

# Called to Restore the Desolate Places 1

(preached 8/29/21)

Please turn to *Leviticus 26*.

MARIO MARILLO. A week ago Saturday, Evangelist Mario Murillo came to NYS to preach and I was pleased to be there. One of the first things he said gave me a wake up slap across the face that I needed, helping me to resolve an internal conflict I've wrestled with for awhile. ***He said "I'm not a Bible Belt preacher, but I'm called to go where the Communists are."*** While this got a rousing cheer and lots of laughter, it caused me to do a sober self-assessment comparing my desires to that of the Holy Spirit.

LEFT NYS. I personally know several Christian families and individuals who left NYS for reasons I completely agree with. **No judgments or indictments from me toward them!** States like NY are tough to live in for any Christian who knows the Bible and believes that God speaks the truth through it. Our state is among the top when it comes to legislating wickedness and taking rights and freedoms away. Our state leaders literally clapped and cheered a couple years back when they passed the most expansive abortion policy in the nation. Hailing from ancient Biblical history, the Empire State Building was lit up with Kali, Hindu goddess of Darkness and Death, and arches to Baal were erected in the same city.

FANTASIZED. I often wondered and fantasized what it would be like to live in a state where I liked my politicians because I've never had that experience. A friend of mine living in a southern state, for example, sometimes complains that his Senators aren't Christian or conservative enough, and I often reply that at least he's not living under our Senators! A few years back the Governor of Oklahoma was filmed leading worship at his evangelical church. He's not the worship leader, but he was invited to the front to sing a song and not a namby-pamby one either...one that clearly exulted Jesus as Lord and Savior. I remember thinking to myself: "*what would it be like to have a Governor that did this?*" and I heave a longing sigh.

LIVED IN TULSA OK. Before I was Saved I lived in the Bible Belt for one year—Tulsa Oklahoma in 1996. My beautiful fiancée-now-wife had lived there for several years and, when making plans to move there myself she gave me the following warning: "when you get here everyone talks about God, all the time, and they'll ask you 'which church do you go to?'"

"I DON'T GO TO CHURCH!" I was stunned by this. I was a young liberal who'd lived in NYC for 6 years and NYS my whole life. Even in the more rural and conservative sections of our state, people don't center their lives around church to the point where they ask each other which one they go to. When I got to Tulsa, OK however, I realized she was right and people really did ask me that. I confess I took pleasure in seeing the shocked look on their faces when I replied "I don't go to church!"

**NATURAL WONDERS MEETING.** The store I worked for out there had monthly employee meetings and we were having a tough time making everyone's schedules work to attend. We were sitting in a circle during one of said meetings and the manager was asking everyone if there was a different day and time that worked for everyone, but it just wasn't coming together. No matter what day/time someone suggested, someone else said they couldn't do it. In my "back east" non-Bible Belt mentality, I finally said "what about Sundays? Why can't we meet then?" I was immediately met with stunned expressions followed by moments of tense silence. My manager finally spoke and patiently explained that we don't have employee meetings on Sundays because it was reserved for church.

**AMBITIONS AS YOUNG PASTOR.** Fast forward to my ordination as Gateway's pastor. I was 35 years old when it happened and I confess I had ambitions...that I carefully concealed from others. I wanted a bigger church with hundreds, then thousands of people. I wanted to have my own website that would sell books I had written and DVD teachings I'd produced. I wanted to travel around the country, even the globe, to speak at big events. I even went to Kingdom, dressed in my finest suit, and filmed a 5 minute intro video to an end time sermon series I'd done in front of green screen that made it look like I was standing on a beach!

**GO SOUTH?** With all these tantalizing desires swirling around in my heart and head, a southern Christian I'm friends with was congratulating me on my new position as Pastor and said: "you should come to the south and start a church! You would have several hundred people on day 1 and it would only grow from there!"

**TEMPTED!** Indeed! After hearing this, I recalled my short time living in the Bible Belt and how life centered around church. Wouldn't it be great to be surrounded by people whose spiritual and political views were closer to my own? Who understood the deity of Jesus, the integrity of Scripture, and the importance of the local church? The more I thought about it, the better it sounded!

**TRAVELING PREACHER IN NORTHEAST?** I tried to be a traveling preacher here in the northeast. I produced an entire "end times" sermon series that I thought was quite good and gave a bunch of free copies of the CD to local churches all over this area. Inside the CD, on the jacket, I gave my information and was sure to tell everyone that if they wanted to invite me to come and speak, just call or email! Disappointed by their lack of vision, I told myself that if I'd given the same invitation in the Bible Belt, the churches there would have jumped at the opportunity! No doubt they would recognize my anointing and welcome me with open arms!

