

Preach, Provide and Pray

by Bayless Conley

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Good morning! We're in James 5. I'm going to finish it up today. I'm actually going to share two messages with you. Two messages sort of all tangled up into one. I'd like to do three or four because there's that much plus a whole lot more in the chapter, but time doesn't permit. So, I'm going to share two distinct messages with you today. Let's take a moment and pray. I know a lot of us have a lot of things going on in our lives. There's always a lot of distracting thoughts that want to pull us away from the main thing.

What if the Holy Spirit wanted to speak to you today through God's Word and give you a key that's going to help you in this season you're in or the season you're coming into? We really want to give Him our undivided attention. The psalmist of old prayed, "Lord, open my eyes that I might behold wondrous things out of Your law." We just want to ask the Lord to give us the spirit of wisdom and illumination in the knowledge of His Word and that Jesus will be glorified. Will you pray with me?

Dear Heavenly Father, we, in unison, ask You to speak to us. Speak to us as a church body and speak to us individually. "You know," as the psalmist said, "Our sitting down and our uprising. You understand our thought of far off. There's not a word on our tongue that You don't know altogether." Lord, we ask You for wisdom, comfort, correction, encouragement, the things that we need in this season, and for what's up the road ahead for us. We just lean out. We pray that You would speak to us. Lord, we will act upon Your Word. We're not just going to be hearers. We're going to be doers. We pray that in everything, through everything, and above everything, the name of Jesus would be magnified. Amen.

I'm going to begin reading James 5. By the way, if you're out on the plaza or wherever you might happen to be listening or watching right now, we're glad that you've joined us. James 5:1–6 NKJV,

¹ Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you!

² Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded, and their corrosion will be a witness against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days. ⁴ Indeed the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out; and the cries of the reapers have reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth (or the Lord of hosts).

⁵ You have lived on the earth in pleasure and luxury; you have fattened your hearts as in a day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

At face value, we find right off he's giving a warning to the godless rich. Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters. You're going to love one and hate the other. You cannot serve God and money." According to Colossians 3, greed is idolatry. Some people worship money and the power they think it gives them. In James' day, when he wrote this there was virtually no middle class. There was just this elite upper class, this oligarchy, if you would, of godless, rich who

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exploited and used the lower class as if they were unimportant and expendable. Just fuel to be burned up in the pursuit of more power and more wealth.

The problem was not in them having wealth. God does not condemn that. It was in how they obtained it and what they did with it after they obtained it. Money is not evil. It's not moral or amoral. "The love of money is the root of all evil," the Scripture says, not money itself. Again, the problem wasn't the fact that they had wealth. It was what they were doing with it and how they got it. James makes it clear that a terrible judgment is coming. What astonishes me, and I think about it quite often, is how the godless rich are people who will use their power and their position to abuse, to turn laws, and things in their favor regardless of who gets hurt.

I often think, "Do you realize you're only on the planet for this long and then you're gone? You're going to step into eternity, and then what's is going to happen?" James says of them, "You lived in pleasure and luxury on the earth." All right, they might be in pleasure and luxury now, but soon, they're going to step into an eternity filled with weeping, moaning, and fire. It surprises me. It astonishes me how little thought people give to the brevity of life, how fragile life can be, and how long eternity is. By the same token, on the other side of the coin, if you would, I'm astonished sometimes at how little the people who would be in that lower class that James is talking about, how little they think about eternal things, and that God eventually will set everything right. In their misfortune, sometimes they tend to blame God and accuse God of injustice and unfairness. That is very short-sighted as well.

I was a brand-new Christian. My vehicle at that time was a 1963 Volkswagen microbus. I wish I still had it. It'd be worth a boatload of money. It's the most expensive Volkswagen that you can buy on planet Earth now. I ran out of gas. The only thing that didn't work on my bus was the gas gage. So, I always had to be guessing, and I ran out of gas. I was on a bit of a desolate stretch of road, with a five-mile walk to a gas station. The truth is I was in a pretty severe economic distress at the time. Even walking the five miles to the gas station, I maybe had enough money for a gallon of gas. I was just kind of bummed out. I stood on the side of the road, thinking, "What am I going to do?" I just didn't know. All of a sudden, this car comes driving by really slow, a very expensive, large car. The top is down, and there are a of couple guys and a couple of scantily clad women in the car. They've got cases of beer stacked up to the moon in the back seat. They slow down, and one of the girls chucks a half-full can of beer at my head. They all start laughing and drive off.

