

Praying for Rain Part 2

All right, we'll pray for rain part two. But before we get there, I want to just kind of put things in perspective for you. If you need to get up and leave, you've already had the message. If you're listening to what's happening, the Holy Spirit choreographs these things, by the way, in case you were wondering how it all comes together. Yes, we have leaders in different departments that put it together, but the Holy Spirit really is the one speaking life into it. So think of the children's story, for example. When a person was trying to juggle everything in their life, they couldn't manage it. But when they're focused on the red balloon, it didn't really matter if the other ones hit the ground or not, because they're focused on the red balloon. And see, what we learned last time, we talked about the story of Elijah, the people who got distracted by everything else in their world, running after different gods, running after tribalism, running after all kinds of things, and not keeping their eye on Jesus. Today we're going to talk about restoring the altar. Well then you could just listen to what Amanda Lena said. Your words speak life or death. In your life, if you have negative self-talk, that's going to bring you down. If you're dogging on your kids or on your spouse, it's not going to build up the home. If we're complaining about our community and taking negative action based on those words, that's not going to help anybody. So our words speak life or death. Talk about rebuilding the altar. We sang a song, The Goodness of God is Running After, is running after me. This is in Exodus 34, Moses wants to see God. He says, I want to see you. I know if you're really with us. This is Moses who's had an incredible relationship with God, but he says, I want to see you. And in chapter 34, he goes back up on the mountain, and God says to Moses, I'm going to pass before you and declare myself before you. So this is what God says about himself. Moses says, verse 6 of Exodus 34, and the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abounding in goodness and truth. So who's running after you? It's God. Personify some of this stuff. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. People say, oh, truth is relative. No, it's not. Truth is God. Okay? So personify some of these biblical principles, because they're rooted in Jesus and God. So when they sing the song, goodness is running after, is running after me, you can just visualize in your mind that God is running after you. Which is true, by the way, from the very beginning. He comes down in the cool of the evening. And he goes, Adam, where are you? Let's go a few more chapters later, and you see that they're building this tower, tower of Babel. But it says, God came down to check on his people. He's checking on us. That's good. And when you get to Moses at the burning bush, he says to Moses, their cry, heard their cries. I heard their cries. You have Hagar, who's pregnant, and she's being abused by Saron. She runs away. And she's underneath a bush, somewhere in the desert. An angel of the Lord shows up. What are you doing here? He's checking on her. It's beautiful. Goodness is running after, is running after me. God is running after us. So if you need to get up and leave, you've had the sermon already. In what we've done already. God is so good, so faithful to do that. Sometimes we stress about how it's all going to turn out. But I've learned, whatever happens is up to God. And so he's laid this message. We're going to have another one next week. The third part, couldn't get through it all. I may not get through it all today. Something I do want to share. It's personal. By the way, Kim is in the air right now. Well, she's not. Well, she might still be in the air. Hopefully she's still in the air. She's landing in about 10 minutes. So if I happen to run off the stage and run out the door and jump in the car, I apologize. But I go to pick her up at the airport. It's been a while. All right, let's pray. Let's have another prayer. Loving Father, your goodness is amazing. You want us to focus on the red balloon. You want us to not worry about all that other stuff. You'll take care of it. You're running after us. You're building us up. You're redeeming us. You're loving on us. Just ask us to be careful with what we say and do. May we always give you the glory. And Lord, thank you for Mandelina's prayer. Again, I echo that and ask that you send your Holy Spirit to speak. May these words be yours and not mine. I pray in Jesus' name, amen. So just

as a matter of review, last time we were talking about it, about this story of Elijah, which is in 1 Kings 16, end of 16 through 18 or so. There'd been a three-year drought. And we laid the proposition before us that it was in direct response to a covenant promise that's found in Deuteronomy. This is in Deuteronomy. And as Elijah is speaking to Ahab, this goes through Ahab's mind. Ahab knew, okay? And it shall be that if you earnestly obey my commands, which I command you today to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart, soul, and mind, then I will give you the rain for your land in season, the early rain and the latter rain that you may gather in your grain, your new wine and your oil. And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock that you may eat and be filled. And I will give you the key to yourself, lest your heart be deceived and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them. Lest