

98-03-08b

We're back now from our break, and we're examining the idea of God's disciplinary judgment on His people. The first expression of that principle, of course, was in the garden, with the expulsion from the garden, and the circumstances that would attend marriage and child raising, and the occupation of man in tilling the soil by the sweat of his brow. We're seeing a second and more extreme example of that in the case of Cain, who, because of his willfulness and refusal to acknowledge transgression and to avail himself of God's grace, despite God's warnings and God's encouragement, lives out his life as a marked man in the bad sense, rather than marked in the good sense.

And we see that this foreshadows the even more extensive example and illustration of that principle in the national life of Israel. In the section of Psalms, from which we took our Scripture reading this morning, beginning in Psalm 10, we have a progression of viewpoint on the part of David, who is the author, basically, of the first 50 of the Psalms, as well as many others, from recognizing the wrong that is done in the earth by those who reject God, as we saw in our reading from Psalm 10, to the plea for justice which that Psalm contains and which is also expressed in Psalm 13. How long, O Lord, David says in Psalm 13, how long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God.

Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Lest my enemies say I have prevailed against him. Lest those who trouble me rejoice when I am moved.

But I have trusted in your mercy. My heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

This is the difference in attitude between Cain and Abel. This is the difference in attitude between Cain and Seth. This is the difference in attitude between the Israelite in the Old Testament days who brought his sacrifice and performed his rituals of obedience out of faith and those who performed the very same actions with a false heart and out of selfish motivation, if they observed those rituals at all.

You can see, for example, in Psalm 16. Preserve me, O God, for in you I put my trust. O my soul, you have said to the Lord, You are my Lord.

My goodness is nothing apart from you. As for the saints who are on the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another God.

Their drink-offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips. O Lord, you are the portion of my inheritance and my cup. You maintain my lot.

Lot is allotment or portion. He is saying God preserves my inheritance. The lions have fallen to me in pleasant places.

Yes, I have a good inheritance. I will bless the Lord who has given me counsel. My heart also instructs me in the night seasons.

Notice the difference in verse 7 and in Cain's reaction when God offers counsel. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Wonderful old gospel song, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices. My flesh also will rest in hope.

For you will not leave my soul in Sheol. Nor will you allow your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life.

In your presence is fullness of joy. At your right hand are pleasures forevermore. Look at Psalm 18.

I will love you, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer. My God, my strength, in whom I will trust.

My shield and the horn of my salvation. My stronghold. I will call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised.

So shall I be saved from my enemies. The pangs of death surrounded me. And the floods of ungodliness made me afraid.

The sorrows of Sheol surrounded me. The snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord and cried out to my God.

He heard my voice from his temple. And my cry came before him, even to his ears. Remember God talking to Cain? The voice of your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground? Then the earth shook and trembled.

The foundations of the hills also quaked and were shaken. Because he was angry. Smoke went up from his nostrils and devouring fire from his mouth.

Coals were kindled by it. He bowed to heavens also and came down with darkness under his feet. And he rode upon a cherub and flew.

He flew upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness his secret place. His canopy around him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies.

From the brightness before him his thick clouds passed with hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord thundered from heaven. And the Most High uttered his voice.

Hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out his arrows and scattered the foe. Lightnings in

abundance.

And he vanquished them. Then the channels of the sea were seen. The foundations of the world were uncovered.

At your rebuke, O Lord, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils. He sent from above and took me. He drew me out of many waters.

He delivered me from my strong enemy. From those who hated me. For they were too strong for me.

They confronted me in the day of my calamity. But the Lord was my support. He also brought me out in a broad place.

He delivered me because he delighted in me. The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness. According to the cleanness of my hands he has recompensed me.

We remind ourselves again that this is David speaking. How clean are David's hands? David the murderer of Uriah. David the adulterer with Bathsheba.

His hands are clean. Why? Because he has prayed that prayer. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. Why does he say purge me with hyssop in another place? Hyssop is the stalk of absorbent plant stalks that was used to apply the blood. You can go to Leviticus 14 and see these used in the cleansing of a healed leper.

The sanctification. The priest would take the blood and mix it with living water in a bowl and then dip hyssop in it and sprinkle it on the leper to sanctify and cleanse him. He did have leprosy but he's been cleansed.

He was unclean and barred from worship in Israel but now he has been sanctified and made clean. And David claims that cleansing. It doesn't matter what awful things David has done.