**MARIO MURILLO.** Back to Mario Murillo. I first discovered him about 2 years ago and began reading his blogs, then watching his videos. He's an evangelist who does old fashioned tent revivals—not unusual or unprecedented—*but he does them in CA*. He did them all throughout Covid, never once shutting down despite opposition from local groups and the government. Just like NY, CA has some "conservative" areas with higher concentrations of Christians, but that isn't where he pitched his tent. He went into the midst of cities like Modesto

that's rife with unbelievers who embrace Marxist thinking, not to mention homelessness and addiction.

NO A/C MEGACHURCHES. He didn't try to hold his meetings inside an air-conditioned megachurch with a jumbotron and fog machines. He could have and still could. He's become quite well-known having appeared on TV many times. Instead, he sets up his tent outdoors in 90 degree humid weather in bad sections of town. Like he said...he's not a Bible Belt preacher. He didn't go to where the concentration of Christians are. He didn't go to friendly territory where the church still has an active and secure presence.

## **He went and still goes to what the Bible calls “desolate” places.**

“DESOLATE” The Hebrew word for desolate doesn't just mean empty or without life. *The context in which this word is used in the Bible is an empty, lifeless place that got that way due to some sort of destruction.*

- Said destruction in Scripture is always a result of the people living there having turned away from God and following their own desires.
- In the Bible, the only life existing in desolate places are satanic beings who are referred to as foul and unclean birds of various types.

*In other words, a desolate place is one that seems to have been taken over by the devil.*

**Leviticus 26** is a hard chapter to read. It takes place during the Exodus from Egypt to the PM, and the Lord warns His people that should they choose to turn away from Him He will make their land desolate:

### **Leviticus 26:31-39 (ESV)**

<sup>31</sup> And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas.

<sup>32</sup> And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it.

<sup>33</sup> And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.

<sup>34</sup> “Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths.

<sup>35</sup> As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it.

<sup>36</sup> And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. The sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall when none pursues.

<sup>37</sup> They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues. And you shall have no power to stand before your enemies.

<sup>38</sup> And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.

<sup>39</sup> And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.

SABBATH. The Sabbath wasn't just a day of rest, but the purpose of setting aside that time was communion with the Lord and fellow saints. Prayer, gathering together to worship, to hear God's Word, and to fellowship. ***It wasn't just the land that received rest, but the "land" of people's spirits and souls were commanded to rest so they too could be replenished and restored.***

STOPPED TAKING SABBATH. When God's people would begin to fall away from Him, one of the first things they stopped doing was taking Sabbath day off from work and other worldly activities so they could gather and worship the Lord.

OVERWORK LAND. ***They would overwork the land, for example, and the soil would become unable to produce any more crops.*** I have a pesticide license that requires continuing education courses and credits and, by the providence of God, the one I just took on Friday night spoke extensively about taking care of crop soil to ensure it remain fertile. Even though the course is put out by secular people who likely think John 3:16 is someone's mailing address, they stressed **the importance of allowing land to rest once every few years to replenish the nutrients.**

**The same thing applies to the spiritual soil within every person**, the same soil Jesus pointed out in the Parable of the Sower. He made it clear that only fertile soil would yield 30, 60, and 100 fold!

## **SPIRITUAL SOIL WITH NO SABBATH BECOMES A DESOLATE PLACE.**

GATHERING. The gathering of the saints to pray, worship, fellowship, and hear God's Word is something every Christian needs no matter how strong they believe they are.

NYS GROUND ZERO FOR REVIVAL. Once upon a time, NYS was ground zero for revival. Between 1815-1840 the Holy Spirit was a contagious, super spreader event in upstate Central & Western NY. One person at the center of this was Pastor Ashael Nettleton who personally led

30,000 New Yorkers to Christ during this time. Here is his report from when he went to Saratoga Springs in 1819:

- *The scene is beyond description. Did you ever witness two hundred sinners, with one accord in one place, weeping for their sins. Until you have seen this, you can have no adequate conceptions of the solemn scene. I felt as though I was standing on the verge of the eternal world; while the floor under my feet was shaken by the trembling of anxious souls in view of a judgment to come.*
- *Within a circle whose diameter would be twenty-four miles [around Union College, NY], not less than eight hundred souls have been hopefully born into the kingdom of Christ since last September.*
- *This revival, which commenced at Saratoga Springs [New York], and spread into the surrounding region, resulted in the hopeful conversion of not less than two thousand souls.*
- *The same glorious work is spreading fast into other towns and congregations.*

CHARLES FINNEY. The more famous Charles Finney was converted to Christ 2 years later and began his work for revival. For the next 15 years he traveled the State preaching the word of God. Upstate NY was coined “The Burned Over District” because the fire of the Holy Spirit raged so hot here with tens of thousands of people getting Saved and rededicating their lives to Jesus including Rome, Utica, and Rochester. With Finney at the helm, 1500 towns and 100,000 New Yorkers got Saved.

