**The Locusts**

Revelation 9

Last week we went through the first four trumpet judgments, which are like the 10 plagues on Egypt “in a blender.” Hail, fire and blood on a third of the LAND. A great mountain thrown into the sea, so a third of the oceans turned to blood. Then a great star fell on the rivers, so a third of the fresh water became bitter. Then a third of the sun, moon and stars darkened. So what was affected by the first four trumpets? The land, the sea, the fresh water and the skies. In other words: everything. ***God’s judgment was beginning to UNMAKE the world He had made.*** Here was our summary:

**The Lens of Future Judgment helps us see our Present Circumstances**

* God’s perfect **Justice** is coming soon in answer to our **Prayers**
* **Contentment** with your assigned role is a sign of **Faith** in the God who assigned it
* **Protection** from God’s judgment is available through His **Mediator**

Many of us have been trained to read Revelation looking for a code to interpret the FUTURE. But this book is ***much more about the PRESENT*** than it is the future. It is meant to be relevant, encouraging and challenging to every generation of believers. It is a lens through which we can better interpret our current situation.

These clear, powerful trumpet blasts first remind us that God’s perfect justice is coming. We don’t know when, but we do know justice is coming. And our calling is to trust in the Lord’s goodness and be content with the role to which He has assigned us. The censers mentioned in Revelation 8 directed us back to Numbers 16 and **Korah’s rebellion**, which was a group of Non-Priests demanding to be treated like priests. God did not take kindly to it.

But when a plague broke out that was killing Israelites one after another, a MEDIATOR was able to stop the plague with his censer, making atonement for the sinful nation. Praise the Lord ***we have the ultimate mediator in the Lord Jesus Christ*** who has stopped the plague of sin and shelters us from the coming judgment! Now, listen to how Revelation 8 ends.

“Then I looked, and I heard an eagle crying with a loud voice as it flew directly overhead, ‘Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, at the blasts of the other trumpets that the three angels are about to blow!’” Revelation 8:13

We’ve had four trumpets, three remain, which represent three dramatic WOES for the earth dwellers. We will hear trumpets five and six today, for the first two woes, but the last trumpet and the third woe will have to wait until chapter 11. So we turn the page to Revelation 9 and the fifth trumpet.

“And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit.” Revelation 9:1

This is a ***doubly ominous verse***. We’ve had the warning from the great eagle that three woes are coming. Now a fallen star opens up a shaft to the pit of hell. This is the stuff of horror movies. The bottomless pit is being opened. Nothing good can come from there.

But notice the key details here. What is happening here is **clearly at God’s initiative**. Just as the Lamb opened the seven seals, so these angels are sounding their trumpet blasts at God’s command. And this fallen star doesn’t open the pit up on his own, ***he is GIVEN a key*** to open it. So God is directing all that happens in Revelation, as He does all of history. **God is in control**. Nothing happens that is outside of His authority.

***That doesn’t mean everything is pleasant.*** It doesn’t mean things will always be comfortable for us. Just read Job if you think that is always God’s will for His people. Things will get much worse before they get better. Thankfully Revelation ends with things being not just better, but perfected. So stay tuned. But now we are in the thick of it, with God’s judgment being poured out in strength.

Today we will see **two key principles related to God’s judgment**. What are these trumpet blasts DOING? What do they accomplish? There is a clear hyperlink from this chapter back to Joel chapter two and a ferocious plague of locusts. God’s judgment is never arbitrary. It is always accomplishing something. So what was it in Joel’s day? What is it in our day? What will it be when those last trumpets are sounded?

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace, and the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft.” Revelation 9:2

The first principle that is clear in Revelation is that **God is the Director**. There is not some other force, or other person who is competing with God on the timing or type of events. There is God over and above everything and everyone, and then everything else. God is clearly defined as the glorious One seated on the throne AND the Lamb who has the seven-fold Spirit. So this three-personal God reigns over everything and is directing the events of history and the culmination of history.

