

# VISION FORWARD



## THE RUBBLE OR OUR SIN?

As Christians in America, we celebrate the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. In addition to the unborn lives it saves, it is right that the legal issue be returned to the voters and their elected officials. Therefore, as Christians in New York State, the battle continues. We continue to pray and to work towards ending abortion in this state. In particular, we pray in urgent for our elected officials.

In 2019, under then Governor Cuomo, abortion rights were expanded in our state. The New York City skyline was lit up in celebration, espousing some kind of new "beacon of hope". Following in her predecessor's footsteps, Kathy Hochul has most recently declared New York State to be a "safe harbor" for all who are seeking an abortion.

It seems imperative to me, then, that we should pray for God to raise up men and women in the legal-judicial system. We need men and women with "an upright heart" and "skillful hand" (Psalm 78:2). Men and woman "wise as serpents and innocent as doves" (Matthew 10:16) who know how to navigate these streams. Why?

Because God doesn't "magically" answer prayer. Meaning, He doesn't manipulate circumstances nor creation to suit His liking. He doesn't make "stones become bread". There is an order to and in all He does.

So, as we pray with a greater fervency than ever, God will not "magically" make an unjust law disappear from our land. Nor will He cause a new just law to appear in our state constitution. Rather, He will raise up those who know how to fight and "seek good, and not evil...Hate evil, and love good". Those who will contend within the legal system and courts for "justice (to) roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." (Amos 5:24)

Certainly there are things we who are not called to this sphere of work can and must do. But, first, again, let us not cease to pray "earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers" into this field to reap a harvest there." (Matthew 9:38) Let us "pray without ceasing". Then, second, let us be "moved with compassion" as Jesus was when he looked around at the multitudes and crowds. Here's what I mean.

A lyric from a song has recently lodged itself into my heart: "Oh, where do we begin? The rubble or our sin?" In many ways, the sins of our land have brought devastation, a rubble as far as the eye can see. Lives damaged and destroyed beyond repair. The rubble cannot rebuild itself. The dead cannot raise themselves. Yet, God has called us to this land. The boundaries of our dwelling have fallen to us in this place: our state, our county, our city.

If there was no hope, why would God call us here? Send us here? Plant us here? Because there IS hope in the rubble.

As we look around, a question arises in our hearts: "Can these bones live?" This is not a question Ezekiel asked of God, but God asked of Ezekiel. We reply with Ezekiel as we survey our homeland, "O Lord God, you know." (Ezekiel 37). God's answer wasn't to start digging. Begin shoveling out the bones. Move or redraw the boundaries. It was, "Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD."

The power wasn't to be in the prophesying. The power was in "the word of the LORD". Elim Grace, the power to restore, rebuild, renew, recreate is God's alone, and His power flows through the preaching and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the word of the Lord, the Word of God made flesh.

The gospel of Jesus both at once deals with the rubble of our sin and the sin in our hearts. Yes, we must pray for new workers in the fields of law and justice. We must continue to support our Family Resource Center and foster care systems. We must continue to adopt and mentor. We must continue to welcome and serve single mothers and fathers. We must continue to be a safe and healing place for those who have chosen to have an abortion or are wrestling with that choice.

But above all we must continue to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ—His death and resurrection, His salvation and forgiveness, His authority and power, His gift of new life and the Holy Spirit. If Nehemiah could rebuild the walls of his day, we can rebuild ours. If Ezekiel could see the graves of his people open up, we can witness ours. Yet none of this is possible "by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6). "Prophecy over these bones".

Let's rejoice because of the works of the Lord done in our generation! And let's praise Him and seek Him because of the works He has yet to do!

## ARE YOU YOUR OWN PROPHET?

Dear Elim Grace, let's be honest: Are you your own prophet?

These are days in which we are being taught neither to listen to God ("There is no god or transcendent truth, anyway," we're told) nor to any external authority (all structural authority is suspicious at best). We are taught to listen to our own desires. We are taught all purpose, meaning, significance, truth in life is discerned or divined by the self. In other words, everyone is their own prophet. Everyone is their own mediator: I speak from myself, to myself, for myself. But as the people of God, the church of Jesus Christ, His bride and body, we must tune our ear and turn our ear to God when He says in His Word: "Listen to him!" (Luke 9:35)

God throughout His Word warns His people to not listen to "the nations". But to not listen means to not learn. For the

people of Israel, listening to the nations involved learning from the nations their practices and customs of worship. In other words, more than information being passed along, listening involved formation of the heart.

God was jealous for His people whom He had saved and delivered from slavery. He loved them and had chosen them as His treasured possession. He didn't want their hearts to wander away from Him, so He gave them His Word and warned them to not listen to the words of the nations. He gave them His prophets like Moses and Elijah to speak and mediate His word to His people.

In these "last days," though, God "has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things" (Hebrews 1:2). In Jesus He has given us a greater prophet and mediator than both Moses and Elijah. Jesus possesses a greater glory than either Moses or Elijah saw of God during their life. The glory Jesus possesses is a glory given to Him by God. Jesus is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus is the very image of God, the Word of God made flesh. When God spoke from heaven on the mountain, "This is my Son, my Chosen One; listen to him!" He was neither speaking of Moses nor Elijah who in that moment had appeared with Jesus. He was speaking of Jesus Christ alone.

Dear Elim Grace, once more, our culture does not believe in God. Our culture is suspect of any voice of authority. The sole prophetic, divine, authoritative voice is "the self". Yet we must not absorb that "leaven". We must not assimilate the "learning" of the nations by "listening" to them in this way. We must not become our own prophet. We must not ascribe to any "voice," whether ours or any other's, the title and authority of the Word, the Prophet, the Mediator.

Acts 12:21-22 serves as an appropriate warning to us today: "On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, 'The voice of a god, and not of a man!'" Let us neither clothe ourselves in Herod's robes nor clothe another. Rather, let us take to heart the words of John the Baptist. When asked with great anticipation whether he was "the Prophet" long expected, he answered without hesitation, "No." But he didn't stop there. He went further. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (John 1:21-23) And then the prophetic moment John had been waiting for his entire life was fulfilled. "The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.'...I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God.'" (John 1:29-34)

Let's be honest: Are we really our own prophet? Or will we hear God's voice and "listen to him!," to Jesus? He is our one and only true prophet and mediator, the very Word of God.