the Lord's anger be aroused against you and he shut up the heavens so that there be no rain and the land yield no produce and you perish quickly for the good land which the Lord is giving you." So this is the covenant promise that was broken by Israel. It says, Ahab had done more wickedly than all the kings that had gone before him. Now we're going to read about Manasseh who did more wickedly than anybody on planet earth. Okay, he took the whole Baal worship to a new level. But God forgave him by the way, just so you know. He gave his heart to God and God forgave. You're going to see Manasseh in heaven. But in this story we see Ahab, because of his wife Jezebel, turning the hearts of Israel away from God. And when Elijah gives the edict, he leaves and God says, go to the Brook Cherith. Well you can see there that the Brook Cherith is outside of Israel. It's on the other side of the Jordan. The famine, because if we keep reading the story, the Brook dries up. And God says to Elijah, you need to go from here and go to Zarephath. It kind of got cut off. It's up at the top left there. Zarephath, right on the Mediterranean Sea. I showed a picture last time of it. It's a seaport. But that's also outside of Israel. In fact, Zarephath, up there in Phoenicia, is between Tyre and Sidon, and Jezebel is the daughter of the king of the Sidonites. He was a king priest. And God sends his prophet right into the middle of it. Because if we're not following God, the consequences of that affects everybody. Likewise, if we are following God, it affects everybody. And we talked about that the first time we were together. Just amazing that Elijah is outside of Israel, and God is using him in these places. So we looked at Mount Carmel. This is the actual picture of Mount Carmel. I think it's fascinating to find these actual pictures. It's cool. Mount Carmel is a wake-up call from God. So Elijah says to Ahab, I want you to bring the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah and all the children of Israel and meet me on Mount Carmel. And we are told that when Elijah is standing there before the king, the spirit of God flows through Elijah, and the king becomes a servant, Elijah becomes the ruler. And he obeyed as a servant at the command of God. So he gathers everybody to Mount Carmel. Mount Carmel praying is a realization of a cosmic conflict. It's a wake-up call from God. There's a cosmic conflict happening in our world. If you haven't figured that out yet, again, you can just take 30 seconds on a newsfeed somewhere and find out that there's a cosmic battle going on. Evil is raising its ugly head as never before. It's time for God's people to raise up as well. And that's the essential message of what these three presentations are about. The Lord had declared an end to the drought. But before the rain could fall, God must first send fire to wake up His people. To wake up His people. Fire in Scripture is often seen as a destroyer, but when God uses fire, it's a purifier. A purifier. When God employs fire, it's to purify people or the earth. So He needed to send fire. And in the same way, before we see the latter rain, God will need to set a holy fire under His people, the fire of revival. You see, when we come down, when you... Let's put it in a military sense. You know, you sign up and go to basic training. You get your basic training done. And then you get your assignment. And there's more training, more training, more... A lot of kinds of training. If you see the people out in Oak Harbor flying their airplanes, there's a whole bunch of training that's going on. If you go to Yakima, you see when they're doing war games over there. Everything comes to bear and you're now in combat. Now it's life or death. That was all pretend before, but good training. You see, we're in this cosmic battle and everything that has gone before, our walk with God, all that brings us to this point where we need to be willing to let Him through us engage. So there's this metaphor. We've been dancing around this metaphor for a couple of times. We're going to hit it a little bit stronger next week as well. You

will find in scripture that God employs natural elements and activities of the environment, the Middle East in this case, to have spiritual meaning. So he uses a metaphor here. We're going to look at it a few other places, but he uses the metaphor here of the early and the latter rain. So it's different than our agricultural season. The early rain came in October. That's why they referred to it, came in October and that's planting time in the Middle East in Israel and they plant. So the early rain comes to water the ground and they sow the seed and then the latter rain comes at the end, which is in the spring in their case, to ripen the grain. So God uses this from, you saw it right back in Deuteronomy, from the very beginning, he uses this metaphor to communicate a spiritual concept. This is in Hosea 6, 3. