

The Jesus Revolution That Led to America's Founding: Can It Happen Again?

The young preacher, dressed in his Anglican clerical robe, stood on the steps of the Philadelphia courthouse and addressed the massive crowd of 10,000 or more gathered before him. It was 1739, and the preacher was 25-year-old George Whitefield, who had come from England to America with the prayer in his heart that the people would no longer live as 13 divided colonies but as "one nation under God."

Knowing there were people of many sects and denominations in the crowd, he decided to challenge their divisions and so mimicked a conversation with Father Abraham, whom he pictured as looking over the banister of heaven at them all.

Looking up toward heaven, Whitefield cried out, "Father Abraham, are there any Anglicans in heaven?"

The answer came back, "No, there are no Anglicans in heaven."

Whitefield continued, "Father Abraham, are there any Methodists in heaven?"

The answer came back, "No, there are no Methodists here either."

Whitefield cried out again, "Father Abraham, are there any Puritans in heaven?"

"No, there are no Puritans here either."

"What about Baptists and Quakers?" cried Whitefield as he continued to gaze heavenward.

"There are none of those here either."

Finally, with a note of desperation in his voice, Whitefield cried out, “Father Abraham, what kind of people are in heaven?”

The answer came back, “There are only Christians in heaven, only those washed in the blood of the Lamb.”

Whitefield then cried out, “Oh, is that the case? Then God help me, and God help us all, to forget about labels and become Christians in deed and in truth.”

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There were many audible sighs, groans and tears as Whitefield presented his case for Jesus being the center of our faith. Benjamin Franklin was one of those in the crowd, and he described the profound influence of Whitefield’s preaching on them all, saying, “From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if the whole world were growing religious” (Hyatt, “1726, the Year That Defined America,” 79).

It Was a Jesus Revolution

It was the Christ-centered preaching of Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards and others that ignited what historians call the Great Awakening. I am here calling it a “Jesus Revolution” because of the exaltation of Jesus in every aspect of the awakening. Denominational and sectarian allegiances were dissolved, and a young George Washington prayed, “Bless, O Lord, the whole race of mankind and let the world be filled with knowledge of Thee and Thy Son Jesus Christ” (Hyatt, 132).

It was this Christ-centered preaching that led to a common cry during the conflict with Great Britain, “We recognize no Sovereign but God and no king but Jesus!” This cry originated just before the gunfire erupted at Lexington in April of 1775. The British officer, Major John Pitcairn, shouted to an

assembled group of minutemen, “Disperse, ye villains, lay down your arms in the name of George the Sovereign King of England.” Rev. Jonas Clarke, who was standing with the minutemen, shouted back, “We recognize no Sovereign but God and no king but Jesus!” (Hyatt, “Pilgrims and Patriots (Second Edition,” 117).

This cry caught the imagination of American patriots everywhere and soon rang throughout the colonies. It became so prominent that a British-appointed governor, Jonathan Trumbull, wrote back to England, “If you ask an American who is his master, he will tell you he has none, nor any governor but Jesus Christ” (Hyatt, “Pilgrims and Patriots (Second Edition),” 117).

The First Congress Opens With Prayer in the Name of Jesus

Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the First Continental Congress opened on Sept. 5, 1774, with an extended time of Bible reading and prayer in the name of Jesus. Fifty-six delegates were present from all 13 colonies except Georgia. They had gathered at Carpenter’s Hall in Philadelphia to discuss how they should respond to the British invasion of their land.

It was a very troubling time. King George of England had sent six regiments of British soldiers who had occupied the city of Boston, closed its port and revoked the right of the people to self-government. British soldiers were being quartered in people’s homes apart from their consent. This was George’s tyrannical response to protests that had erupted, especially in New England, over his burdensome taxes and regulations on the colonists without any input on their part.

Having been impacted by the Great Awakening and its Christ-centered message, the delegates, which included Anglicans,

Puritans, Presbyterians, Quakers and others, agreed to open with Bible reading and prayer. Samuel Adams, a Puritan from New England, suggested that they invite Rev. Jacob Duche, an Anglican minister of Philadelphia, who was known as a man of deep spirituality, to come and lead them in prayer.

As the elderly, grey-haired Duche stood before the Congress, he began by reading the entire 35th psalm, which powerfully impacted everyone present. It is a prayer of David for deliverance and begins with the words, "Plead *my cause*, O Lord, with those who strive with me; fight against those who fight against me" (Ps. 35:1, NKJV). The psalm ends with praise for God's deliverance.

America's Founding Prayer

After reading the psalm, Duche began praying for the delegates, for America and especially for the city of Boston and its inhabitants who were under siege. As he began praying, the Anglicans, such as George Washington and Richard Henry Lee, knelt in prayer, according to their custom. The Puritans, such as Samuel Adams and John Adams, sat with bowed heads and prayed. Others prayed according to their own unique customs.

