

## ***Let it Rain*** 6-16-02

We are undergoing the worst drought that Arizona has seen. Other Southwestern states are not faring any better. Wildfires are consuming huge sections of wilderness forests. At the same time, some areas of the USA are experiencing severe flooding. What is happening to our weather? Is it merely cycles? Is God speaking to us, allowing judgement to come upon our nation through weather? Does God practice a 'hands off' policy or is He involved. Is He God of all or not God at all?

As to His ability to control the weather, we should not be in any doubt. Jesus calmed the wind and waves on Galilee. God brought a thunderstorm upon Egypt and stopped it at Moses request. He parted a sea for the Israelites under Moses and held back a flooding river for them under Joshua. God rained hail on the enemies of Joshua so that more were killed by hail than in battle. We can clearly see that God has no problem with His ability to control the weather. He is God of all. He is Lord over His creation. He is involved in His creation. We have seen before in Scripture that God does not change. If He has been involved in the past He is involved today.

But why would God plague a country with severe weather? Do we have a precedent in the Word of God? The mind of man (flesh) will look to what he calls natural phenomenon. The mind of the Spirit will look to the Word of God to find principles and lessons that relate to our present situation. We have many people operating under the label of 'Christian' today that act as if they really do not believe the Word of God. While in church it is convenient to say they do, in their everyday life they look to man's wisdom and man's ways for the answers to their questions and problems. If it comes to man's knowledge or the Word of God, they will pick man's knowledge every time.

If the Word of God is the source and standard of Truth, then man would have to study it and submit to its instruction. If we want to be our own boss, our own standard setter, then we need to believe the Bible is a nice book but not the Word of God to man. Then I can remain lord of my own life and I do not have to submit to THE LORD. -- What you believe is what you practice when no one is watching. Do you lean on the wisdom of man, on self-ability, or the Word of God? Do you believe God is at the helm of the universe or that we are all left to chance and haphazard circumstance? What you believe will determine where you go to find the answers.

This message is for you who believe the Word of God holds the answers man needs. For you who do not believe that, I would ask you to consider that man changes his interpretation of what is true on a regular basis. My college Chemistry professor warned us the first day of class that our textbook would be outdated next year. The Word of God never changes. We will look at some texts from 3500 years ago. This ancient wisdom is just as valid now as it was then because truth does not change! Consider what the Word of God has to say to our situation. Consider its timelessness.

When God gave the Law to Israel He made a direct correlation between obedience (love and wholehearted service to God) and the weather. Barbara shared this verse at the Wednesday night Bible study. That is two weeks in row we have had a

confirmation of the text for the service. I hope you realize the LORD is speaking to us. How many verses in the Bible? Go figure the odds. They're astronomical!

Deut 11:13-17 (NIV)<sup>13</sup> So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul--<sup>14</sup> then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil.<sup>15</sup> I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.<sup>16</sup> Be careful, or you will be enticed to turn away and worship other gods and bow down to them.<sup>17</sup> Then the Lord's anger will burn against you, and he will shut the heavens so that it will not rain and the ground will yield no produce, and you will soon perish from the good land the LORD is giving you.

I could list a number of other passages that basically say the same thing: Leviticus 23:3,4, Deuteronomy 28, the story of Elijah, and the story of Ruth, all declare that God responds to our behavior with good or bad weather.

Israel has two short seasons of rain. The Bible calls them the early and the latter rains. Israel is very similar in vegetation and terrain to Arizona. If the situation cools down in Israel I would love to take another group there so you can see with your own eyes what I am referring to. Without the seasonal rains there is severe water shortage. God placed His people in a land like this so that He could express His faithfulness to discipline them in love by withholding the rain when they went astray. The temptation they had was the same that we have today. They looked to other sources to determine the weather. If the Word of God did not fit with their desires, they would worship Baal. The Canaanites believed he was the one that brought the rain, and he was much less invasive in their daily way of life. In fact, Baal fit in quite conveniently with the lust of men. Instead of Baal, we bow to the god of so called science because we have the same liberating affect. Neither Baal nor science demand that we love our enemies, or that we do unto others as we would have them do to us. Baal or science demands very little. Therein is the temptation to abandon our love for the God that made us and choose a god of our own making, a god that lets us live like we desire to live.