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord. His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain or the early rain. So here in Hosea, Hosea was a farmer, okay, and a prophet, but he uses this metaphor again as applying to God, not to literal rain. It's a spiritual metaphor that drives us to God. God will come to us like the rain. In the East, the former rain falls at the sowing time. It is necessary in order for the seed to germinate. The latter rain falling near the close of the season ripens the grain and prepares it for the sickle. The Lord employs these operations of nature to represent the work of the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit. Take a look here in Acts. You know, we talked last time too, I showed a picture of Kim and I when the kids were just real little, so this would have been probably the early 90s. And you would have noticed that Pastor Don had really black hair like Nate over there and a black beard, okay, and about 40 pounds lighter than I am now. And Roger was so keen, he said, Kim hasn't changed a bit. Smart man. But I talked about the idea that we don't look like we do today. This idea of someone's going to find Kim and I at the Salt Lake City airport, and they were given that picture from like 1991. They have a hard time finding us in a crowd because we don't look anything like that picture. And we looked at the idea that the 21st century church, which is us, doesn't look anything like the first century church. In fact, when we look in Revelation 3, we see that God is outside the church rather than inside the church. So Peter is speaking here, but Peter, because the Holy Spirit's been poured out, people were wondering what was happening, okay. Standing up with the 11, raised his voice and said to them, men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and heed my words, for these are not drunk as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. This is right after the promise of the Holy Spirit. It says, it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, that I will pour my spirit on all flesh. His sons and his daughters shall prophesy. His young men shall see visions. The old men will see dreams. You'll notice this is not age specific nor gender specific. And on my men servants and on my maid servants, I will pour out my spirit in those days and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven upon the signs in the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, the moon into blood before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. What a promise right there. If you call on the name of the Lord, you will be saved. That is amazing. Okay. But he's talking about that they had this big wind and these tongues of fire coming down on the upper room. We called it Pentecost. It was an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And you see this about three other times in Acts right there in the beginning. It falls on Jews and Gentiles alike. After baptism and before baptism, it falls on them and God moves through the first century church. That's the early rain. That's the early rain. That's the beginning of the church. We are at the end. If you look in Revelation, which we're going to look again, starting in September, we're going to be going through Daniel and Revelation. Okay. We're going to touch on these. But in Revelation, you see the seven churches. You see Ephesus is the first church. And read it and then go back and look this up online and remind yourself of what it said. Or look at there in Acts chapter two. But the last church is Laodicea. We're going to look at that here in a minute. That's us. Okay. So, there is a drought. We are spiritually dehydrated. We need to pray for rain. The story of Elijah and 1 Kings 17 and 18 foreshadows our existence. Are we so busy chasing things or ideologies or political opinions that a spiritual drought has settled on us individually, with our families, church, and community? Here's some interesting information. So Barna does a whole bunch of church

research. They might do others, but they're best known for doing church-related research. And in 2009, they were looking at the average of attendance, all denominations, across the United States, about 48% of people listed on the membership rolls of any given church were attending church on any given weekend. That's about 40%. In 2020, it was 36%. Here in the, I remember when this came out, because in the Washington conference, we were patting ourselves on the back because our average attendance across the conference was at 40%. But we really shouldn't pat anybody on the back. Okay. So it's 36% in 2020. Today after COVID, one in five churches, so 20% of the existing churches will likely close within the next year and a half. There are more Christians not attending church than who attend church. And the idea of going back to church, in fact, Barna has a whole book, Post-COVID Church, talks about we've got to do things differently to reach people who have walked away during COVID. Well, this is our reality in front of us here. We need to pray for rain. We need to pray for the Holy Spirit to fall in our lives. Mount Carmel prayers are drought-ending prayers, praying for rain. We're going to talk more about this next week, but let me just drop this for you to consider. When you read the story of Hanai the circle maker, I remember some of you read the book by Mark Patterson called Circle Maker, and Hanai was in the area between the Testament. So if you come to the end of the Old Testament, there's 400 some years between the New Testament and Hanai was in there. He was a God person of faith. They call him a prophet then. And they're having a drought then, and he began to pray. They asked him to pray for rain. And so he said to them, I'm going to pray for rain. I want you to take the Passover ovens and I want you to set them inside so they're not softened by the rain. That's what he said. No rain had fallen yet, but he knew God was going to answer his prayer. See the