But although their outward manners differed, there was a singleness of heart and purpose as they all united in prayer, in the name of Jesus, for God's assistance and intervention for America. Duche lifted his voice in prayer, saying,

O Lord, our high and mighty Father, heavenly king of kings, and Lord of Lords, who dost from Thy throne behold all the dwellers of the earth, and reignest with power supreme over all kingdoms, empires, and governments. Look down in mercy we beseech thee on these our American states who have fled to Thee from the rod of the oppressor and thrown themselves on Thy gracious protection, desiring to be henceforth dependent only on Thee. To Thee they have appealed for the righteousness of their cause; to Thee do they now look up for

that countenance and support which Thou alone can give ... Shower down upon them and the millions they represent, such temporal blessings as Thou seest expedient for them in this world and crown them with everlasting joy in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ Thy Son and our Savior. Amen.

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John Adams wrote to his wife, Abigail, of the impact of the Bible reading and prayer on the delegates, saying, "Who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to heaven for divine interposition and aid. It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I never saw a greater effect upon an audience" (Hyatt, "1726," 108).

America for Jesus

In early America, there was no hesitancy about mentioning the name of Jesus as the object of faith and expressing the desire that such faith be spread throughout the earth. For example, in a meeting with chiefs of the Delaware tribe, who had brought some of their youth to be trained in American schools, George Washington said to them, "You do well to wish to learn our arts and ways of life, and above all the religion of Jesus Christ." (Hyatt, 172).

John Hancock served as president of the Continental Congress, and his signature is the largest and most prominent on the Declaration of Independence. While serving as governor of Massachusetts in 1793, he proclaimed a Day of Prayer and Humiliation and asked the people to pray for "The spreading of the true religion of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, in all its purity and power, among all the people of the earth." (Hyatt, 173).

Although Thomas Jefferson was known to have questioned the deity of Jesus, he was convinced that the moral teachings of Jesus were the key to a stable and prosperous society. Take, for example, the so-called Jefferson Bible, which is a misleading misnomer by modern historians. Jefferson titled it "The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth," and in it, he meticulously brought together the teachings of Jesus into a single volume for his own study but also for evangelizing and instructing Native American tribes. He even took money from the federal treasury to pay for a missionary to the Kaskaskia tribe. Jefferson was a Jesus Revolutionary, and he once said, "The philosophy of Jesus is the most sublime and benevolent code of morals ever offered to man. A more beautiful or precious morsel of ethics I have never seen."

The Fruit of this Early American Jesus Revolution

– **Americans became a tolerant people.** This should not be surprising, for it was Jesus who said, "Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). They, of course, never lived up to this standard but it was acknowledged by all and served as a positive force pulling them in the right direction. This tolerance showed itself in an early July Fourth parade in Philadelphia. Dr. Benjamin Rush (1745–1813), a devout Christian and signer of the Declaration of Independence, wrote, "The rabbi of the Jews locked in the arms of two ministers of the Gospel was a most delightful sight" (Hyatt, 'America's Revival Heritage,' 97).

– **Slavery became anathema throughout America.** In my book "1726," I have documented how a powerful abolition movement was ignited by this Jesus awakening that turned every Founding Father against slavery at a time it was accepted and

practiced in most of the world. Impacted by the awakening, abolitionists used the teachings of Jesus to oppose slavery, saying that if people lived by His teachings, such as “love your neighbor as yourself” and “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” it would quickly put an end to slavery (Hyatt, 1726, 98-99)

– **Denominational divisions were healed.** The animosity between Anglicans, Puritans, Baptists, Quakers and others ran deep. In the Old World, the Anglican Church, the state church of England, had harassed and persecuted all these groups, which is why they fled to the New World. In the New World, the Anglicans of Virginia, the Puritans of New England, the Baptists of Rhode Island and the Quakers of Pennsylvania all persecuted each other. But in the Christ-centered preaching of the awakening, these divisions melted as the people saw Jesus Himself to be the essence and object of their faith. Commenting on Whitefield’s final visit to America in 1770, the historian Benjamin Hart wrote,

The true Spirit of Christ had dissolved sectarian differences. America considered itself to be a nation of Christians, pure and simple, as Whitefield noted with satisfaction. “Pulpits, hearts and affections,” he said, were opened to him and any preacher of whatever denomination who had a true Christian message to share.

(Hyatt, “1726,” 87-88)

With religious, racial and cultural barriers being breached, the people began, for the first time, to see themselves as a single people—“one nation under God” as Whitefield had prayed. This is why the late Harvard professor Perry Miller declared, “The Declaration of Independence of 1776 was a result of the evangelical preaching of the evangelists of the Great Awakening” (Hyatt, “2000 Years of Charismatic Christianity, 112).

America Must Have Another Jesus Revolution

The hymn “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing” was written in 1739 by Charles Wesley, a very close friend and mentor to George Whitefield at Oxford University. This Jesus-honoring hymn must have been sung by Whitefield and the massive crowds to which he preached in colonial America. One stanza says,

*Jesus! the name that charms our fears/ That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears/'Tis life and health and peace.*

Let us pray for another Jesus Revolution across America that will impact people of every religious and theological persuasion. It is the biblical thing to do. It is also the American thing to do.

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This article is derived from books by Dr. Eddie Hyatt, including “1726: The Year that Defined America,” “America’s Revival Heritage (Second Edition)” and “Pilgrims and Patriots (Second Edition).” These books and more are available from Amazon and his website at .