David has availed himself of God's grace and has received forgiveness and is cleansed. And David the adulterer, David the murderer says the Lord rewards me according to my righteousness in verse 20. According to the cleanness of my hands he has recompensed me.

Why? Verse 21 I have kept the ways of the Lord and have not wickedly departed from my God for his judgments are before me and I did not put away his statutes from me. I was also blameless before him and I kept myself from my iniquity. He doesn't say he never had iniquity but he has separated himself from it.

He's been cleansed. And that life of faithful obedience or obedient faithfulness has been

his path. Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

With the merciful you will show yourself merciful. With a blameless man you will show yourself blameless. With the pure you will show yourself pure.

But with the devious you will show yourself shrewd. David says about God. For you will save the humble people.

You will deliver the one of humility, David says. But you will bring down haughty looks. Haughtiness, self-sufficiency, denial that there is a God and that his requirements have to be met.

That's what gets us in trouble. You will light my lamp, David says in verse 28. The Lord my God will enlighten my darkness.

For by you I can run against a troop. By my God I can leap over a wall. As for God, his way is perfect.

The word of the Lord is proven. He is a shield to all who trust in him. For who is God except the Lord? And who is a rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.

David doesn't say God likes me because my way has always been perfect. He said I trust in God who makes my way perfect. He makes my feet like the feet of deer and sets me on my high places.

He teaches my hands to make war so that my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You have also given me the shield of your salvation. Your right hand has held me up.

Your gentleness has made me great. And so forth. You can read the rest of this psalm.

It's a wonderful expression of praise to God. But this is David's claim on God's justice, his claim on God's vindication. And he knows that even though his enemies seem to prevail, God's righteousness will cause him to stand.

If you turn to Revelation 6, we find a passage that reminds us of what we've just seen in the psalms as far as the righteous crying out for that justice from God, for that vindication. David said back in Psalm 13, How long, O Lord, will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? And we see that David finds that vindication by the time you get to Psalm 18. Well, here in Revelation 6, you have a similar idea being expressed by the martyred souls who reside under the altar.

Revelation 6, verse 9, in the middle of the seals, the seven seals on the scroll that has been handed to the Lamb when the fifth seal is opened, I saw under the altar the souls of

those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. Now, these are all of the Old Testament martyrs. These are those who are referred to in Hebrews chapter 11, those who lived in caves and holes in the ground, who were sawed in two, who were slain with the sword, and so forth.

Those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. These are not just tribulational martyrs, by the way. These are all of the martyrs of the Old Testament age.

And they cried with a loud voice, saying what? How long, O Lord, holy and true, until you judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? In this crowd is Abel himself, whose blood cries out to God from the ground. Then a white robe was given to each of them, and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was complete. There are more Old Testament saints to be added to the number, and there are more Old Testament martyrs to be added to the number in that 70th week of Daniel.

And figuratively here, these souls speak to God and cry out in the words of Psalm 13, how long, O Lord, until our wrongful death is avenged? And God assigns to them righteousness, the gift of the white robe. And He says a little while longer. There are more being added to your number in this last seven years of the Old Testament age.

When that number is complete, then your vindication will come. And of course, if you go over a few chapters in Revelation, you find that that vindication takes place. But we see here once again that it is a choice for the people of God.

We are believers. Our salvation is not in doubt. But our future and the state of our relationship with God hinges on what we decide.

We can either heed the warnings of God, or we can be brought to the place of acknowledgment by the justice of God. And God illustrates this in the national life of Israel. Time and again, they are warned.

Time and again, they are disciplined. Time and again, they fail to heed that warning. And like Cain, who never does awaken in humility to an acknowledgment of God and fails to put God in His proper place, that curse drives him out from the land that he so loves to farm, and he becomes a wanderer and a fugitive.

But he's marked, he's preserved, even in that case. And we think again, well, how bad could it be, really, to go out and be a wanderer? It doesn't seem like that big a deal. Well, there is a graphic example of this in the national life of Israel.

And I'd like to precede it. You remember what we read in Leviticus 26 about those cycles of discipline and how agricultural calamity is one of the warnings from God to wake up

and realize that there's more to life and that God has a place in their thinking. I'm going to do something you may consider strange here.

I have a book from the series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, *The Little House on the Prairie* Lady. You may know that she wrote many books about her life roughly 100 years ago on the prairies in America in the early days of pioneer life and expansion and so forth. And I want to read you a particular experience which she describes based on her firsthand observation.