So, I ducked, and I got mad. Not at them; I got mad at God. I said, "God, can't You see the discrepancy in this picture? I've given my all to You. My heart, my soul, everything I have, I put in Your hands, and here I am out of gas. I don't have any money. I'm stuck on the side of the road, and I know where they were going. They're going to a place called Immigrant Lake." I said, "You and I both know what's going to happen. They're going to drink the beer, and the girl's clothes are going to fall off. She threw a can of beer at me, God! She threw a can of beer at my head! They had enough money for a really nice car. They have money for fuel. They have money to buy enough beer to drown the state, and here I am, Your servant."

I was really hacked off. So, I just sort of had it out with God. I said, "This is just not right!" I went into the van, and I got this big, old Bible out. I opened it up, and it fell open to Psalm 73. I read through the Psalm, and it changed my life. I'm going to paraphrase a bit, but this is what it basically said. "I was envious of the boastful when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They aren't in trouble like other men. They're cruel, and they boast against God. The only thing that seems to happen to them is they get richer."

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I thought to myself, "I'm serving God for nothing." It says, "It was hard for me to understand," the psalmist said, "Until I went into the sanctuary of God and then I saw their end. They're in a slippery place, and very soon, they're going to slide off into eternity and destruction. Yet, I'm with You and will continue to be with You enjoying, Your presence and Your bounty through eternity." Then the psalmist said, "God, I was so ignorant. I was so foolish in my understanding. I must have been like a beast before You."

I was so convicted in my heart. I remember standing on the side of the road saying, "God, forgive me. I'm so sorry for having such a limited perspective of things." From that day to this day, I think about eternity almost every single day. I judge things in the light of eternity. We need to look at life that way. Now, we read in verse 4, and it said that the cries of the laborers whose wages have been held back have reached the Lord's ears. Did you know God is the champion of the daily wage earner? There are a lot of Scriptures we could read, but for the sake of time, let me just stick to these. Deuteronomy 24:14–15 NKJV,

¹⁴ "You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether one of your brethren or one of the aliens who is in your land within your gates. ¹⁵ Each day you shall give him his wages, and not let the sun go down on it, for he is poor and has set his heart on it; lest he cry out against you to the Lord, and it be sin to you."

That is exactly what James said has happened. James writes these things as a warning to the godless rich in hopes that they will repent. But also, as an encouragement to any believer in this straightened circumstance, this lower class, if you would, who is suffering due to the injustices that have been done to them. Let me make it clear, James is not putting forth some socialistic gospel. That is unbiblical. He is not saying, nor does the Scripture say anywhere, that you should take the wealth of those who are rich and distribute it to the poor. That is not a biblical principle. This is, however, a clear warning to be just, fair, to pay what has been agreed upon, and to pay it on time. Listen to the New Testament. Colossians 4:1 TPT says,

¹ Employers, treat your workers with equality and justice as you know that you also have a Lord and Master in heaven who is watching you.

He's not just watching. He's coming. Now, back to James 5:7–8 NKJV,

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain. ⁸ You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand.

How close? Next verse, verse 9,

⁹ Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be condemned. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door!

I think He's got His hand on the handle, and He's turning it right now. Verses 10–11,

¹⁰ My brethren, take the prophets, who spoke in the name of the Lord, as an example of suffering and patience. ¹¹ Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job and seen the end intended by the Lord—that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful.

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In the end, God sorted everything out for Job, and He will do the same for His children in every generation. I love the fact that God used Job as an example because Job wasn't just blessed when he got to the end of his life and stepped into eternity. God turned things around for Job during his earthly life. Yes, Job went through some suffering. Job went through some tragedy. Things happened to Job, but you read the end of the story, and God turned things around. That's what James emphasizes. James says that's what we should be looking at. That's what we should be getting out of the story.

In fact, most theologians agree that the book of Job, and the things that happened to him lasted a maximum of nine months. In fact, did you know that chapter 3, all the way to chapter 42, 42 is the final chapter in the book, chapter 3 to chapter 42 is one conversation that takes place in one day. Now, there are some things you can read in the first couple of chapters and get an idea of the length of time, but very easily, it could have fit into a couple of months' time frame before the wheels of God's deliverance started turning in the life of Job.