The only reason this fallen star can open the pit of hell is because ***God hands over the key***. God has that key. Remember Jesus has the key of David. He is the One who opens doors, and no one can shut them; He closes doors, and no one can open them. Here is an especially freaky door King Jesus is allowing some celestial being to open. And smoke rises, as if from some massive fiery furnace. So much black smoke that it darkens the whole sky.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth.” Revelation 9:3

Then we realize the smoke isn’t actually smoke: it’s bugs. Locusts. And these are no ordinary locusts. These are ***locusts of unusual size***. LOUS’s. Just like the fallen star, the locusts were given power, so they become Scorpion-locusts.

Now, when you hear of **combination animals**, what does that remind you of? Daniel and the beasts he saw in his dreams that were combinations of animals. Those beasts represented great kingdoms that were given power and authority - FOR A SHORT TIME. A lion with eagle wings that get torn off. A great bear chewing ribs. A leopard with four heads and four wings. Then an enormous beast with 10 horns that tramples and devours everything. Read Daniel 7. That is the single key chapter that unlocks the meaning of Revelation.

We hear scorpion-locusts, our minds should go to Daniel 7 and think of ***kings and kingdoms God will raise up*** for specific times, for specific purposes. My favorite verse about this is Isaiah 10.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“Shall the axe boast over him who hews with it, or the saw magnify itself against him who wields it? As if a rod should wield him who lifts it, or as if a staff should lift him who is not wood!” Isaiah 10:15

God spoke this through Isaiah to the **king of Assyria**. Yes, great king, you are the tool God is using at this moment. But don’t forget you are just a tool. Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon got a similar lesson: “The Most High rules over the kingdoms of man and places over them whomever He will.” In other words, ***God is in charge.*** He iscalling the shots. He is directing everything.

And just because God’s judgment is falling on Israel through Assyria at that moment doesn’t mean Assyria is going to dodge God’s judgment on them. That is coming in the form of Babylon, and after them Persia, then Greece, then Rome. God’s judgment is directed, diminished and delegated.

* It is ***directed at God’s discretion***, according to His timetable.
* It is diminished right now - not coming in full force at everyone everywhere.
* And it is almost always delegated: being accomplished through other agents, usually human ones, like Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome…

Back to Revelation 9 and the ***demon scorpion locusts*** coming up from hell in smoke.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Revelation 9:4

The first four trumpets were ***directed at the whole world***: the land, the seas, the rivers, the heavens. Only a third were destroyed, so you see how God’s judgment in the seals and trumpets is DIMINISHED, not yet fully comprehensive. But now we see a clear and stark distinction in God’s direction. These woes, these divine judgments in the final trumpets, are not directed at God’s own people. And they are even ***kept off of the grass***.

(I’m sensitive to grass right now as we are trying to get the soccer field grass to grow, so I feel like an old man who wants to go yell at kids and dog-walkers, “Stay off the lawn!”) It’s funny that God overtly protects the grass here. I take that to mean God likes soccer. And I’m sure He calls it football. Can’t be dogmatic about that but there you go.

The point here is that **God directs the judgment** and, in the process, protects His children. Those who are marked with the seal of God, marked as belonging to King Jesus by faith, are not affected by these scorpion locust demons. Five months of torment without death…

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“They were allowed to torment them for five months, but not to kill them, and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings someone.” Revelation 9:5

This shows ***how God DIMINISHES the judgment***. Yes, people are tormented by these terrifying creatures, whatever they represent. But the demon-locusts are not allowed to kill people.

Remember Romans 6:23, ***“The wages of sin is…”*** DEATH. Yes. What we all deserve for our sins is immediate death. Sin… die. Just like that. Your kids are complaining about PB & J again for lunch you slam on the brakes and say, “What do you think you deserve? Do you think you deserve Chick fil a every day? What would you get if you got what you deserved?” We know, we know, Dad: death and hell. Death and hell.

That’s right. ***So, anything less than immediate death and hell is God’s mercy***. It is a lessening, a diminishing of the judgment we all deserve. And that was certainly true in first century Rome and in the days of Joel around 500 years before Christ.

What did the Jews in Jesus’ day deserve? Did they deserve to be free from Rome’s control? Did they deserve to have rich harvests and healthy flocks?

What did the Christians in John’s day deserve? Were they entitled to long, comfortable lives, free from persecution and suffering?