This chapter is called *The Glittering Cloud*. And the reason we're reading this is to get a feel for agricultural disaster. The wheat was almost ready to cut.

Every day Paul looked at it, Laura says. Every night he talked about it and showed Laura some long, stiff wheat heads. The plump grains were getting harder in their little husks.

Paul said the weather was perfect for ripening wheat. If this keeps up, he said, we'll start harvesting next week. The weather was very hot.

The thin, high sky was too hot to look at. Air rose up in waves from the whole prairie as it does from a hot stove. In the schoolhouse, the children panted like lizards and the sticky pine juice dripped down the board walls.

Saturday morning, Laura went walking with Paul to look at the wheat. It was almost as tall as Paul. He lifted her onto his shoulder so that she could see over the heavy, bending tops.

The field was greeny gold. At the dinner table, Paul told Ma about it. He had never seen such a crop.

There were 40 bushels to the acre and wheat was a dollar a bushel. They were rich now. This was a wonderful country.

Now they could have anything they wanted. Laura listened and thought now Paul would get his new boots. He's been walking around for a long time in patched boots.

She sat facing the open door and the sunshine streaming through it. Something seemed to dim the sunshine. Laura rubbed her eyes and looked again.

The sunshine really was dim. It grew dimmer until there was no sunshine. I do believe a storm is coming up, said Ma.

There must be a cloud over the sun. Paul got up quickly and went to the door. A storm might hurt the wheat.

He looked out, then he went out. The light was clear. It was not like the changed light before a storm.

The air did not press down as it did before a storm. Laura was frightened. She did not know why.

She ran outdoors where Paul stood looking up at the sky. Ma and Mary came out too and Paul asked, What do you make of that, Caroline? A cloud was over the sun. It was not like any cloud they had ever seen before.

It was a cloud of something like snowflakes, but they were larger than snowflakes and thin and glittering. Light shone through each flickering particle. There was no wind.

The grasses were still and the hot air did not stir, but the edge of the cloud came on across the sky faster than wind. The hair stood up on Jack the Bulldog's neck. All at once he made a frightful sound up at that cloud, a growl and a whine.

Plunk! Something hit Laura's head and fell to the ground. She looked down and saw the largest grasshopper she had ever seen. Then huge brown grasshoppers were hitting the ground all around her, hitting her head and her face and her arms.

They came thudding down like hail. The cloud was hailing grasshoppers. The cloud was grasshoppers.

Their bodies hid the sun and made darkness. Their thin large wings gleamed and glittered. The rasping whoring of their wings filled the whole air and they hit the ground and the house with the noise of a hailstorm.

Laura tried to beat them off. Their claws clung to her skin and her dress. They looked at her with bulging eyes, turning their heads this way and that.

Mary ran screaming into the house. Grasshoppers covered the ground. There was not one bare bit to step on.

Laura, barefoot, had to step on grasshoppers and they smashed, squirming and slimy under her feet. Ma was slamming the windows shut all around the house. Pa came and stood just inside the front door looking out.

Laura and Jack stood close beside him. Grasshoppers beat down from the sky and swarmed thick over the ground. Their long wings were folded and their strong legs took them hopping everywhere.

The air whored and the roof went on sounding like a roof in a hailstorm. Then Laura heard another sound, one big sound made of tiny nips and snips and gnawings. The wheat, Pa shouted.

He dashed out the back door and ran toward the wheat field. The grasshoppers were eating. You could not hear one grasshopper eat unless you listened very carefully while you held him and fed him grass.

Millions and millions of grasshoppers were eating now. You could hear the millions of jaws biting and chewing. Pa came running back to the stable.

Through the window, Laura saw him hitching Sam and David, the horses, to the wagon. He began pitching old dirty hay from the manure pile into the wagon as fast as he could. Ma ran out to the other pitchfork and helped him.

Then he drove away to the wheat field and Ma followed the wagon. Pa drove around the field throwing out little piles of stuff as he went. Ma stooped over one, then a thread of smoke rose from it and spread.

Ma lighted pile after pile. Laura watched until a smudge of smoke hid the field and Ma and Pa and the wagon. Grasshoppers were still falling from the sky.

The light was still dim because grasshoppers covered the sun. Ma came back to the house and in the clothes leaned to, she took off her dress and her petticoats and killed the grasshoppers she shook out of them. She had lighted fires all around the wheat field.