Now, I thank God for one that the lion's share of our reward is in the world to come. That will happen when we step out of this life, when we die, or when Jesus returns, whichever one of those things happens first, and the reward that's waiting on the other side will make every bit of obedience, every step of obedience to God and His Word on this side, absolutely worthwhile. That in and of itself would be far more than enough. Yet what Job found, and what James wants us to see, is what the psalmist wrote so succinctly. Psalm 58:11 NKJV says,

¹¹ "Surely there is a reward for the righteous; surely He is God who judges in the earth."

There is a reward and God does judge the earth in this life, not just settling accounts. Once we get to glory, that's certainly a big part of it. Psalm 27:13 NKJV says,

¹³ I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

We all know we're going to see the goodness of the Lord when we step out of this life. But he said, "I would have lost heart. I would have given up unless I believed I would see His goodness in the land of the living, in the here and in the now." My wife, Janet, some of you may not know that she's actually a registered nurse. Stand up, sweetheart. This is my girl right here. We've been married for 42 years, and for the first couple years of our marriage, she worked in nursing. She hasn't since we started Cottonwood 40 years ago. She's been too busy with the church.

She's kept her license current, but she hasn't worked as a nurse for the last four decades. The first couple of years she did, and I worked as an assistant pastor in a church. I was also a glass installer. I installed windows and glass in commercial buildings. Janet would come home. She worked at a hospital in San Bernardino, and would come home in tears almost every day. She had a supervisor who had decided that she was going to be an enemy to Janet. This woman was cruel and rude to her. Every good thing that came Janet's way, whether it was shifts or whatever, this woman would step in the way and block it.

Janet would come home. It's a hard thing as a brand-new husband, when your wife comes home in tears hearing she did it again and just making Janet's life miserable. So, we would, I can't tell you how many times we knelt down next to that little couch in our apartment, and we prayed. We prayed for that woman and prayed that God would turn things around. Then Janet

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would come home again. Honestly, I felt like going to the hospital and knocking that woman out, but instead, we prayed.

We prayed for her, and then she would do some other thing. Even things that legitimately belonged to Janet because of her position, this woman would find some way to thwart those things and block them. She was just nasty. We prayed, and that went on for months. Then, all of a sudden, one day, everything changed. Now, I don't know if the lady got saved or somebody cast a demon out of her, but Janet's persecutor became her champion. It happened overnight. Now, this woman's going out of her way to make sure that every blessing comes Janet's way, to make sure that every good shift comes her way, to speak words of kindness. It was crazy how radical this shift was.

Friend, our God does do good things for His children in the land of the living. Listen, He will balance all the scales when He returns. Everything will be made right then. We are told in the meantime to persevere and be patient. What does that translate to for us? What does that mean in practical terms? While we're trusting God for His hand to move in our temporal circumstances and change things or when we're waiting for the Lord's return when He'll set everything right, what does it mean to patiently endure in the meantime? I mean, what does that really mean for you? What does that mean for me? Well, we read in verse nine. He said, "Don't grumble against one another." So first, we need to stay in unity. Then in James 5:12, NKJV he says,

¹² But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.

In other words, walk in honesty and integrity. Be a person of your word. Anyone who has to prop up their word with an oath, generally does it because they're lying. "Well, I swear to God. I swear on my mother's grave. I swear on the head of my children." Now, the only reason you have to prop it up like that is because your word is no good. So, you have to add something to it so that people will believe. It's been my experience that 99.9% of the time, people who prop up what they're saying like that can't be trusted.

I remember I was visiting a friend. He's in ministry. I saw him talking to a young, very attractive, single young lady. When I saw him, I was alarmed inside. Nothing inappropriate went on, but I was just bothered inside. This guy's married. He has kids. So, I went to him and said, "Look, I'm just talking as your friend. Is something going on between you and this gal you were talking to?" He said, "No, nothing." I asked, "Are you sure?" I said, "Because it can ruin your marriage, destroy your family, and destroy your ministry." He said, "Bayless, there's nothing going on." I said, "Okay." So, I left him and made my way out.