faith? When we look at the story next week of Elijah, he's going to tell, after this fire comes down and consumes the sacrifice, he's going to tell Ahab the king, eat and drink. I hear the sound of rain. There's not a cloud in the sky. He has to pray seven times yet before God answers and sends the rain. But he had faith to know that God was going to send the rain. Mount Carmel is drought ending prayers, praying for rain. We need to be praying for rain. Different times call for Christ-focused, God-dependent saints willing to stand for God though the heavens fall and pray. Pray for drought. Pray drought-ending prayers. Now here's the focus. We'll finish the last few minutes. This is an actual picture of an altar, stone altar, based on the Old Testament construction of their altars. And praying for rain starts by rebuilding the altar. I want you to journey with me to 1 Kings. First Kings 18. We're going to take a look at what, if we remember the story or if you were here last time, they came there early in the morning and Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, you go ahead and go first because there's more of you. And they began to dance all day long, cut themselves and do all kinds of crazy stuff, praying for rain, praying for fire to come down, excuse me, to consume the sacrifice and nothing happened until, and then they were done. And Elijah says, verse 36 of 1 Kings 18, and it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice that Elijah the prophet came near and said. Okay. So this is a time of the evening sacrifice. But before we get to his prayer, let's go back to verse 30. And Elijah said to the people, come near to me. So all the people came near to him and he repaired the altar of the Lord. That was broken down on top of Mount Carmel. I showed you that picture of Mount Carmel. This was a holy place. This is a place where artesian springs fed it. Okay. Came up and fed that area. They dried up. The altar had been broken down, the shrines for Baal worship had all dried up. And the altar of the Lord had been kicked over and broken down. And Elijah doesn't dance around and scream and holler. He just invites the people to come near. And before he prays, he rebuilds the altar. He rebuilds the altar. Take a look. Verse 31, and Elijah took 12 stones according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob to whom the word of the Lord had come, saying, Israel shall be your name. And then with the stones he built an altar in the name of the Lord. God is moved by the simple, honest prayer of the humblest of his servants. He doesn't require a show, only humble faith and simple obedience. Desperate times call for restored altars, personal altars, family altars, church altars, and community altars. An altar declares the gospel that honors God first and always. The Bible story is in there. What Mandalena shared is in there. It all comes together. It's a place of remembrance. When they came up out of the Jordan River, when they crossed over with Joshua and the priests went into

the water and it parted the Jordan and they crossed over, God said to Joshua, get 12 strong men, one from each tribe, and go out and get a stone from the middle of the river and bring it up and place it here as a stone of remembrance. When Jacob, who later named Israel, is running from home because he deceived his brother, and we have the Jacob's ladder vision that he had, he set up a stone as a place of remembrance. These altars were places of remembrance and they told the story. They told the story of the gospel and we're going to look at, if we take the 12 sons of Jacob and put the meaning of their names together in order, it would read something like this. Behold, a son is born unto us, one who hears us and became attached unto us. Praise the Lord. He judged our struggle and brought us good fortune, happiness, reward, and honor. He added us to his family and called us the sons of righteousness. But you see, this had been kicked over. During the time of Baal worship and worship of other gods, they had neglected the message in their names. Tribe of Judah, Reuben, Gad, Naphtali, on and on and on. They had forgotten the gospel message that's contained within their family of the tribe of Israel, recognized in the altar, and Elijah goes and rebuilds that, telling the story. This reminder had been forgotten, okay? Replaced by selfishness and greed and misguided ideologies. Now let's let the word of God step on our toes here a little bit today, okay? Revelation 3, this is the seventh church I was talking about earlier. Revelation 3, 14 to 17. If you don't understand it all right now, just make sure you come through September and October and we'll go through Daniel and Revelation together. We won't do an exhaustive study, but it'll be enough to give you maybe what you're looking for, I hope. So verse 14 says, and the angel of the Lord of the Laodiceans write, these things says the amen, the faithful, true witness, the beginning of creation of God. I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish that you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm and neither cold nor hot, I'm going to vomit you out of my mouth, because you say I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing. And do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked. That's the condition of the church today. We got, I mean, we're dealing with inflation and some other stuff financially, but really, really, we're well off. You know, if you got 