Perhaps smoke would keep the grasshoppers from eating the wheat. Ma and Mary and Laura were quiet in the shut, smothery house. Carrie was so little that she cried even in Ma's arms.

She cried herself to sleep. Through the walls came the sound of grasshoppers eating. The darkness went away.

The sun shone again. All over the ground was a crawling, hopping mass of grasshoppers. They were eating all the soft, short grass off the knoll.

The tall prairie grasses swayed and bent and fell. Oh, look, Laura said low at the window. They were eating the willow tops.

The willow's leaves were thin and bare twigs stuck out. Then whole branches were bare and knobby with masses of grasshoppers. I don't want to look anymore, Mary said, and she went away from the window.

Laura did not want to look anymore either, but she could not stop looking. The green garden rows were wilting down. The potatoes, the carrots, the beets, and beans were being eaten away.

The long leaves were eaten off the cornstalks and the tassels, and the ears of young corn and their green husks fell, covered with grasshoppers. There was nothing anybody could do about it. When it was time to go for Spot, her cow, Laura put on stockings and shoes and a shawl.

Spot was standing in the old ford of Plum Creek, shaking her skin and switching her tail. The herd went mournfully lowing beyond the old dugout. Laura was sure that cattle

could not eat grass so full of grasshoppers.

If the grasshoppers ate all the grass, the cattle would starve. Grasshoppers were thick under her petticoats and on her dress and shawl. She kept striking them off her face and hands.

Her shoes and Spot's feet crunched grasshoppers. Ma came out in a shawl to do the milking, and Laura helped her. They could not keep grasshoppers out of the milk.

Ma had brought a cloth to cover the pail, but they could not keep it covered while they milked into it. Ma skimmed out the grasshoppers with a tin cup. Grasshoppers went into the house with them.

Their clothes were full of grasshoppers. Some jumped onto the hot stove where Mary was starting supper. Ma covered the food until they had chased and smashed every grasshopper.

She swept them up and shoveled them into the stove. Later that night in bed, Laura and Mary could still hear the whoring and sniffing and chewing. Laura felt claws crawling on her.

There were no grasshoppers in bed, but she could not brush the feeling off her arms and cheeks. In the dark, she saw grasshoppers' bulging eyes and felt their claws crawling until she went to sleep. The next morning, the whole prairie was changed.

The grasses did not wave. They had fallen in ridges. The rising sun made all the prairie rough with shadows where the tall grasses had sunk against each other.

The willow trees were bare. In the plum thickets, only a few plum pits hung to the leafless branches. The nipping, clicking, gnawing sound of the grasshoppers eating was still going on.

At noon, Pa came driving the wagon out of the smoke. He put Sam and David into the stable and slowly came to the house. His face was black with smoke and his eyeballs were red.

He hung his hat on the nail behind the door and sat down at the table. It's no use, Caroline, he said. Smoke won't stop them.

They keep dropping down through it and hopping in from all sides. The wheat is falling now. They're cutting it off like a scythe and eating it, straw and all.

He put his elbows on the table and hid his face with his hands. Laura and Mary sat still. Day after day, the grasshoppers kept on eating.

They ate all the wheat and the oats. They ate every green thing, all the garden and all

the prairie grass. Oh, Pa, what will the rabbits do, Laura asked, and the poor birds? Look around you, Laura, Pa said.

The rabbits had all gone away. The little birds at the grass tops were gone. The birds that were left were eating grasshoppers.

And prairie hens ran with outstretched necks, gobbling grasshoppers. When Sunday came, Pa and Laura and Mary walked to Sunday school. All the way, Laura and Mary brushed off grasshoppers.

When they came to the church, brown grasshoppers were thick on their petticoats. They lifted their skirts and brushed them off before they went in. But careful as they were, the grasshoppers had spit tobacco juice on their best Sunday dresses.

Nothing would take out the horrid stains. They would have to wear their best dresses with the brown spots on them. Many people in town were going back east.

Their best friends had to move back. They did not go to school anymore. They must save their shoes for winter.

And they could not bear to walk barefooted on grasshoppers. So you get the idea of the devastation that took place. Not only that, but a few days later, Pa had decided that he would plow and try to plant another crop.

Laura started toward the wheat field to ask Pa about something strange she had seen in the soil. But Pa was not plowing. Sam and David were standing still with the plow, and Pa was walking on the unplowed ground looking at it.