I maybe got 50 paces, but I couldn't get rid of this sense. I turned around and walked back. I said, "You say nothing's going on between you and this girl. Are you sure?" He put his hand on his heart and said, "Bayless, I swear to God, nothing's going on." The moment he did that, I knew he was lying. Sure enough, it wasn't too much longer after that the girl came and confessed. He only confessed once he found out that his business was out on the street. Let your "yes" be "yes" and your "no" be "no". Be a person of integrity. Be a person of honesty. Be so honest that you and other people know if you say something, it's good. You can take it to the bank as they say. James 5:13–16a, NKJV says,

¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing psalms. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. ¹⁵ And the prayer of

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faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven. ¹⁶ Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.

All right. So, what do you do in the meantime, while we're patiently enduring and waiting for the Lord's return or waiting for Him to turn around circumstances? You stay in unity. You live uprightly. You live a Christian life. You pray, you sing, you worship, you minister to the sick, and you carry on. In other words, you just keep doing church. You keep doing life. You keep living for Jesus. You come to church, and you worship, you pray, and you live uprightly inside the doors and outside of the doors. You carry on. That's what you do. You don't get mad and quit and say, "Look, I'm not going to church anymore. This isn't working out for me." No, you carry on. You don't get mad at God and say, "Look, I'm done with this. You're a bunch of hypocrites in church. I'm not going back." No, you carry on. You carry on.

I was in a boating accident back in 2014. I was not expected to live and was out of commission for about six months. Quite often, in fact, it happened just a few weeks ago again. Someone will come up to me and ask, "What's different now after the accident? How are your priorities different now from how they were before? It didn't look like you're going to live. You had this close brush with death. What's different about your life now?" Most people are very disappointed in my answer. I say, "Nothing. I haven't changed a single thing. My priorities are exactly the same. I was trying to do it right before, and I'm still trying to do it right after. I haven't changed my priorities. I haven't looked at life any differently. I'm just carrying on."

That's the same thing we need to do while we're waiting for the return of our Master, while we're waiting for His mighty hand to work in our life. We carry on. I'm going to keep coming to church. I'm going to keep praying. I'm going to keep worshipping. I'm going to keep ministering. I'm going to do the things God has told me to do. I'm going to carry on. Which brings me to message number two. I think there's a very profound message that James has woven purposefully into the things we've read and the surrounding verses that we're going to talk about. It's basically threefold. We need to preach, provide, and pray. Preaching, provision, prayer. Can we say that? Preaching, provision, prayer.

Now, the symbolism in Scripture of lost souls being like a harvest is found in the Old Testament and the New Testament. Those who are out sharing the gospel are the workers who are reaping the harvest. When Jesus saw the multitude scattered like sheep with no shepherd, He was moved with compassion. He said, "The harvest is truly great, but the labors are few." Pray that the Lord of the harvest would send out laborers into His harvest. In John 4, when the woman at the well came back with the whole town, she said, "Come meet a Man who told me everything I ever did. This has to be the Christ, the Messiah." Jesus, there with the disciples, looks at this mass of humanity moving towards Him. He says, "Look at the harvest fields. They're ripe. They're ready for harvest." Then He went on and started talking about being a worker in the harvest fields. That is what James is talking about throughout these verses that we have read.

He opens up by talking about laborers in the harvest field, those who have literally brought in the harvest. The reapers say they're crying out because they haven't been paid. He said, "Two things are crying out. The wages that have been held back are crying out to God, and the laborers themselves are crying out to God." The missionary and his family, the pastor at church in a difficult area, and the people who have given their all for the sake of the Kingdom and the tithes and offerings that have been withheld. Literally, God says those wages are crying out to Him, like the blood of Abel that cried out from the ground. It says literally those wages are crying out. Their heart is full of vision, but they don't have the resource to carry out the vision.

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They're crying out to God, and God is listening to those cries. As we look at it from this symbolic standpoint, James is not necessarily addressing the ungodly rich because, if you think about it, the book wasn't written to unbelievers. James is addressing the godly rich. Godly in the sense that they named the name of Christ, their prospering, but only for themselves. They have no thought for the harvest and no thought for lost humanity. They don't care about world missions or Kingdom work. Their tithes and offerings are being withheld. That money is literally gathering rust that will one day testify against them. In the meantime, it cries out to God to be sown into the Kingdom.