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying. I'm not trying to paint all science to be evil. I'm saying man will use it as an excuse to do what he desires to do. True science is a wonderful thing for it glorifies God. Physicists that do not believe in God are getting harder and harder to find. But science can be misused just as religion can be misused.

So what does our text say to us today? Does it apply to us as well as Israel? Israel was called to be the people of God. Are we? Of all the nations on the earth, the world looks to the United States as a stronghold of Christianity. I believe the passage is just as applicable to us as it was to them. If we will love the Lord and are faithful to serve Him with our all, we will have rain as a blessing. We are not as much of an agrarian society as we once were, but the weather still affects our over all prosperity. If you don't believe that, ask the businesses in Oak Creek Canyon that have almost no traffic due to the canyon closure. Many are closing down and have laid off their employees. That is just a microcosm of what is happening across our nation.

If our hearts turn from God, then His faithfulness will withhold the rain to turn us back to Him. That is the discipline of a loving Father who is justly angry at His children's behavior. We saw in a video how the land of Inuits was blessed when they turned back to God. I could show you another story of another city in Central America that went from poverty to an abundance of oversized vegetables when they turned to God. But while those places remained in darkness their land was cursed. These are current examples that match with the Biblical accounts. I don't need to name all the ways in which the USA has turned from righteousness. All you have to do is turn on CNN. If you don't see it, there is no need for me to elaborate on it. If you love righteousness you are grieved every time you hear the news around our nation.

First we must recognize it is the hand of God. We must be convinced it is His response to our spiritual condition. God's hand of protection kept terrorists and war from our homeland with the exception of the Civil War and Pearl Harbor. Why has God allowed the attacks of 9/11? The terrorists are evil, there is no doubt about that. So were those who stole Job's herds, and those who conquered Israel. The question is why did God lift His hand of protection? If we are willing to accept our condition as the justice of God then we can ask how we should respond.

When Solomon dedicated the Temple he prayed a wonderful and prophetic prayer. The portion that applies to the topic today is 1 Kings 8:35-36 (NIV).

*<sup>35</sup> "When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them,<sup>36</sup> then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance.*

He has given us our proper response in this prayer. We are to pray. We often talk about prayer but we rarely hear of desperate crying out to God for a change. We need that kind of prayer that comes from a broken heart, a heart that sees the sin and aches with God because of it. We need to confess His name. We have been studying the attributes of God. His name is the sum of His attributes. To confess His name is to recognize who God is, how faithful, just, holy, merciful, good, loving and gracious He is. When we confess His name we see our shortcomings in the light of His perfection. We see the holy demand for righteousness. We know we must change. Then we turn from our sin. Where God has revealed to us areas in our lives that are contrary to His name, the places in our hearts and lives that do not line up with who He is, we must consciously turn from them. We purpose, by His grace, to not return to those things. Then God will teach us the right way to live and will send a rain of grace and cleansing, of renewal to our spirits. There is no more refreshing feeling than knowing that you are completely right with God. We need the rain of the Spirit of God to refresh us, but we must invite Him with repentance and a genuine desire to love and serve Him with our all. Are you spiritually dry? I think that is God's illustration in the weather. He is saying to us, "Recognize your dying dry condition and seek refreshing from me."

You might think you are walking in Christ to the very best of your ability. Your conscience may be clean. You may be communing with Him daily. If you have really allowed the light of the Holy Spirit to have a thorough inspection of your heart, praise God. But you are still not exempt. When the same conditions existed in the days of Daniel and Nehemiah, though those men had no recorded sin in the account of their lives, they prayed as one of the people of their nation. They pleaded for forgiveness as a part of a nation that had turned its back to God. They pleaded for a change in hearts. They pleaded for forgiveness and grace as though they were the worst of sinners. They associated themselves with the people. That is called intercession. They stood in their shoes and prayed the prayers that needed to be prayed, and God heard. God restored. God blessed. He rained in their hearts the refreshing of the Spirit, and He let the rain fall on their land.

