

A NEW CALL FOR EXTRAORDINARY PRAYER

By Dave Butts

With all that has been happening in our nation, it eventually becomes very easy to allow our attention to be diverted back to what we call "normal." Unfortunately, "normal" often means life without God and without a dependence upon Him in prayer. I believe it is vital for us to hold on to our first response - - the response of prayer.

The Church desperately needs to both issue and respond to a new call for extraordinary prayer. Extraordinary prayer goes beyond the normal expectations of the past. It is prayer that can bring God's power to bear on a whole new world facing us--a world of uncertainty, fear and war.

The Bible records times of extraordinary prayer like this. One good example occurred in the Book of Esther. The crisis there concerned the lives of every Jew held captive in Babylon. A decree had been issued that would result in genocide for the Jews. Queen Esther was going to risk her life by going to the King on behalf of her people; however, before she went, she called her people to three days of prayer and fasting for her mission. Extraordinary prayer brought about extraordinary deliverance.

The Book of Ezra gives another good example of extraordinary prayer. Ezra was preparing to lead a group of the exiles back from Babylon to Jerusalem. The king had even offered troops for protection on the perilous journey. But Ezra had refused the troops, pointing out that God Himself would protect them. As the people gathered, Ezra began to realize how dangerous the trip would be and that they should not merely presume upon God's protection. So he called the people to humble themselves and pray and fast over the journey. God heard their prayers and gave them safe passage to their destination.

There are many examples of this in more recent history. The great British preacher, Charles H. Spurgeon, was used by God to bring many into the Kingdom and in the process, a large church was built in London. He challenged his people to extraordinary prayer if they wanted to see God's hand at work in their church. He wrote, *"Dear Friends, we do not know what God may do for us if we do but pray for a blessing of the Holy Spirit... Have we not tried to preach without trying to pray? Is it not likely that the church has been putting forth its preaching hand but not its praying hand? O Dear friends! Let us agonize in prayer, and it shall come to pass that this Music Hall shall witness the sighs and groans of the penitent and the songs of the converted. It shall yet happen that this vast host shall not come and go as now it does, but little the better; but men shall go out of this hall praising God and saying--It was good to be there; it was none other than the house of God, and the very gate of heaven. This much to stir you up to prayer."*

In the United States, the revivals known as the Great Awakenings came in response to Christians gathering for extraordinary prayer. Often called "Concerts of Prayer," God used these times of prayer to bring awakening to His people. Robert Bakke in his wonderful book, *The Power of Extraordinary Prayer* writes, *"It (the Concert of Prayer) was born out of convictions that say with certainty that, regardless of how bright or dark the hour we live in, God is about to do something greater than He's ever done before. Furthermore, it said that God would not move forward with His ever-increasing and ever more marvelous plans until Christians agreed with Him and agreed with each other about what He was going to do. A great and lucid vision of Christ's earthly reign was before their eyes--with every nation, people, tribe and tongue united as one company before the throne of God, Christ the Son, and the sevenfold Spirit. It was a compelling vision that would not let Christians rest or let go of God until the rule of God held sway in every aspect of life."* (Pg.133)

Read again that last sentence from Bakke: *"It was a compelling vision that would not let Christians rest or let go of God until the rule of God held sway in every aspect of life."* Have you ever made a decision to pray like that? Not merely God bless us or even God protect us--but a life-changing commitment to pray until the "rule of God held sway in every aspect of life"? This should not just be a response made only by individual Christians. Has your church made a decision to pray extraordinarily for the working of God's power? The key to the Concert of Prayer was for Christians to gather together for times of extraordinary prayer--as was the practice of the early Church.

We are living in times that are not "normal." What has been normal for us in our prayer life and experience of Christianity will not suffice for this hour. God is calling us to extraordinary prayer! How will you respond?

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