Then Laura saw him go to the plow and lift it out of the furrow. He went, driving Sam and David toward the stable with the idle plow. Laura knew only that something dreadful would make Pa stop work in the middle of the morning.

She went as fast as she could to the stable. Sam and David were in their stalls, and Pa was hanging up their sweaty harness. He came out and did not smile at Laura.

She tagged slowly after him into the house. Ma looked up and said, Charles, what is the matter now? The grasshoppers are laying their eggs, said Pa. The ground is honeycombed with them.

Look at the dooryard and you'll see the pits where the eggs are buried a couple of inches deep. All over the wheat field, everywhere. You can't put your finger down between them.

Look here. He took one of the gray things from his pocket and held it out on his hand. This is one of them, a pod of grasshopper eggs.

I've been cutting them open. There's 35 or 40 eggs in every pod. There's a pod in every hole.

There's 8 or 10 holes to the square foot, all over this whole country. Ma dropped down in a chair and let her hands fall helpless at her sides. We've got no more chance of making a crop next year than we have of flying, said Pa.

When those eggs hatch, there won't be a green thing left in this part of the world. So, Pa has to go to work in town. And let me just read you what happens when those eggs hatch.

After Christmas, there were a few snowy Sundays. One morning, Pa said the Chinook was blowing. The Chinook was a warm wind from the northwest.

In a day, it melted the snow away and Plum Creek was running full. Then came the rains, pouring day and night. Plum Creek roared, humping down its middle and swirling far beyond its low banks.

Then the air was mild and the creek was tame again. Suddenly, the plums and willows blossomed and their new leaves uncurled. The prairies were green with grass and Mary and Laura and Carrie ran barefooted over the fresh softness.

Every day was warmer than the day before until hot summer came. It was time for Laura and Mary to go to school. But they did not go that year because Pa must go away again.

And Ma wanted them at home with her. The summer was very hot. Dry, hot winds blew and there was no rain.

One day, when Pa came into dinner, he said, The grasshoppers are hatching. This hot sun is bringing them out of the eggs and up through the ground like corn popping. Laura ran out to see.

The grass on the knoll was hopping full of tiny green things. Laura caught one in her hands and looked at it. Its wee small wings and its tiny legs and its little head and even its eyes were the color of the grass.

It was so very tiny and so perfect. Laura could hardly believe it would ever be a big, brown, ugly grasshopper. They'll be big fast enough, said Pa, eating every growing thing.

Day by day, more and more grasshoppers hatched out of the ground. Green grasshoppers of all sizes were swarming everywhere and eating. The wind could not blow loud enough to hide the sound of their jaws nipping, gnawing, and chewing.

They ate all the green garden rows. They ate the green potato tops. They ate the grass and the willow leaves and the green plum thickets and the small green plums.

They ate the whole prairie bare and brown. And they grew. They grew large and brown and ugly.

Their big eyes bulged and their horny legs took them hopping everywhere. Thick over all the ground they were hopping and Laura and Mary stayed in the house. There was no rain and the days went by hotter and hotter, uglier and uglier, and filled with the sounds of grasshoppers until it seemed more than could be born.

Oh Charles, Ma said one morning, seems to me I just can't bear one more day of this. Ma was sick. Her face was white and thin and she sat down tired as she spoke.

Pa did not answer. For days he had been going out and coming in with a still, tight face. He did not sing or whistle anymore.

It was worst of all when he did not answer Ma. He walked to the door and stood looking out. Even Carrie was still.

They could feel the heat of the day beginning and hear the grasshoppers. But the grasshoppers were making a new sound. Laura ran to look out at them excited and Pa was excited too.

Caroline, he said, here's a strange thing, come look. All across the door yard the grasshoppers were walking, shoulder to shoulder and end to end, so crowded that the ground seemed to be moving. Not a single one hopped.

No one turned its head. As fast as they could go they were all walking west. Ma stood beside Pa looking.

Mary asked, oh Pa, what does it mean? Pa said, I don't know. He shaded his eyes and looked far to west and east. It's the same as far as the eye can see.

The whole ground is crawling, crawling west. Ma whispered, oh, if they would all go away. They all stood looking at the strange sight.

Only Carrie climbed onto her high chair and beat the table with her spoon. In a minute, Carrie Ma said, she kept on watching the grasshoppers walking by. There was no space between them and no end to them.

I want my breakfast, Carrie shouted. No one else moved. Finally Carrie shouted, almost crying, Ma, Ma.