This Wednesday evening I'm asking us to have a prayer meeting instead of a Bible study. If you are not able to get out at night I would ask you to pray at home. Pray with us in spirit. Use this passage in 1Kings 8:35,36 for your outline. Pray a prayer of intercession. Examine your own hearts and get right with God before you come. I mean that. James 5:16b-18 (NIV) *The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.*<sup>17</sup> *Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years.*<sup>18</sup> *Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.*

We have to be right with God before we can intercede for our nation. Thursday at 5:30 p.m. we will have a citywide prayer service right here at Wayside. 6 other pastors and members of those congregations are going to join us. It is on KGCB and it is in the paper. We are going to come together as the body of Christ under the headship of the LORD Jesus and ask God to forgive us and rain on us, spiritually and physically. This is not something I organized, it was prompted by a layman that worships in Cottonwood, and organized by the Holy Spirit. Everything just fell into place because it is of God. I would love to see Wednesday evening at the Newman home packed so that we can be spiritually ready to host this time of prayer. I hope you realize this is the call of God and we should be honored to be the hosts but we need to be spiritually ready.

I don't think God wants us to stop there. You have handouts in your bulletin asking when you can commit 15 minutes or more to join a small group in prayer on a weekly basis. We need a steady rain of the grace of God in Sedona and He will come if we will invite Him to come. If you are willing to be a part of that, if you think God wants you to be a part of that, check off the time or times you can participate and we'll help put you together with others that can pray on that same day and time. Just drop them in the offering plate or hand them to an usher or turn them into the office later. Does God answer prayer? I sometimes participate with a group on the Internet. Most of them are struggling in their faith, but one thing they all believe, prayer makes a difference. I hope you have that firm conviction. Let's make a difference in Sedona by the grace of God!

In recent history the state of Montana had a drought like we are having. The governor of the state asked the churches to please pray that coming Sunday for rain. One of the State's largest newspapers ran an editorial mocking the governor. "How

ridiculous to ask some God in heaven for rain. Rain is a natural phenomenon that comes when conditions are right. How silly to think God controls the weather." That Sunday the churches prayed and that Sunday rain began to fall and did not stop for 3 days. I love it when people challenge God, because we serve a big God that is more than capable of meeting their challenges! That editorial writer got a heaping serving of humble pie, though he refused to eat it. I imagine he looked at the forecast before he wrote his article. After all, he relies on nature and man's understanding of it. That will do you no good. God doesn't need the weather forecasters and they will tell you they don't understand it all anyway. He claimed it was a coincidence. There are none so blind as those who refuse to see!

Are you loving God with all your heart and soul and mind? Then, do you love your neighbor as yourself? Change begins in us as individuals. It starts with these two foundational conditions. The passage so often quoted in regard to revival, 2Chron. 7:14 says God's people are the ones that need to cry out to God. That verse is preceded by this condition, 2 Chron 7:13 (NIV)<sup>13</sup> "When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain... Then <sup>14</sup> if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

If you are already faithful in love and service to God, you can take the next step and intercede for those who aren't. Humble yourselves and step into their shoes and ask God to move in their hearts and lives and bring repentance. Intercede for government officials, the ones you like and the ones you don't. Intercede for those who don't know their need to allow the light of the Holy Spirit to shine in their hearts. Let's pray like those churches in Montana prayed. Encourage others to pray. Let's see what God will do. On June 20<sup>th</sup> the churches of Prescott are also joining together to pray. I wonder how many other places are that we don't even know of. I wouldn't be surprised a bit if churches all over the Southwest were doing the same thing. That day by the grace of God the people of God will humble themselves, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways. Then He will hear and heal our land. Then He can let it rain in our dry spirits and on our land.

I want to close with the words of the song we sang during the offering, now as a closing prayer:

Make us a house of prayer, that we might meet You there.

On behalf of the nation, a dying generation make us a house of prayer.

O Lord teach us to pray unceasingly night and day.

Make our intercession, for You a mighty weapon. O Lord teach us to pray.