

PRAYING FOR AMERICA: When America Stands for Jesus

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On April 29, 1980, John and I woke up in our darkened hotel room at approximately 5 a.m. The day for which we had been waiting nearly two years finally had arrived. As we hastily began to dress for the day on the Mall in Washington D.C., John quietly said, "Anne, I don't know if anyone will be there but us." I encouragingly responded, "Well let's go, we will be there!"

Still dark when we arrived, thousands were pouring onto the mall from the subway system. By that afternoon, nearly 700,000 believers had gathered to pray for America.

On April 29, 1980, Washington for Jesus became an unprecedented historic gathering of the church in response to a national crisis that many historians point to as a turning point for the nation. Many credit the massive gathering of prayer for influencing the presidential election that sent Ronald Reagan to the White House and birthed a national movement. It all began as a simple prophetic word given to my late husband, Bishop John Gimenez.

John had been in Oakland, Calif., in October 1978. While he was preaching one night, he had a vision of a man he couldn't recognize—but knew to be the president of the United States—prophesying the Word of the Lord to the nation! The words of 1 Samuel 17:29 kept ringing in his heart, "Is there not a cause?"

Just like David brought down Goliath, God showed John that the church also had a cause and a giant to bring down. Other enemies had arisen in the land—double-digit interest rates, American hostages in Iran and rioting on college campuses—all seeking to destroy a nation that had been based on the Word of God. America was in deep trouble!

The first thing John did when we came home to Virginia Beach, Va., was to visit Pat Robertson and lay out the vision. Robertson answered, “We’d need to get 100 churches to each bring 100 people. And by the way John, how would you feed that big of a crowd?” John had the answer ready: “Let ‘em fast!”

Next he went to see Demos Shakarian, president of Full Gospel Business Men’s Fellowship International—who quickly confirmed the vision—and the rally was on! People were stirred about the condition of America, and it gave them hope that something could be done.

Robertson and Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ were chosen as program co-chairmen, with John serving as the national chairman. In a time with no Internet or cellphones, John traveled continuously from one side of America to the other gathering support for Washington for Jesus. We began to believe that perhaps 1 million Christians would come to the nation’s capital on April 29 to pray in the spirit of 2 Chronicles 7:14 (“If My people ...”).

That day was specifically chosen for its historical significance. It was the anniversary of the 1607 planting of the cross by Rev. Robert Hunt, chaplain of Jamestown, Va., in dedication of the country’s first settlement.

Washington for Jesus amazed us all and exceeded everyone’s expectations. We had a state-by-state parade around the Capitol Mall—thousands marching with American flags and colorful banners.

Leaders from every background and denomination were on hand to

speak throughout the afternoon. Some came from denominations that, under normal circumstances, didn't speak to other groups. But on that day, differences fell to the ground and they locked arms and prayed as one church.

Interestingly, then-President Jimmy Carter was unavailable to speak at the gathering, either in person or by phone. Presidential candidate Ronald Reagan telephoned, declaring, "I am with you."

A number of men and women of God have often looked back at that day and concluded that the prayers from Washington for Jesus were a turning point in the election. In fact, when Reagan was inaugurated on Jan. 20, 1981, Bright told the new president: "Some of us believe you were actually elected on April 29, when over 700,000 Christians came to Washington and prayed for America."

In time, we came to see the phenomenal results of answered prayer on that historic day: the release of the American hostages in Iran, the economic recovery of our nation, and the renewed unity among Christians from different denominations and movements. Washington for Jesus resulted in one of the largest recorded gatherings in the history of the nation, outside of the 1976 Bicentennial celebrations.

Many have credited the birth of the modern conservative political movement to the network created there. Most importantly, we all witnessed the power of unified prayer can turn a nation.

When we returned home, John said to me, "We won't do this again." We came home with leftover bills, which our Rock Church had to pay.

But in 1988, God's church was in trouble. Scandals rocked the evangelical world and another Washington for Jesus rally was called. Political pundits said the church never would gather again as it did in 1980, but they were wrong. This time, the

count on the mall was more than 1 million believers praying and repenting.

After that, we received a new prophetic call to a national prayer event every eight years. We returned to Washington again in 1996 and 2004, and saw God move mightily each time.

In February 2008, John was called home to be with the Lord. Only two weeks previous, he said to me, "Anne, someone is going to call the nation to prayer again, but it won't be me this time. I know in my heart this country will either have transformation or abomination."

I never dreamed God would speak to me to call a national solemn assembly for 2012. But God confirmed the word again and again. This call, however, is different. The word of confirmation we received came from 2 Kings 2:19-22, where God performed a miracle of healing in the city of Jericho. The men of the city explained to Elijah that the land had been barren because of contaminated water. The prophet had them bring a new cruse of salt to the headwaters, where God healed the land by healing the water supply.

The symbol of salt is vitally important in the context of this call to prayer. Salt speaks of personal holiness and purity. Jesus said: "If the salt loses its saltiness ... it is no longer good for anything" (NIV). America has lost its saltiness, as has the church of the living God. We are coming to Philadelphia to make a new salt covenant with God, and we are coming with "clean hands and a pure heart" (Ps. 24:4).

It is a solemn assembly (Joel 2:15-17) that God is calling for, and we believe as we come for such an occasion that God will answer (Joel 2:19).

We have seen it happen before. The rallies of 1980, 1988, 1996 and 2004 bear witness to the intervention of God in the lives of His people.

Surely, if the Lord can use a reformed drug addict from the Bronx like John Gimenez to call a nation to prayer and turn a nation to God, nothing is impossible.

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