I had a friend ring me some time ago. In our conversation, he said, "Bayless, my wife and I just got our living trust done." I said, "Good for you. Janet and I have done the same thing. We've created a living trust." He said, "We got it all sorted out with the house, whatever possessions, and all the funds we have. Our kids and grandkids are all taken care of." He says, "I just wanted you to know we put Cottonwood in the trust as well." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "The messages coming out of Cottonwood have so impacted our lives, and so impacted the lives of our family; we wanted it to be carried on after we were gone. We didn't want all of our inheritance to be eaten up in probate costs, attorney's fees, and distant, unsaved, or even close, unsaved relatives coming and fighting over their piece. We wanted to make sure the Kingdom was taken care of as well."

It really blessed me when he shared that. So, the gospel must be preached. First Corinthians 1:21 says, "It pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe." So it has to be preached, but people also need to be sent. The gospel needs to be sent. We read in Romans 10:14–15 NKJV,

¹⁴ How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? ¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!"

One of the ways we send is through resourcing the gospel. We send the message around the world through every medium that we can, and we support people who have given their lives to be preaching the gospel. People can't believe in a Lord they haven't heard of, and they can't hear unless somebody preaches, and they can't preach unless they are sent. That has to do with provision. Preaching is important, but provision is necessary as well.

Friend, we are just stewards over the wealth we have. We're not the owners. When I call Jesus, Lord, it's an acknowledgement of my stewardship. Listen, if your salvation experience does not compel you and inspire you to give so that others can hear the message, I think you may have the wrong Jesus. I'm going to say that again. If your salvation experience does not compel you and inspire you to give so that others can hear the message, and be saved, it just might be that you have the wrong Jesus. I cannot conceive of a salvation experience that doesn't compel you to want to reach other people through every means that you can. James carries on the thought in verse seven. Once again, he said,

⁷ Therefore be patient, brethren, until the coming of the Lord. See how the farmer waits for the precious fruit of the earth, waiting patiently for it until it receives the early and latter rain.

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All right, Jesus, why haven't You come yet? Well, the farmer is waiting. The word farmer is the same word Jesus used in John 15:1. He said, "I'm the true vine. My Father is the vine dresser. My Father's the husbandman. That's the same exact Greek word. My Father's the farmer. "Heavenly Father, why have You not sent Jesus back yet?" Because He's waiting for something. What's He waiting for? The precious fruit of the earth. That word earth is used throughout the New Testament, not just meaning soil. It refers to all the inhabitants of the earth. He's waiting for a global harvest.

Now, I love our country. I want to see the United States saved and lifting up the name of Jesus. God loves the United States of America, but He also loves India, all the nations of Asia, all the nations on the African continent, Europe, Russia, and the Pacific islands. He's waiting for the precious fruit of the earth. I am convinced there will be an end time global harvest. It's spoken of in Revelation 14. Jesus is depicted sitting on a cloud. He has a crown of gold on His head. In His hand is a sharp sickle. An angel cries out and says, "The time has come. The harvest is ripe. The harvest of the earth is ripe. Thrust in your sickle and reap." That time will come. We haven't seen it yet, but my friend, we will see an end time global harvest.

I know dark times are coming upon the world. The Bible prophesies it. The Scriptures are clear, but they're also clear in the fact that at the same time and in that season, there will be a global harvest. The Father is waiting for that before He sends Christ back. Then he said, "He's waiting till it receives the early and latter rain." In Israel, there are two rainy seasons. The first one comes before planting time. It softens the soil. It gets the soil ready and receptive for the seeds so the seeds can be planted.

The second one, the latter rain, comes before harvest time, and it helps the harvest to become fully ripe. Without both of those rains, without the early rain and the latter rain, there would never be a successful harvest. Both are important, and throughout Scripture, the early rain and latter rain refer to the presence and the work of the Holy Spirit. In Joel 2 and Acts 2, both talk about it specifically with salvation and the Spirit coming down. It's spoken of in Hosea 6, Psalm 72, Amos 4, and Isaiah 45. My friend, that early rain came on the day of Pentecost as 120 people prayed in that upper room. It was the beginning of the church age, and the seeds of the gospel were sown into people's hearts for the very first time. The Holy Spirit came. The Word was preached. Miracles were wrought. Thousands were saved, and the gospel seeds began to spread around the world.