20 bucks in your bank account, you're more off than 80% of the world. We're just that blessed here in America. And as you can see by the stats I shared earlier, that 64% of the people have no desire to go to church. If you heard the illustration I shared from my daughter who works on San Juan Island about, oh man, we don't need Christians like that. She said, you know, hold your tongue. People don't want Christians hanging around. The question would be, if the church here in Mount Vernon disappeared, would the community miss us? If we become rich and in need of nothing and we go, ah, I'm good. That's what had happened there. And it points directly to you and I living in the time in which we live. We must pray that God will unseal the fountain of water of life and we must ourselves receive the living water. Let us with contrite hearts pray most earnestly that now in the time of the latter rain, the shower of grace will fall upon us. You know, I'm just going to segue here and if Melissa wants to find her way back for our song, we're going to sing Days of Elijah again. But the importance of what Mandalena shared scripturally can't go understated. Having the family altar, your personal altar, your family altar is essential. And at times of people's passing, that idea becomes ingrained even more permanently. So my father-in-law passed away. I've been part of that family for 42 years. So he was 43. Now think about that, those who are in this age category. He was 43 when the 16-year-old came into his daughter's life. Might have made him a little nervous. But he was gracious. But I watched my father-in-law's journey, spiritual journey, ups and downs, downs and then ups. And he struggled with just stuff we struggle with, right? He had baggage in his past. His wife, my mother-in-law, graduated in the 50s, graduated with almost a nine-month-old baby. Back then, you didn't keep going to school if you were pregnant. You went home and had the baby and hopefully got married, which they did. They got married. She had a baby when she walked down the aisle there. Lot of garbage, lot of pain, lot of stuff. But they never lost sight of Jesus. And sometimes the altars fell down, but they would come back and gather around and begin to rebuild the altars. He was open and authentic and genuine about his struggle. And he gets to his later life where he's not the macho man he used to be. He begins to focus on prayer. And speaking life into me. We went to prayer,

well, promise keepers together and men's ministries together and we prayed together. And we just shared together. Because that was helping to build the altar of his youngest daughter's home. You see. His middle daughter had a child when she was a teenager and a lot of stuff there. And he began to speak life and pray into her life. And she became a prayer ministry leader of the Northern New England Conference. And her husband became baptized before he passed. Anyway, he's still alive, but doesn't really know where he's at every day. 39-year-old son, now 42, said, I want to know more about the Bible, what the Bible says. I mean, he was teaching in Adventist schools. Teaching in Christian schools. Teaching and gone to Christian colleges. And so during COVID, in fact, today at 5 o'clock they're having a family meeting, continuing on. But he began to study the word of God like never before. Marty is speaking and building an altar in his grandson's life. And grandson's home. Oldest daughter who struggled with all kinds of addictions. Very angry person. Identity issues. All kinds of things. She has given her heart to Christ. Praise God every single day for these altars being rebuilt in his children. And I saw a text. I was doing okay until I saw a text from my oldest daughter. Who just really glorified God because of her granddad. What's this all about, it's just all about rebuilding the altars in our homes. Now Kathy held it all together for many years. Praise God for godly women. But men, we got to step up and build the altar in our homes. And support our wives and our children and our grandchildren and our great-grandchildren as long as God gives us breath. It has to happen before we can expect the Holy Spirit to be poured out in our lives. And the last Sabbath that I was with Marty, we were having a Bible study. You know, he had congestive heart failure, a lot of water. I mean, he's a big guy anyway. I mean, big guy. And you know, he just couldn't breathe and had to be on oxygen. But when it came time to study the Word of God, he sat up to study the Word of God with his family. He'd been sleeping the whole time. In fact, I'd go over there sometimes and I'd look at him. Was he breathing? You know? And his nephew, my nephew, his grandson would come in. Is grandpa breathing? And he sat up to study the Word of God with his family. And just a beautiful time. And he went to sleep in Jesus. And we'll see him again in glorified heaven. But he took the time in his latter years to apologize and ask for forgiveness from his family, to humble himself before his daughters and his wife and his son-in-law and his grandson, his granddaughters. And rebuild the altar of God in his family. That's the story of Elijah, rebuilding the altar of Israel. We forgot about the God of Israel. And I just want to, I mean, next Sabbath we're going to take a look at the fire coming down. We're going to talk about the rain. But today I want you to think about the altar in your life. Words speak life or death. Thank you so much.