## **The Holy Spirit moved the strongest, with the most conversions, in small town churches with a low population.**

Bars shut down because people stopped drinking, and church attendance swelled to new heights. The crime rates dropped by 2/3rds.

DESOLATE IN 2020's? That seems like a long time ago, doesn't it? Here in the 2020's it seems as through NYS has become a desolate place and it's hard to imagine that our state was once ground zero for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening. It's hard to see the flame of Jesus burning here and it seems like the same foul and unclean birds of Satan have moved in and set up residence. *If we stare at this darkness too long, perhaps tempting thoughts spring to mind to flee elsewhere.*

**Perhaps to the Bible Belt**, where the light of Jesus seems to burn more brightly. Where most everyone goes to church, where more Biblical values exist, and God's people represent the majority. Where persecution is less and acceptance is more. Maybe even like and be proud of a politician or two...possible one or more is even a church going Christian! When we participated in The Return even last Fall, a southern Congressman stood up on the stage and led the crowd in a Christ-exalting prayer. Wouldn't it be great to have a Congressman like that?

**As beautiful as these desires and fantasies are, however, is that what God is calling us to do?**

PARENT'S PLACE IN FL. We went to my parent's place in Moore Haven, FL this last March. While that was amazing, they have another place in Summerland Key, FL that's a paradise on earth, that we've been to several times. Overlooking the ocean, it has its own PRIVATE BEACH that no one else can access unless they blatantly trespass. The entire front lawn is connected to the beach, facing the ocean, is all sand and sprinkled with coconut palm trees, mango trees, and banana trees...no joke. You can go out there, pick the fruit, and eat it. These trees are sprinkled through the "lawn" and also form a wall between us and the neighbors so that we can't even see them. It's a wonderful privacy barrier and privacy is rare in FL.

WATER CHANNEL. On the other side in a wide man-made channel of water around 50 feet wide where boats travel to and fro. Several are fishing boats and it's great to watch them come in at the end of the day to and see their catch. Across the channel is a multi-million dollar mansion, made with lots of glass that faces the ocean, and the property owner keeps things immaculately clean and kept up.

AMAZING TO LIVE THERE. It would be amazing to live there and I confess my heart has yearned for such a thing. I've fantasized about living in the downstairs apartment, renting the upstairs, and hanging out in the hammock my dad has there. I could call it "Gateway FL" or the "Gateway Conference Center" LOL. I would live in a state where I admired and was thankful for my governor...a new experience!

## **But is that what God wants?**

IMPORTANT QUESTION. As I've gotten older I realize that question means more than most of the other ones I ask, especially ones based on my own wishes.

- Do my fantasies of reading novels on the beach for the rest of my life match up with the desires of the Holy Spirit?
- Where does He want me?
- Where does He want you?

**IS THERE ANY HOPE FOR A DESOLATE PLACE?** If the answer is yes, then what does that hope look like? **How is a desolate place restored?**

LEVITICUS 26. Earlier I read to you from a tough chapter, Leviticus 26, where God threatens to make the land desolate if His people turn from Him. I read you verses 31-39. Let me read on:

### **Leviticus 26:40-42 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me,

<sup>41</sup> so that I walked contrary to them and brought them into the land of their enemies—if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity,

<sup>42</sup> then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

BUT GOD REMEMBERED. Last week's sermon was titled "But God Remembered" so now you know what it means. **We may not know exactly why NYS was ground zero for revival back in the 1800's but can we agree that, for whatever reason, God chose this state?**

## **Did He choose this state back then just to abandon it now?**

Yes, there were times when He turned land into a desolate place as a result of His people turning away from Him. Yet I just read you verses 40-42 that, even after a major OC smackdown, GOD REMEMBERED the land. When the people repented, turning from their wicked ways, and turning back to the Lord God healed, restored, and refreshed their land!

