lord's sword, and he's the Lord's appointed minister to bring his people home. The point is this.

The Lord God is in sovereign control of all things. Yes, even the things which hurt and are painful. Now, what does the knowledge of the sovereign power and the majestic control of God got to do with our theme of restoring the years the locusts have eaten?

The answer is everything in every single way. Let's go back to that rubbish dump north of the M74 extension in the east end of Glasgow.

There are items of rubbish dating back over 50 years at the bottom of that tip. They were once children's toys, shall we say.

[15 : 39] But now we're just bits of plastic. They were once beautifully knitted jumpers, but they're now just scattered bits of wool.

They were once tasty dinners between intimate lovers, but they're now nothing more than grains of soil. If they could speak, I wonder what stories they would tell us these items of rubbish at the bottom of that rubbish dump off the M74 extension.

Our sovereign God, in his infinite power and wisdom, made a universe out of nothing. And he can take all these bits of twisted metal and these scattered bits of wool and soil, he can rebuild them into what they once were.

That wonderful tricycle upon which a lovely child played. That beautiful jumper which kept a cold pensioner snugly warm on a pea soup in Glasgow.

That tasty dinner between intimate lovers at which he asked her to marry him. God can restore and rebuild the rubbish. He can reconstitute the beauty of what it once was and it should always have been.

[16:54] Now let's get back to all those years in your life the locusts have eaten. Those years that you've wandered in the spiritual wilderness and wasteland and made a mess of it all.

You look back and you view it rather like that dump off the M74 extension. And now that you've come to your senses and you've realised it's time to come back to God you wonder to yourself how is it possible for God to restore all these years to me?

Years when I could have made such strides forward in his grace and love. I can't imagine how God can do such a thing. What is impossible for us even to imagine is possible for God to do.

for he is in this specialisation of repairing and restoring broken things. He can take all those rubbish years and make of them something beautiful.

He can use them to propel you forward in your faith faster than you could even dream. In his wisdom and love your heavenly father can even weave these wasted years into the beautiful tapestry of your discipleship.

[18:07] This is his reigning power at work mysteriously reconstituting what you could and should have always been his faithful child secure in his love joyful and peaceful in Christ and his gospel.

Think of that demon-possessed man who's called Legion in the gospels. Now there's a man who had made a mess of his life. He'd run around all crazy cutting himself and making everyone around him scared for their lives like he was high in crack cocaine.

They could no longer allow him to live among them so they tied him up with chains and they forced him to live in a graveyard. What a waste of a life! But then he met with Jesus and with the word of his power Jesus cast out the demon and we read that the people found him in some of the most powerful words in scripture again.

Seated, dressed, and in his right mind. Legion became a powerful evangelist for the Christian gospel among his own people.

In his mighty power and through his powerful word God restored to Legion the years the locusts had eaten and he rebuilt of the waste Legion had made of himself something remarkably beautiful.

[19:32] He could do the same for you tonight. Your loving Heavenly Father into whose arms through repentance and faith you run. He's the sovereign Lord who can make all things new.

Third, rich provision. Here's the third promise in this wonderful passage of Joel 2, 25 and 26. Rich provision. We've heard God's promise he'll restore to us the years the locusts have eaten.

We've understood that such a restoration is not impossible to God but rather is certain. Now we must move into verse 26 and ask ourselves why we must return to him.

Yes, I know it's a selfish thing to be motivated by gain, personal gain. But we should return to him for personal gain rather than that we should just return because he commands us to.

But our gracious and loving Heavenly Father does not want us just to obey him because he tells us to robotically and mindlessly. He wants us to return to him with willingness and with great affection.

[20:46] Remember in this verse, in verse 26, he is speaking to people whose land has been destroyed by progressive swarms of locusts and the invasion of foreign enemies. the land is barren, the crops are burned and the water is poisonous.

To them he says, 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.

He's speaking to people who have nothing to eat and he says to them, you shall eat in plenty.

He's speaking to people whose children are dying of hunger and he says to them, you shall be satisfied. He's speaking to people who are wondering where God is in all their sufferings and God says to them, you shall praise the name of the Lord your God and he's speaking to people who cannot lift up their faces from the floor because of the disgrace they feel and he says to them, you shall never again be put to shame.

These are very powerful motives why God's people should return to him. In fact, they have every reason to turn away from the mess they have made of their lives and turn toward the order and the beauty of a God-shaped and God-blessed life.

[22:08] But what about us? One of the reasons that some of us may have become spiritually cold is because we are already eating in plenty and are satisfied.

In other words, we're materially prosperous. We're enjoying a great life. We have great relationships. And we are very far from being in shame. We're well respected in society, morally upright.

We're professionals. We don't even have a title. Such affluence and prosperity is what has contributed to our spiritual lives being wasted and turning what was once our vibrant love for Christ into a spiritual wasteland.

All the time we've forgotten the all-sufficiency of the grace of Christ which abounds in the lives of Christ's people. The higher status altogether we enjoy as sons and daughters of the living God together with a strong sense of identity and belonging to his family.

We've forgotten the peace and the hope and the joy of a living and growing relationship with Jesus. We've forfeited all these things on the altar of a stinking, rotting, rubbish dump called material prosperity.

[23 : 33] called strong relationship, called affluence. We forfeited the promise that God will restore all the years the locusts have eaten and he'll restore them by giving us years of plenty and satisfied joy in him, days of secure belonging in Christ and inextinguishable peace.

All we've ever needed but the world cannot provide us. All that if we had ever been in our right mind we would have wanted more than we could ever imagine possible.