***What do we deserve today?*** Do we deserve long, happy, healthy, comfortable lives? Are we entitled to see our kids and grandkids play soccer and graduate from college and so on?

Don’t miss this point. The fact that you are sitting here, and breathing air is nothing other than God’s **MERCY and grace** to you. Mercy is NOT getting the judgment you deserve. Grace is getting anything good from the Lord, that you also do not deserve.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“In appearance the locusts were like horses prepared for battle: on their heads were what looked like crowns of gold; their faces were like human faces.” Revelation 9:7

One more point on God’s judgment here: ***His judgment is almost always DELEGATED***. Once in a while, God directly intervenes and strikes someone dead. Very rarely. It does happen, but not very often. Usually God works through means, like people and nations. How did God judge and discipline Israel? By letting them get conquered by Assyria, then Babylon.

We aren’t going to get further into the demon-locusts here. They appear like horses, but they have human faces and golden crowns. So, ***what are these critters?*** Are they demons or are they people? Just notice the connection with Joel 1-2.

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| **Revelation 9:8-10** | **Joel 1:4,6; 2:4-5** |
| “Their hair like women's hair, **and their teeth like lions' teeth**; they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the noise of their wings was like the noise of many chariots with **horses rushing into battle**. They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.” | “What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten… For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number; **its teeth are lions' teeth**, and it has the fangs of a lioness… Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and **like war horses they run**… like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle…” |

In the time of Joel there was a ***literal locust plague*** that devastated the crops. But that locust plague came to symbolize the conquest of Israel in the exile, when Babylon devoured them.

So what is happening in Revelation 9? Is this a literal locust plague? Are these terrifying demons torturing people? Or are they symbolic of war and military conquest?

Dunno. Pick one. Or all of the above. Here’s the summary of this first point in v. 10.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

“They have tails and stings like scorpions, and their power to hurt people for five months is in their tails.” Revelation 9:10

God is the One directing these judgments. He has chosen, in His mercy, to ***diminish and limit the judgment*** to one third of the planet, only those not sealed with His seal, and delegated to some terrifying agents of torment. Notice that this fifth trumpet lasts for five months. It is limited. It will be terrible suffering, but it will not go on forever.

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| God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated** | One day it will be **Perfect** and **Personal** |
| “They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any green plant or any tree, but only those people who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.” Rev. 9:4 | **“**Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne.” Rev. 20:11-12 |

Don’t miss the contrast here. Even in the seal and trumpet judgments, God’s wrath is limited, it is not worldwide and doesn’t affect everyone. But in the final judgment, all people great and small ***will stand before God PERSONALLY***. His evaluation will be perfect, and all people will be judged according to what they have DONE.

A lot of the thrust of Revelation is this truth: ***judgment is coming***. It will be completely fair. It will be comprehensive. And it will come from the hand of God. How long, Oh Lord, do we have to wait?

A little longer. But Jesus is coming, and He will judge all people and render perfect justice in the end. So what do passages like this one and Joel 2 accomplish for us?

* Catastrophes and suffering are God’s **Wakeup call**: this world is passing away!

“They have as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek he is called Apollyon.” Revelation 9:11

Abaddon in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek both mean ***destroyer or destruction***. So this demon in charge of the abyss and the demon-scorpion-locusts has a name and a mission: to destroy. This is the devil’s mission statement: to steal and kill and destroy.

Why is the devil allowed to do this now? Why are these terrible judgments foretold in the end times?

Clearly, it’s not just to scare the pants off of us (though it does have that effect). ***It is to shake us up and wake us up!***

The fact is that this world is passing away. Everything is literally ***crumbling to dust*** in our hands. You can’t take anything with you.

* Some of you have ***lost loved ones*** recently. Every funeral is a reminder that nobody lives forever.
* Some of you have ***lost jobs or health***. Many in our church family have loved ones struggling with dementia.
* Some of you have been through or are going through other ***hardships in life or relationships***.

Why does God allow this? Why hurricanes and earthquakes? Why direct demonic attacks?

The effect of all of these things is to help us **see what we are clinging to**. Are we so attached to this world that is passing away, or more attached to the Lord Jesus and His kingdom? You find out what you really love when you lose it or it is threatened.

