

Show Me the Proof

A Historical Look at How Prayer Turned the Tide in U.S. History

By David Kubal



We all know the verse: “If my people who are called by my name. . . .” Go ahead and finish it. The words are so common they have become a cliché. We have said the verse enough and heard it enough, yet we often look at our country and wonder if our prayers are having any visible effect.

Thankfully, history assures us that this verse is true, and that the powerful Word of God is never simply a cliché. When a nation comes together to pray, fast, and seek the will of God, things do happen.

Here are three pivotal moments in our country’s history that demonstrate God’s desire to act when we contend in prayer for

our nation.

Birth of a Nation

It started with a bailout. Hungry for new sources of income, the British Crown negotiated a payment of 400,000 pounds of tea each year from the British East India Company, a company that had developed a monopoly on the tea trade in British territory. When the agreement nearly drove the tea company into bankruptcy, Parliament passed a new tax contained in the Tea Act of May 10, 1773, meant to subsidize the company with what many called a “legal bribe.”

American colonists were infuriated by the new measure and protested when a blockade was set in place to enforce the monopoly in Boston’s harbor. Samuel Adams, one of the fathers of the American Revolution, was influential in sparking a grassroots movement that resulted in revolt on December 16, 1773—what is now known as the Boston Tea Party.

The impact of these events was felt up and down the East Coast. Just a few months after the Boston Tea Party, Virginia legislators felt such a commonality with their fellow colonists to the north that they passed the following resolution that called for a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer:

This House, being deeply impressed with apprehension of the great dangers to be derived to British America from the hostile invasion of the city of Boston in our Sister Colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose commerce and harbor are, on the first day of June next, to be stopped by an armed force, deem it highly necessary that the said first day of June be set apart, by members of this House, as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, devoutly to implore the Divine

interposition, for averting the heavy calamity which threatens destruction to our civil rights and the evils of civil war, to give us one heart and mind . . . [Pray and fast] that the minds of His Majesty and his Parliament may be inspired from above with Wisdom, Moderation, Justice, to remove from the loyal People of America all cause of danger, from a continued pursuit of Measures, pregnant with their ruin. . . .

Less than three weeks later, Virginia called the colonies to form the Continental Congress, the organizing body behind the Revolutionary War. A day of fasting and prayer acted as a fulcrum for the emergence of a nation.

Breakthrough for a Nation

After the Revolutionary War, leaders of the colonies met in Philadelphia at Independence Hall to construct the unifying document that would give birth to our nation. George Washington, James Madison, and Noah Webster had met before the assembly and were convinced that the Articles of Confederation currently in use were not adequate. Representatives presented numerous ideas, and yet no one could reach an agreement. The whole process was on the verge of rupturing.

On June 28, 1787, Benjamin Franklin (the oldest delegate present) asked permission to address the assembly. At 81 years old, he had not lost his gratitude for the One who directed them during the early days of the Revolution:

. . . this small progress we have made after three or four weeks... [this] is proof of the imperfection of the Human Understanding...how has it happened that . . . we have not once thought of applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our

understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were in sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in the room for Divine protection. Our prayers, Sir, were heard, and they were graciously answered. . . . I therefore beg leave to move—that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven and its blessing on our deliberation be held in this assembly every morning. . . .

These comments were put into a formal motion that passed. Very shortly after this, a breakthrough was achieved, resulting in the writing of our American Constitution—the longest standing constitution in the history of the world. Every day since Benjamin Franklin’s call for illumination from God, Congress has opened with prayer.

Freedom for a Nation

The Battle of Chattanooga in November of 1863 was a critical point in the Civil War. Up to this point, the southern states seemed impenetrable. Considered the “Gateway to the South,” a victory in Chattanooga meant that Atlanta would be next, and then the defeat of the Confederacy could quickly follow.

Historians debate much over turning points in the Civil War, but it is obvious that there was a significant occurrence just one month earlier on October 3, 1863. In the third year of the bloodiest war in our nation’s history, with brother fighting against brother and hundreds of thousands dead, President Abraham Lincoln declared a “National Day of Thanksgiving and Praise.”

The initial reaction had to be surprise. How could people be thankful at a time like this? The words of the proclamation reveal Lincoln’s heart for eventual healing and restoration:

. . . I recommend . . . that while offering up the ascriptions justly to Him for such singular deliverance and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience . . . and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes. . . .

One month later Chattanooga fell. About half a year later Atlanta fell, followed by the surrender of the Confederacy, thus ending this horrific war. A National Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to the Almighty Hand of our Lord was timely in ending bloodshed and securing freedom for the entire nation.

The Urgency of Today

Certainly our nation is at a place of crisis again. The political rancor is reaching heightened extremes, with political parties disagreeing—at times bitterly—over solutions to our economic and social woes. Abortion continues to be one of the greatest blights of all time on our country. The entertainment industry seems to know no boundaries, with children and families directly affected by regular exposure to indecency and violence. We seem ineffective at stopping the flow of drugs into our culture.

We are fighting wars on many different battle fronts, and the rhetoric of hatred with nation against nation grows each day. We were deeply wounded in September of 2001, and now we wait in apprehension for the next terrorist attack that might harm multitudes of Americans at any time. We are a nation on edge.

Certainly the stresses and woes of our nation today are

comparable to critical times in our nation in the past. Yet at times it seems the Church is unaware of the urgency of the day. We can seem paralyzed in prayer, unsure that God's Word still applies to our hopeless situations.

Might God Hear Our Cries Again?

Could it happen again? Could we cry out to Almighty God that He would accomplish His divine purposes in and through our nation?

Part of the answer to these questions is your understanding of His purposes. God always wants to accomplish good things for a nation. His heart is always looking for reasons to bring mercy. He says in Jeremiah 18:7-10:

If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it.

It is only in the final days that we would be praying against God's will for the healing of our nation. According to Revelation 19:15, it is then that God's wrath against nations will be fully realized and poured out:

"Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. 'He will rule them with an iron scepter.' He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty."

But until then, can America be saved by prayer? The problems we are facing are too large for human understanding. If we are

to be saved, only God can do it. We have seen Him save our country in the past, and we have no reason—either historical or biblical—to doubt that He would do it again.

. . . if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and will heal their land. (2 Chron. 7:14).

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