That's what God promises to you this evening. It's a powerful motive to return to him to testimonies and see whether he will not make of the wilderness of your life and the apathy and the wasteland of your ambitions a masterpiece of his grace.

Testimonies and as your life draws in you'll say the Lord's always been my shepherd and I've never been in want. Goodness and mercy have followed me all the days of my life and I'll dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Testimonies and he'll say to you surely I am eating of Christ's grace in plenty. Surely I am most satisfied in him.

[24 : 59] Rich provision. And then the last promise in this marvelous passage residing presence. Residing presence.

We close I want us to return to the argument for returning to the Lord we spoke about a couple of weeks ago from Joel chapter 2. Returning to God with all our hearts.

Rending our hearts not our garments. God restores all these wasted years. We've established that God has the sovereign power to reconstitute the mess we've made of our lives and make us a masterpiece of his grace.

We even have motives embedded in verse 26 that of fulfillment and satisfaction and plenty. God keeps the best of his promises until the last.

To our repentant people who have returned to their loving heavenly father to a people who were once prodigal but have now returned from their far off country. He says in verse 27 you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel that I am the Lord your God that is no other.

[26 : 15] Greater than the promise of provision and plenty is the promise of God's presence with his people. He will return to them in power in his holy temple.

He will protect them again from all that will harm them just as he did when he protected them against the fury of the Assyrian army. Then they shall know the beauty of that psalm we love to sing together.

God is our refuge and our strength and ever present help in trouble. This is surely the best and greatest of his promises.

The intimacy of his presence with his people. An intimacy he would directly fulfill in person through the incarnation of his son Jesus Christ in his lifetime of pilgrimage and passion among God's people.

An intimacy which he would directly fulfill even more in the sending of his Holy Spirit. The presence of God among us. That presence which in the words of the children's song we've all known since we were knee high to grasshoppers assures us saying with Christ in the boat I can smile at the storm.

[27 : 38] Well perhaps rather like me so often you're looking back at all those wasted years at this spiritual rubbish dump you've made of your life through your spiritual apathy coldness and backsliding and you want to come back to God and you're saying to yourself the locusts have eaten so many years of my life and I want to come back I've wasted so many years you know after dinner or supper this evening when you're cleaning up your table and you scrape the food into the bin think

to yourself the waste food into the bin think to yourself that's what I've done with my life I've thrown it into the trash can I have good news for you I have gospel for you a message the world cannot give you Jesus Christ has died for sinners and whether we come to him once or ten thousand times he promises to forgive our sin and restore our relationship to God he promises to rid us of the trash sheep and make whatever remains of our lives wonderfully fruitful and beautifully fresh to fill us with hope and peace and joy and love your God promises you this evening

I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten if you're not yet a Christian but especially if you are a Christian listen carefully tonight to God's call upon your life before you leave this place pray for return and for repentance let us pray our loving heavenly father we thank you for your word well it's one thing to be told that we've wasted the years that we've had but it's another thing altogether to be told and promised in your word that you'll repay that you'll restore all these broken years these wasted years well father as we look back in our lives we feel that so often we have scraped those years into the bin we've made a mess of them we didn't grow in grace like we should have done we were distracted by the gold and the relationships and all the pleasures of this world we made a god out of this world's idols we bowed down to worship it and we forsook you but how we thank you that even now you call us to return lord we think in the first instance of your ancient people of old the jews and today we remember our partnership with the international mission to jewish people we thank you that in increasing ways that as christian gospel being preached in the land of israel itself we thank you lord for our partnership with that organisation over many years for our involvement in setting up that organisation as a denomination for our intimate belief in the promises of your grace lord fulfil your promise to them we ask father we pray for ourselves we pray lord and thank you for the privilege of being together here this evening for the privilege of being together this morning for the privilege of seeing each other's faces and rejoicing that well in some small way you're restoring already the years the locusts have eaten and father we want to pray that you would allay the fears of those who are still terrified and anxious about returning to church we want to pray lord that you'd be very close to them and you would give them grace to overcome these fears we don't ask that you would take these fears away but we pray that you would give them a greater grace we also pray for those who have become apathetic and cold in their faith we would spare them the bitterness of looking back and saying I've wasted so many years so we pray that even now lord you would return them to their senses father we pray for ourselves we want to be an effective mission center for

Glasgow we want Glasgow to flourish by the preaching of your word and the praising of your name and lord we pray then for for a vision and a passion for our congregation here we pray for a new building once again keep us from walking down routes that you would not have us go down and show us a place oh lord that's right for us that we may be able to serve you in this city effectively and joyfully remember tonight the nation of Afghanistan as the darkness has returned for a while the light shone but the darkness has now crept back into the land just like in the lord of the rings we think of the land of mordor well lord we're thinking now of the darkness of the Taliban and the rain of terror in the lives of Afghan men and women boys and girls especially lord we remember your people we thank you for the tens of thousands of

Afghani people who have professed faith in Christ and lord we pray lord that in their persecutions you would be faithful to them and they'd be faithful to you grant them grace oh lord in the face of their persecutors so much so that their persecutors would be ashamed of themselves and many of them in years to come would profess and bear testimony to how they were once Taliban but they are now sons and daughters of the living god that you took the sword out of their hands by first taking it from their hearts and so we commit ourselves to you oh lord praying for your guidance and your reading in this week ahead that we may be the most effective Christians we can be where we are in our homes in our workplaces in our leisure centers among our families among our friends among our colleagues in society on the on the trains on the motorways whatever we are oh lord we ask that you would help us to live for Christ and we ask all these things in Jesus name amen to live for you I command the