* What do you love, trust and serve MOST? That is your true god.
* When that thing is threatened you will panic.

But God is working in your life as your loving Father to help you let go of these lesser things and trust HIM more, love HIM more, serve Him more. Because HIS KINGDOM lasts forever!

* God chose to direct His Judgment onto His **Only Son**

“By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed, by the fire and smoke and sulfur coming out of their mouths.” Revelation 9:18

When the sixth trumpet is sounded four angels release 200 million mounted warriors, with heads like lions that shoot out fire and smoke and sulfur. Lovely.

Fire and sulfur remind us of the destruction of ***Sodom and Gomorrah*** in Genesis 19. These cities were known for their wickedness and sexual immorality. So, God consumed the whole cities in “fire and brimstone.” Poof.

That’s the imagery brought out by this sixth trumpet and second woe. Horse-lions that breath fire, smoke and sulfur that kills people. The demon locusts torment people. The horse-lions burn them up.

Again, remember what we all deserve is immediate judgment for our sin. The remarkable thing is not that God is going to bring this kind of judgment on the world one day. ***The amazing thing is that God has not yet done it.***

It is not the justice of God that is incredible. It’s His mercy and patience. If you don’t understand that you don’t know the depravity of man. We all deserve to have our whole cities burned up in fire and sulfur right now. Let’s not think Tampa is this amazing place of righteousness and love.

But God has not poured out His wrath full strength on the world. Listen to the gospel in Romans 8:3.

* God chose to direct His Judgment onto His **Only Son**

“By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh.” Romans 8:3

Instead of condemning us for the sin in our flesh, ***God chose to condemn SIN in the flesh of His Son***. It’s a bit of a tongue twister but the theology is glorious. The reason there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus is because that condemnation was already experienced by Jesus on the cross. He BECAME sin for us and drank the full cup of God’s fury against sin.

So, what is the punchline of Revelation 9? What is the takeaway? Flip to the end.

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which cannot see or hear or walk, nor did they repent of their murders or their sorceries or their sexual immorality or their thefts.” Revelation 9:20-21

This reads like Genesis 6 and the **state of things before Noah’s flood**. “Every inclination of the hearts of men was ONLY EVIL ALL THE TIME.” The earth was filled with violence. And even though Noah kept the ark open for DECADES, not a single person came with to be saved from the coming judgment. Only his immediate family.

The same thing will be true in the Tribulation. Very few people will repent when these last judgments are poured out. Maybe none. The refrain of Revelation is not: massive plague and then huge revival! Major judgment followed by mass repentance. No. The refrain is, ***“still they did not repent.”***

Here the people double down on their idolatry, openly and flagrantly worshiping demons! What else can God do but condemn these rebels?

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands nor give up worshiping demons and idols…” Revelation 9:20

This book should not keep us from sharing the gospel now with the thought that God will take care of it during the great tribulation. Exactly the opposite! This book should fire us up with URGENCY to ***share the gospel with anyone and everyone*** we can WHILE THERE IS STILL TIME!

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation.”

2 Corinthians 6:1-2

**WE ARE God’s ambassadors**! He is making His appeal to the world THROUGH US! We are partnering with the Lord Jesus to bring the good news to the ends of the earth, appealing to people to respond to God’s grace, not receive it in vain, meaning people are just faking it.

Listen to Jesus’ mission statement, according to Luke 4, from Isaiah 61.

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor… to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God.” Isaiah 61:1-2

In the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus stopped with the phrase, “the year of the Lord’s favor.” Period.

***NOW is the year of the Lord’s favor.*** Now is the time that **Noah’s ark stands open** and anyone who commits to King Jesus can climb aboard!

But the day is coming, probably SOON, when that door will close, and the floods will rise. The day of vengeance of our God is coming. The great day of judgment. The Day of the Lord.

That’s what the book of Joel is about: the day of the Lord. And Joel’s whole prophecy is a national call to repentance for Israel.

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine, for it is cut off from your mouth.” Joel 1:5

The locusts came and destroyed everything. The vineyards were gone. The fields were consumed.