My friend, there will be another great outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and it will be global. The latter rain will ripen the fruit of the earth to be harvested. What must we do to cooperate? But first, let me say this. I realize God got along fine before I came on the scene. He'll get along fine after I'm gone. So frankly, He doesn't need me. He doesn't need you. He can get His work done. Yet He has purposed this thing, declared it, and wired it so that we're to cooperate. How do we cooperate? Well, there has to be preaching. There has to be provision. There has to be prayer. Zechariah 10:1 NKJV says,

¹⁰ Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone.

My friend, at Pentecost, the Spirit descended on praying people, and He will descend upon praying people once again. In the time of the latter rain, God says, "Ask for rain." You need to pray and ask for the rain. James carries on in the same vein and the same thought. The subject doesn't change. Listen to it. We pick it up in James 5:16b–18 NKJV.

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¹⁶ The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much. ¹⁷ Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. ¹⁸ And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.

Yes, it happened, but there is an analogy that he is bringing out. Elijah prayed, the heaven gave rain, and the harvest was reaped. If you read the story, when Elijah prayed for rain, and the heavens gave rain, it's in 1 Kings 18, it was tied into and was all about a national revival. Israel as a nation had gone completely into the worship of Baal. They walked away from the God of their fathers. It was a time of political and moral social darkness. Elijah prayed, and God sent rain. The nation came back to God.

My friend it happened in a mass, and it happened in a day. There's so much here. Listen, the national, political, and social climate in which Elijah prayed was so similar to ours and so similar to what James declared was going on in the first few verses that we read. It's uncanny. As I said, first, he lived in a backslidden nation. A nation that once honored God, but no longer honored God. Reminds me of our blessed nation. He was living in the midst of a backslidden nation. The political leaders were a personification of James 5:1–6. Ahab and his wife Jezebel were the political leaders at the time.

Let me give you an example of what things were like. King Ahab decided he wanted this vineyard. It was next to the summer palace in Jezreel. It belonged to a man named Naboth. So he says, "Look, I want your vineyard. I'll give you another one better than it, or I'll buy it from you." Naboth said, "No." He said this based on what God has said. A family's inheritance was very, very important. In fact, if you lost it due to hard times, it would come back to you in the year of Jubilee, 50 years later. It always came back to the family, but Ahab wants it permanently. Naboth says, "I can't do it. It would be wrong. I'm not going to let go of my family's inheritance. No, I won't do it."

So, Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, decided to take it anyway. The first thing they did was weaponize the media. The media of the day was having letters written, which circulated to all the leaders and the elders. They slandered Naboth. They wrote untrue things about him. They turned public opinion against him because they weaponized the media. Then, they weaponized the courts. He was unjustly accused and unjustly condemned. He was executed, and then Ahab seized the vineyard. That's the climate of things in which Elijah prayed. In fact, James said this in verse six. He says, "You've condemned," it's a courtroom term.

⁶ You have condemned, you have murdered the just; he does not resist you.

In other words, it seems like nobody can do anything about it. It's exactly what happened with Naboth during the season when Elijah was praying. So, in a spiritually dark, politically and morally corrupt climate like that, Elijah prayed, and God sent rain. He sent natural rain, and He sent spiritual rain. The nation turned back to God. God, my friend, can do it again. As you'll see, we're going to finish the chapter now, the subject hasn't changed at all. He says this in James 5:19–20 NKJV,

¹⁹ Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, ²⁰ let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.

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Elijah turned the nation back to God, who had wandered away. He's saying, "Hey, you can do the same thing. Elijah, how did you do it? He prayed. It's interesting. James says this can happen on an individual level, just like it can on a national level. We pray for people, and then the Holy Spirit comes and softens their hearts. He will make them receptive to the truth of God's Word. We continue to pray, and God brings them to the place, through the power of the Holy Spirit, through the latter rain, if you would, of brightness where they're ready to call upon the name of the Lord and be saved.

I was talking to a friend last week. His son is a grown young man, but lives a hedonistic lifestyle far away from God and is not concerned about spiritual things. All mom and dad can do is pray. They've shared with him. They've talked to him, but he doesn't want to hear it. So, they're praying that the Holy Spirit will just get ahold of him. "Holy Spirit, get ahold of him. Holy Spirit, get ahold of him." The son calls one day. He says, "Dad, I need to come over. I need to talk to you." It turns out he had a dream that night. There was an enormous angel standing there. Behind the angel, the whole sky, the horizon, as far as you can see from left to right, up and down, was a huge book.