There, you shall have your breakfast, Ma said, turning around. Then she cried out, my goodness. Grasshoppers were walking over Carrie.

They came pouring in the eastern windows side by side and end to end across the windowsill and down the wall and over the floor. They went up the legs of the table and

the benches and Carrie's high stool. Under the table and benches and over the table and benches and Carrie, they were walking west.

Shut the windows, said Ma. Laura ran on the grasshoppers to shut it. Pa went outdoors and around the house.

He came in and said, better shut the upstairs windows. Grasshoppers are thick, walking up the east side of the house as they are on the ground and they are not going around the attic window. They are going right in.

All up the wall and across the roof went the sound of their raspy claws crawling. The house seemed full of them. Ma and Laura swept them up and threw them out the western window.

None came in from the west, though the whole western side of the house was covered with grasshoppers that had walked over the roof and were walking down to the ground and going on west with the others. That whole day long, the grasshoppers walked west. All the next day, they went on walking west.

And all the third day, they walked without stopping. No grasshopper turned out of its way for anything. They walked steadily over the house.

They walked over the stable. They walked over spot until Pa shut her in the stable. They walked into Plum Creek and drowned.

And those behind them kept on walking in and drowning until dead grasshoppers choked the creek and filled the water and live grasshoppers walked across on them. All day, the sun beat hot on the house. All day, it was full of the crawling sound that went up the wall and over the roof and down.

All day, grasshoppers' heads with bulging eyes and grasshoppers' legs clutching were thick along the bottom edge of the shut windows. All day, they tried to walk up the sleek glass and fell back, while thousands more pushed up and tried and fell. Ma was pale and tight.

Pa did not talk and his eyes could not twinkle. Laura could not shake the crawling sound out of her ears nor brush it off her skin. The fourth day came and the grasshoppers went on walking.

The sun shone hotter than ever with a terribly bright light. It was nearly noon when Pa came in from the stable shouting, Caroline, Caroline, look outdoors. The grasshoppers are flying.

Laura and Mary ran to the door. Everywhere, grasshoppers were spreading their wings and rising from the ground. More and more of them filled the air, flying higher and higher

until the sunshine dimmed and darkened and went out, as it had done when the grasshoppers came.

Laura ran outdoors. She looked straight up at the sun through a cloud that seemed almost like snowflakes. It was a dark cloud, gleaming, glittering, shimmering bright and whiter as she looked higher and farther into it, and it was rising instead of falling.

The cloud passed over the sun and went on far to the west until it could be seen no longer. There was not a grasshopper left in the air or on the ground, except here and there a crippled one that could not fly but still hobbled westward. The stillness was like the stillness after a storm.

Ma went into the house and threw herself down in the rocking chair. My Lord, she said, my Lord. The words were praying, but they sounded like thank you.

Laura and Mary sat on the doorstep. They could sit on the doorstep now. There were no grasshoppers.

How still it is, Mary said. Paul leaned in the doorway and said earnestly, I would like someone to tell me how they all knew at once that it was time to go and how they knew which way was west and their ancestral home. But no one could tell him.

Turn with me to Joel in the Old Testament. I think with that as a first-hand account, the words of the prophet Joel will ring with new meaning. Joel writes about the day of the Lord, the day of judgment on Israel.

The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel, Hear this, you elders, and give ear, all you inhabitants of the land. Has anything happened like this in your days or even the days of your fathers? Tell your children about it. Let your children tell their children and their children another generation.

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.

Awake, you drunkards, and weep, and wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the new wine, for it has been cut off from your mouth. For a nation has come up against my land, strong and without number. His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a fierce lion.

He has laid waste my vine and ruined my fig tree. He has stripped it bare and thrown it away. Its branches are made white.

This, of course, is a nation that is pictured as locusts, as a swarm of grasshoppers. Look at verse 15. Alas for the day, for the day of the Lord is at hand.

It shall come as destruction from the Almighty. Is not the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God? The seed shrivels under the clods. Storehouses are in shambles.

Barns are broken down, for the grain has withered. How the animals groan! The herds of cattle are restless because they have no pasture. Even the flocks of sheep suffer punishment.

O Lord, to you I cry out, for fire has devoured the open pastures. This is the devastation left by the locusts. It's as though they've been burnt with fire.

And a flame has burnt all the trees of the field. The beasts of the field also cry out to you, for the water brooks are dried up. And fire has devoured the open pastures.

Blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm in my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand. A day of darkness and gloominess.