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.” Joel 1:13

There was no grain, no wine to offer to the Lord. Even though they were back in Jerusalem, even though the temple had been rebuilt, the locusts had taken everything. And this judgment, this discipline from the Lord was meant to move the whole nation to repentance.

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes.” Joel 1:14-15

Should we long for the Day of the Lord? Should we look forward to the return of Christ? ONLY if we are in a right relationship with HIM. The day of the Lord is the end of all things. It is final destruction. UNLESS you belong to the Lord by faith in the Lord Jesus!

Joel, like all of the OT prophets, was calling God’s people to genuine faith and commitment to the Lord. The Jews had come under God’s judgment and discipline because of their unfaithfulness to the Lord. So they were fools to call out for the Day of the Lord. That day, for them, would not have been sunshine and rainbows, it would have been wrath and darkness!

What about us?

God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**

* **Now** is the time of God’s favor

“Blow a trumpet in Zion; sound an alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near.” Joel 2:1

***Are we sounding the alarm?*** Are we shaking one another to be sure everyone is awake and ready for the great day? Think of the parable of the ten virgins! Why didn’t the five who were prepared go after the five who were not? Why didn’t they plead with them to make preparation? Or the parable of the talents. Why didn’t the guys with five and two go find the guy with one and help him dig it out of the ground and put it to use?

***God is warning us.*** He is calling us. He is shaking us. How many hurricanes do we need? How many wildfires? How many terrorist attacks? How many school shootings?

This world is falling apart. It is tearing itself apart. Do you know people who are actively trying to gain the whole world and in the process are about to forfeit their eternal soul?

Now is the day of God’s favor. Now is the time to repent. Now is the time to come to Jesus in personal faith.

God’s Judgment is **Directed**, Diminished and **Delegated**

* One day it will be Perfect and **Personal**
* Catastrophes and suffering are God’s **Wakeup call**: this world is passing away!
* God chose to direct His Judgment onto His **Only Son**

Revelation 9 and the trumpet judgments show us God’s mercy and patience. In history and even in the great tribulation God’s judgment is directed, controlled, diminished and limited. Only at the very end will God destroy all things and call everyone to full account. But that final day is coming when judgment will be perfect and it will be very personal. King Jesus will judge everyone for what they have done, said and thought.

***All suffering now is meant as a wakeup call*** and constant reminder: this world is passing away. If this world is your only hope and your only home, you SHOULD be depressed and constantly battle anxiety.

On March 28 a 7.7 magnitude **earthquake hit Myanmar** and over 3,000 people have been found dead as a result. Myanmar is a predominantly Buddhist nation and many in their official government rely heavily on astrology for guidance and various religious objects for protection. For several years now Myanmar, formerly Burma, has been torn by civil war, with multiple coups and rebellions. Could it be that God is saying something to the people of Myanmar? Many of them seem to think so!

NY TIMES Headline: *After Shattering Quakes, Some See Political Omen.*

“She advised a Buddha amulet to be worn at all times, but the astrologer said she thought the earthquake was an ominous sign for the general.”

God uses all kinds of circumstances, including natural disasters, to get the attention of people. Even local superstitions can support what God is trying to say. ***Are the people of Myanmar listening?*** Are we?

Judgment in all of its forms is ultimately **a reminder of the gospel**: that God has not chosen to pour His wrath out on us, but instead on His only Son. Jesus drank the flaming cup of God’s righteous fury so you would not have to.

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| God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**   * **Now** is the time of God’s favor * No one is guaranteed **Another** chance to repent | “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Joel 2:12-13 |

Come back to the Lord! Turn away from this world and fall on your knees before King Jesus!

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| God’s Discipline is a call to **Repentance**   * **Now** is the time of God’s favor * No one is guaranteed **Another** chance to repent | “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. Joel 2:13 |

God is not quick to judgment! He is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance!

“The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Joel 2:31-32

So repent. Call on Jesus now! Everyone who calls on His Name will be saved!

Don’t wait. Don’t delay. No one is guaranteed another chance. The door of salvation stands open, and the one holding it is Jesus. Come to Him today! And go get your friends!

Let’s pray.