It was titled, "The Book of Life." It was filled with names as far as the eye could see. The angel called this young man's name. He looked at the angel, and the angel said, "I'm sorry. I cannot help you. Your name is not in the book." He said, "Suddenly, it was like a chute opened up underneath him, and he was dragged down, down, down into the darkness, down to the suffocating darkness." Suddenly, he woke up terrified. He called his dad. He said, "Dad, I need your Jesus. I need to be saved." He gave his life to the Lord. He's on fire for God now.

I had a friend. His name was Steve. We used to run together before we got saved. We got in quite a bit of trouble together. I got saved in a street mission, and Steve was one of the first people I talked to about Jesus. Honestly, he mocked me. He laughed at me. He made fun of me, but I prayed, and I prayed, and I prayed, and I prayed that God would get ahold of Steve. There was a Christian concert at the college campus there in Southern Oregon. Not too many people turned out for it. It was probably 1977. A guy finishes and gives an invitation. No one responds, but then suddenly, I hear someone crying and look over. It's my friend Steve walking down one of the aisles. He's convulsing and weeping so strongly he can hardly walk.

He gets to the front, and he collapses in this guy's arms, sobbing. Finally, when he stops crying. The guy leads him to Jesus and prays with him. I had the privilege of laying my hands on Steve about four or five days later, and he was baptized in the Holy Spirit. What got a hold of his heart? My friend, the Word was shared with him. The rain of the Holy Spirit, the presence of the Holy Spirit got ahold of his heart. My friend, don't underestimate what God can do. Don't underestimate what God can do at your work. Don't underestimate what He can do with your unsaved relatives, our communities, our country, and the world.

I'm telling you. He's looking for a people who will see that the Word is preached, who will provide, and will also pray. All three of those things are vital. The heart that does not move the hand to send support for the gospel cannot pray prayers that will move the hand of God to send rain. The things are intertwined together. Here's a couple of thoughts as we close. I know some people think, "Well, Pastor, maybe somebody else can pray, and God would hear, but He wouldn't hear me." The effective fervent of the righteous man avails much. That means it makes much power available. Well, did you know what the Bible says about Jesus? It says, "He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

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His righteousness has been imputed to us, my friend. He goes on. Here's the example: Elijah was a man, not a superman. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours. One translation said he was every bit as human as you are. If you read about Elijah's life, he battled with depression. All sorts of stuff went on. He was a man. He may seem larger than life, but he was a person just like you with struggles just like you have. He prayed, and God sent the rain. So, don't knock yourself out, my friend. God only has flawed vessels to use, and I'm going to stand at the front of that line. I'm going to say, "Here I am, Lord. I'm available." God will use you.

I want you, right now, to maybe think of an individual for whom you can pray. It may be a parent, a sibling, a wayward child, a classmate, a neighbor, a coworker, or some individual. We're going to pray in a moment for those individuals. Pray that the Holy Spirit will move on their heart. The Holy Spirit can do in a moment, which you cannot do in a lifetime of arguing. If you can talk someone into getting saved, somebody else can come along and talk them out of it. When the Holy Spirit does a thorough work, no one takes that away from you, my friend.

I want you to be thinking, even now, as I wrap this up, of an individual who you can pray for. In a moment, I'm going to have them put up the nations of the world. They're going to be scrolling on the screens in a moment. I ask you to pick a nation that you can pray for. Now, you may want to pray for our own nation. I can't think of a nation on the planet that needs more prayer than our own does right now. I do love the United States of America, but we need prayer.

Maybe there's another nation. Maybe it's one of those places where if I could go anywhere, this is where I'd go. Maybe you pray for them. As it scrolls up across the screens, I want you to latch on to one if you don't already have one. Begin to pray for that country. If one man's prayer, a man just like us, Elijah, could pray, and it could result in a national revival, what could all of our prayers do? The final thing is I want to encourage you to take some time every day this week, every single day. You don't have to take a long time. Take a few moments, at least. You may want to extend that and pray for that individual. Pray that the influence of the Holy Spirit will come upon him or come upon her. Spend a few moments praying for that country, that God would pour out the rain of His Spirit. Because, friend, we will see no revival or harvest without the rain.