A day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains. A people come, these are the locusts, great and strong, the like of whom has never been, nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations. A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns.

The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness. Surely nothing shall escape them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like swift steeds, so they run.

With a noise like chariots, over mountaintops they leap, like the noise of a flaming fire that devours the stubble, like a strong people set in battle array. Before them the people writhe in pain, all faces are drained of color. They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war.

Everyone marches in formation, and they do not break ranks. They do not push one another, everyone marches in his own column. Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down.

They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall, they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness. The Lord gives voice before his army, for his camp is very great, for strong is the one who executes his word, for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible.

Who can endure it? Now therefore, says the Lord in verse 12, turn to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. This is inner change, not outward.

Appearance of change. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and he relents from doing harm. Who knows if he will turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God.

Blow the trumpet in Zion, consecrate a fast, call a sacred assembly, gather the people, sanctify the congregation, assemble the elders, gather the children and nursing babes, let the bridegroom go out from his chamber and the bride from her dressing room, let the priests who minister to the Lord weep between the porch and the altar, let them say, spare your people, O Lord, and do not give your heritage to reproach that the nation should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, where is their God? Then the Lord will be zealous for his land and pity his people. The Lord will answer and say to his people, behold, I will send you grain and new wine and oil, and you will be satisfied by them.

I will no longer make you a reproach among the nations. I will remove far from you the northern army and will drive him away into a barren and desolate land. With his face toward the eastern sea and his back toward the western sea, his stench will come up and his foul odor will rise because he has done monstrous things.

Fear not, O land. Be glad and rejoice, for the Lord has done marvelous things. Do not be afraid, you beasts of the field, for the open pastures are springing up and the tree bears its fruit.

The fig and the vine yield their strength. Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given you the former rain faithfully, and he will cause the rain to come down for you, the former rain and the latter rain in the first month. The threshing floors shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with new wine.

So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, the consuming locust, and the chewing locust, my great army which I sent among you. You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of your God who has dealt wondrously with you, and my people shall never be put to shame. Then you shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, I am the Lord your God, and there is no other.

My people shall never be put to shame. God will go to great lengths to warn us, to encourage us, to cause us to give him his rightful place in our lives. We are the people of God.

We have the opportunity to avail ourselves of God's grace. There's no need to go through divine discipline. There's no need to go through the consequences of disobedience and the consequences of faithfulness that Cain suffers, that the nation of Israel suffers, and that we as believers in the church age can suffer, especially in the spiritual sense when through inattention, through apathy, or through indifference, we

find that our lives bear no fruit, that our branches wither and are gathered together, cast into the fire and burned, as Jesus points out in John chapter 15.

We face the same choice that Cain faced. We face the same choice that Israel faced. Why go through the chastening and the discipline from God, all of which is designed to turn us and to cause us to humble ourselves before God, to acknowledge that we need him, that we belong to him, that he deserves first place in our lives.

If we fail to do that, if we fail to humble ourselves, God will humble us. This principle has application and will find fulfillment both in our present lives and in our lives in the age to come. 1 Corinthians 10 tells us that all of these things have been written for our instruction, as an example to us.

1 Corinthians 10, 11, all these things happened to them, Israel, as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man.

But God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able to bear, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape that you may be able to bear it. Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. Idolatry is putting something ahead of God in our priorities.

I hope that our extended look at the graphic nature of God's discipline on Israel will be a reminder to us that there's no need to put ourselves in that position. If we heed God's warnings, if we heed God's encouragements, if we avail ourselves of God's grace, as Cain had the opportunity to do, if you do well, is there not a lifting up? Is there not a forgiveness of sin? But if you do not do well, sin crouches at the door. The croucher is at the door.

And it is our calling to rule over it, to put God first and to acknowledge Him in every area of our lives. Let's close in prayer. Thank you, Father, for the privilege of studying your Word.

We thank you for the correction and the rebuke and the instruction in righteousness that it contains. We pray that we will respond to the power of your Word in the hands of your Spirit to set our priorities aright, to live and to think in a way that pleases you and that we will not fall into that category that requires discipline, that requires judgment. We thank you that you are a righteous God and that your desire is to bless, your desire is to build up, your desire is to give us a life that is not only meaningful and enjoyable for us, but also fulfills your purpose and reflects your glory.

We pray that we will be in that category and that in all things our Savior, Jesus Christ, will have the preeminence. We ask these things in His name. Amen.