COVENANT WITH NY? Just as God remember the ancient covenant He made with Abe, Isaac, and Jacob to restore the land during the days of the exodus, perhaps He will remember that He once sent the fire of the Holy Spirit here to the point where it was called "burnt over"!

2<sup>ND</sup> COMING.

- When Jesus returns is there going to be one piece of real estate on planet earth that He WON'T be ruling over?
- Is there going to be a particular country, territory, island, town, or mountain that won't bow in submission to Him?

### **Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,

<sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

<sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Every knee will bow before Christ Almighty. Everyone, everywhere.**

### **1 Peter 3:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> ... through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

<sup>22</sup> who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

**Everything, everyone, and everywhere are subject to Him. His dominion over this planet all the people on it will be complete.**

## **No territory has been given to the Devil.**

CAST OUT HAGAR. Jesus isn't going to share it with him. Just as Abraham cast Hagar and Ishmael out of the camp so that they would have no part in the inheritance or covenant, so Jesus casts out Satan!

## **God is the One Who makes covenants and remembers**

**them.** He's never made one with Satan. The only thing He's ever told the devil is where he's going to end up: burning forever in the Lake of Fire.

## **God has made covenant with you and me—the NC.**

**Despite all my past desires to migrate to greener pastures and stiller waters, I must bow to the Holy Spirit** Who has said the same thing to me, about me, that He said to Mario Marillo: *I'm not a Bible Belt preacher.*

SMALL TOWN NY. The territory the Lord has placed me in is here: small town NY! My greener pasture will come on the day the trumpet sounds and the Lord descends from heaven with a shout. I'll have all eternity to walk the golden streets of the NJ and eat from the tree of life.

BB EASIER. The Bible Belt would be easier for all of us. When someone asked "what church do you go to?" we would have an answer. Yet, for some reason, the God of all creation chose to place you and I here...in the desolate place of NY.

Yes, I said "we." *Ask yourself the same question I did: are you meant to be a Bible belt preacher?*

*"I'm not a preacher at all!"* some of you are saying, but you misunderstand—a preacher doesn't have to have their own church or pulpit. A preacher doesn't have to go to Bible college or seminary.

**A preacher only needs to have God the Holy Spirit living in them and a mouth willing to tell others about the Saving Grace of Christ Jesus!**

**Romans 10:14-18 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?



<sup>15</sup> And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

<sup>16</sup> But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?”

<sup>17</sup> So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> But I ask, have they not heard? Indeed they have, for “Their voice has gone out to all the earth, and their words to the ends of the world.”

## **THE ONLY HOPE FOR THIS STATE IS JESUS.**

RELAX? Here’s what’s funny: If my general environment were far more Christ and Church friendly and prominent, I might relax spiritually, and I’m only speaking for myself.

### **Here in NY, the fallen angelic principalities seemed to have concentrated their forces.**

- Our politicians openly embrace wickedness even to the point of exalting pagan gods, killing our children, and robbing us of our rights.
- They hate Jesus, consider the church a threat, and would love nothing more than to use Covid and any other means to label us as terrorists and shut us down.
- They desire nothing less than to turn this state into a Godless, Marxist, dystopia perhaps even to the point where they hope that the Lord will utterly turn His back upon us.
- That’s an ancient tactic employed by the Devil called “the Doctrine of Balaam.”

**So therefore we cannot afford to relax here in NY.** We must be on our knees daily, crying out the Lord. We must be sharing the Gospel with others to build God’s army. We must be reading our Bibles to know the will and plan of God, and our part in it. We need to press through the crowd, like the woman with the blood issue, to touch Jesus. We are on the front lines of the fight here in the USA and we need to make our voices heard, speaking the truth in love.

***So I ask you again: are you a Bible Belt preacher?*** If the Lord has called you there, as He has some people, then by all means go with no judgments from me.

WHY HERE? But as for me and my house I cannot help but wonder: why would God place me HERE of all places? Perhaps He means for us to be here? Maybe He wants us on the front lines for such a time as this?

PARADISE FOREVER. When we finally enter the NJ we have forever to dwell in Paradise. Until that time comes, I declare that NY is God’s territory just as much as Tennessee, Texas, or Florida. I conclude with this verse, one of my favorites:

**Psalm 2:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you.

<sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.

<sup>9</sup> You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

**All the nations, the ends of the earth, are the inheritance of Jesus. He will break them and dash them to pieces like a metal rod smashing pottery! This includes NY!**

*This state does not belong to Satan, it belongs to  
Jesus!!!!!!!!!!!!!!*