I'd like you to stand your feet. Whoever's doing it, just push that button right now. Let those nations begin to scroll up there. As we begin praying for individuals, I just want to let you know. I'd like to lead in prayer with my mic on, but then I'm going to turn it off because it's pretty private. Right now, who I'm praying for needs to stay before me and God, somebody who is away from God who shouldn't be. I want you to pray and don't worry about those around you. If you want to pray out loud, go for it. If you want to pray quietly, go for it. But after you pray for that individual, I want you to pick a country and pray for it. You may have never been there. You may know no one there, but specifically, God put something on your heart. I want you to pray. Are you ready?

Heavenly Father, we're going to bring individuals before You. We believe we're in a moment that You've crafted. We know that You're listening. We know that You want this more than we want this. Father, as we bring this individual before You and call out their name, we trust that the influence of the Holy Spirit will come upon them. That You will give them dreams. That You will send laborers across their path who speak the secret language of their heart. That they would be saved. God, as we pray for these nations, we trust that You will move by Your Holy Spirit globally. Lord, we so want to be a part of this great end time, final harvest before You come, Jesus. Lord, we pray now in the mighty name.

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Go ahead and begin to pray and continue to pray.

Lord, we thank You. Thank You for moving right across this world, Lord God. Thank You for touching lives. In Jesus' name, in Jesus' name, and in Jesus' name. Father, we do pray for our own country right now as a people. We lift up our voices for this nation. God, we pray that the gospel would take hold. That these forces of darkness that have so blatantly shown themselves, and boast against You, and that boast against righteousness. That are calling evil good and good evil. Lord, we know it cannot be solved politically. We don't set our hopes on the next political leader. We set our hope on You alone. We pray that You'd move by Your Holy Spirit through our nation.

Oh God, move in our schools in the name of Jesus. Move in the lives of people in positions of power and authority. May they be saved, radically saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth and place Your Word as the final authority in their life, regardless of what it costs them. Father, we pray that there would be such a sense of Your presence. That it would be felt in every classroom, on every street, in every market, in every store, in every place of business, in every home, and in every neighborhood. Father, a tangible sense of Your presence.

Oh God, we pray that the reign of the Spirit would fall in our own nation. May things turn. Oh God, our trust is not in a prince. Our trust is not in a political party. Our trust is not in a man. Our trust is not in a woman, but our trust is in You alone and in the power of Your Holy Spirit. God, revive us as Your people. Cause these hearts of ours to burn brightly. Lord, we repent of complacency. We repent of greed. We repent of having a lackadaisical attitude about the salvation of the lost. Lord, help our hearts to beat in unison with Your heart. Help us to love what You love. Help us to hate what You hate. Help us to walk uprightly, Lord. We ask You to bring people into our lives that we can share the gospel with. Lord, use us as vessels for Your glory and for Your purposes in the mighty, mighty, matchless name of Jesus.

For just a moment, every head bowed, and every eye closed. If you're in here today, out on the plaza, or wherever you're listening, if you've not made Jesus the Lord of your life, I want to give you an opportunity to do it. If you're a back slider, if you loved Jesus when you were a little girl or a little boy, and had some encounter with God at a camp, maybe, or maybe you just made a promise to God when you were in trouble. You told Him you'd live for Him, and He helped you, but you know your heart is far from Him. He's not mad at you, but it's time to come home, prodigal son. It's time to come home, prodigal daughter. Living halfhearted for God just doesn't work. The most miserable person in all the world is somebody who knows the truth and isn't living in it.

Yes, sin has pleasure for a season, but that season always ends. In the beginning, sin promises to please and to serve, but it always ends up enslaving and dominating. Listen, God will hear your heart if you'll turn it to Him right now. Lord, I thank You for moving. Congregation, why don't you pray with me? Let me give you the words, but they won't mean a thing without a sincere heart behind them. If you will tie your heart around the words, God will hear you. Say,

Oh God, I come to You. I know I need You. I'm a wreck without You. I can't do it on my own. I trust You. I invite You into my life. I put my trust in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who died on the cross to take away the sins of the world. Who was raised from the

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dead on the third day. Jesus, I put my trust in You. I give You my all. Teach me to walk in Your ways. Teach me to live Your life. It's in Your name, I pray. Amen.

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