

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Effective Prayer of a Righteous Man

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The ***effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much***. 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 earth for three years and six months. Then he prayed again, and the sky poured rain and the earth produced its fruit. (James 5:16-18 NASB) [bold italic added]

According to a newspaper article, on November 13, 2007, the governor of the state of Georgia led several hundred people in prayer for rain for his drought-stricken state. The prayer was simple: "God, we need you. We need rain." True to form and right on cue, the demonstrators came out to protest a public official holding what they saw as "a religious observance at the seat of state government." After all, these detractors see the very Creator of all authority as having no business in the governance of mankind, especially in the United States. They know not what they are doing or saying.

For by Him, that is, Christ, the image of the invisible God, all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him (Colossians 1:15, 16). On the cross, Jesus, the Son of God, disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him (Colossians 2:15). At the consummation of the ages comes, when Jesus hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, He will have abolished all rule and all authority and power. He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet (1 Corinthians 15:24-25). A day will come when, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11).

Now, many areas of the southeast United States need rain so badly that if none comes soon, they will run out of drinking water. Even nuclear power plants could be forced to shut down. If this were to happen, it would be a disaster of monumental proportions. Our society depends on a plentiful supply of water that is piped to our homes and businesses. Without it, we would be immobilized.

The United States has seen its share of major, natural disasters from devastating fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, and droughts. At this point, what is missing is a major earthquake or perhaps a volcanic eruption. Of course, we have not been alone, since many parts of the world have experienced severe natural disasters as well, but very few regions of the world experience the variety that we do. It is not uncommon to hear many people crying out to God when disaster strikes. After September 11, 2001, it was not uncommon to hear public officials praying for *God to bless America*. But what we do not see in public officials or even in many Christians is a heart of confession of sins and turning from our ways (repentance). It seems that when the dust settles, many go back to business as usual, even institutional church business.

God has blessed America over and over again and abundantly, if not lavishly. Responsibility to do good always goes along with blessing. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required (Luke

12:48). Perhaps, as a nation, we are not living up to our full responsibility and are sick. After all, sickness comes in many forms, and nations can become sick. Consider how Isaiah diagnosed the Judahite nation that was in rebellion against the holy one of Israel. They had become a sinful nation that was sick; the whole head was sick and the whole heart faint, from the sole of the foot even to the head. Even the land was desolate. They were exhorted to make themselves clean, cease doing evil, learn to do good, seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, and plead for the widow (Isaiah 1:4-20).

When the Lord wants to get people's attention, He is not bashful about using the natural realm to make a statement. After all, He flooded this earth twice. Consider how the Lord dealt with the Judahite nation in the time of Haggai. He sent blasting wind, mildew, and hail, and kept them from becoming too prosperous (Haggai 2:13-17). Sure does sound like a hurricane or a tornado! Or consider how the Lord dealt with the Israelite nation in the time of Amos. He withheld rain from one city or a part of a city and sent rain to another city or part of it. Two or three cities would stagger to another city to drink water (Amos 4:7-8). Sure does sound like a pretty bad drought! And let us not forget that the Lord sent fire to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Finally, there is a word about rain being withheld from nations that do not celebrate the feast of booths and worship the king (Zechariah 14:16-19). So, historically and prophetically, it is quite clear that the Lord does judge nations through natural disasters, as well as through enemies, such as happened on 9/11/01.

I sense that America is sick like ancient Israel. Only the Lord knows how sick. Many proclaim judgment has come to America, and some say it is too late, for we have a terminal illness that cannot be cured. I will leave it to the Judge who is standing at the door (James 5:9). Perhaps we have a head cold that, if not treated, will lead to a much more serious sickness that will require more drastic measures on the part of the Lord to heal us. Rather than debate the matter, there is a righteous way for us as a nation, especially the millions in our country who are becoming the righteousness of God *in* Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21), through faith *in* Jesus (Philippians 3:9). Rather than asking God to continue blessing us, we should follow the advice of James and confess our sins as a nation and seek God for healing. We need to be reminded that the effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much. After all, He hears the prayer of the righteous (Proverb 15:29). Consider Abraham when he negotiated with the Lord to withhold judgment if there were at least ten righteous in Sodom (Genesis 18:32); unfortunately, there were not even ten. Surely, we have that many in our nation. Consider how effective Elijah was, who we are told had a nature like ours, which, by the way, included doubts and fears. Elijah asked that the Lord to take his life; and yet, he was used of the Lord to withhold rain for over three years and then to release the rain. We are not much different. When the heat is turned up, we begin to cry out to God for help. We have this very same nature of fears and doubts, and yet, we are commanded to pray. *Christ is our righteousness*. Are we not being made the righteousness of God in Christ? It is time to pray as if we truly believe this.

The leaders of our great nation have lost sight of the Almighty God who gives them authority to rule. *For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God* (Romans 13:1b). As a nation, we need to stop asking for blessing and start confessing our sin, starting with the Lord's people, the church that has lost its moral compass, and progressing to the leaders of our nation that have no righteous compass and that seek power that is God's alone. It is time for the leaders of our nation to stand together and confess their sin, to acknowledge that they have no authority apart from God, and to seek the righteousness of God. So, the next time we, as a nation (or any nation), find ourselves in a difficult place, rather than asking God to bless us, let us confess our sins before the Almighty. Perhaps He will send healing to our nation.

Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people. (Proverbs 14:34 NASB)