

CLOSING PRAYERS

Facing the Final Crisis on our Knees

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CHANGE ME

*“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God
unless he is born again.”*

—John 3:3

*Christians are as guilty for not having the Spirit,
as sinners are for not repenting.*

—Charles G. Finney

Shock and awe: those were my emotions as I watched coverage of the siege on the United States Capitol during a joint session of Congress to count the electoral votes from the 2020 presidential elections.

Demonstrations were expected. A coup d’état was not. Peaceful protesting in the streets is an American right. Rioting in the Senate chamber, clashing with Capitol police, and vandalizing lawmakers’ offices are un-American sedition.

Just six days into the new year, still praying that the dumpster fire that was 2020 was mercifully over, a new horror befell us. Not since the 9/11 attacks on America have I struggled to believe that what I was seeing was real. And yet there it was. Amid the hundreds of images we cannot delete from our minds was that of a makeshift gallows erected opposite the United States Capitol—a hangman’s noose framing the dome. The photograph captured other demonstrators holding various banners and signs, including one with two words that seemed profoundly out of place.

Those two words? “Jesus Saves.”

It’s not that the words aren’t true. They are. But in the midst of an insurrection, they seemed less like a call to repentance and more like a call

to arms. The rioters adorned with Christian flags and crosses invoked images of the Crusades and called to mind the dark ages of the bloody Inquisition. It didn't help that the Jesus Saves sign was upside down. But why not? Everything else was upside down that day—decency, civility, democracy, and the nationalist form of godliness that denied the power thereof.

Inside the Capitol, lawmakers huddled behind tables and, at one point, were instructed to put on gas masks. Above the roar of confusion, Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) shouted out a prayer while rioters broke through police barriers and into the building.

What prayer do you pray when an unrestrained mob is moments away from breaking through the door where you're sheltering in place? The text of Rochester's prayer, caught on camera from the floor of the House of Representatives, is revealing:

Father God you are all-powerful. We know all things work together for the good. So we trust in you right now in the name of Jesus, that you have this under control.

*Right now in the name of Jesus! All things work together, all things!
PEACE! Peace in the land . . . Peace in this country . . . Peace in this world . . .*

*Lord we ask you for a healing. Right now. Right now in the name of Jesus.
Lord protect (unknown) Protect those who are trying to protect us . . .
Protect all of our brothers and sisters in this Congress who protect America Lord.*

We just thank you. We praise you. We give you all honor and glory because you are powerful! Above all . . .

We thank you right now. In this MOMENT!¹

It was an extraordinary moment, and it called for an extraordinary prayer—a prayer that, for all anybody in that room knew, could have been the last they would ever hear. A far cry from the innocuous, gender-inclusive intonation offered by a guest chaplain to open the 117th Congress just three days before the riot. That prayer was politically generic and distant. Congresswoman Rochester's prayer was specific and urgently personal. The difference was context: the normalcy of another opening session of Congress versus the abnormality of a seditious siege on Congress. Suffice it to say, you pray differently under fire!

Unprecedented

The year that was looked forward to with such hope and promise as we entered the decade of the 2020s could be summed up by a popular meme, circulating on Instagram and Twitter, of a flying cow seen through the windshield of an anonymous driver. The caption reads, “What the??? Never mind. I forgot it’s 2020.” In other words, that which would be considered weird, bizarre, or unexplainable under normal circumstances was par for the course in that weird, bizarre, and unpredictable year that was anything but normal.

And the word you heard over and over again to describe all the weirdness of the pandemic, the protests, the violence, the fires, and the politics (don’t forget the murder hornets) was *unprecedented*—never before experienced. And yet we continue to experience what has never before been experienced. Amazingly, there is now almost daily precedence for the unprecedented.

Now think with me. What if there was a single word being blasted over and over again on social media and in the streets to describe the church during this unprecedented time of weirdness and upset? What would that word be? I would love to know the words that popped into your mind right now!

Because of this book’s focus, you might assume the word would be *prayer*. But some of us have been attending, organizing, and speaking at prayer conferences for thirty-plus years. We have had Daniel fasts; all-night prayer vigils; twenty-four-hour prayer meetings; ten-, thirty-, and forty-days of prayer, and so on. And over the last few decades, we have met and prayed through some other unprecedented times: the 9/11 terror attacks; the great recession of 2008; Hurricanes Katrina, Sandy, and Rita; the pope’s address to Congress; the Second Gulf War; the Indonesian tsunami; the mass shootings in Las Vegas; Parkland, Florida; Virginia Tech; Emmanuel Baptist Church; and so on. And while spiritual breakthroughs have happened elsewhere around the world, here in North America, with few exceptions, our prayers have fallen short of producing the revival of true godliness that we’ve been told is our most urgent need.² Why?

Why no revival?

Back in the fall of 2015, I was a passenger in the car of a retired pastor as we drove to Pocatello, Idaho, to conduct some ministry training. He was going to be teaching a class to elders about preaching, and I was going to do a seminar on prayer. As the sagebrush along the interstate whisked by, he suddenly asked me, “So after all the prayer conferences and prayer initiatives over the years, why haven’t we seen revival yet?”

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The question stung, but I knew what he meant. I cannot remember exactly how I responded to him, but I think we would have to admit that while the idea and the results of revival appeal to us, the means of revival—the prerequisites—do not. We would like an app for that: revival, like Uber Eats, delivered to your door hot and at a time that fits conveniently into your schedule. It's like the poem "\$3 Worth of God" by Wilbur Rees:

I would like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.
Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to
equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine.
I don't want enough of Him to make me love a black man or pick beets
with a migrant.
I want ecstasy, not transformation.
I want the warmth of the womb not a new birth.
I want about a pound of the eternal in a paper sack.
I'd like to buy \$3 worth of God, please.³

But in the closing hours of Earth's history, the days of discounting God are over. *The time is now* to value God properly—to give Him the glory due His name and to repent for trying to have Pentecost without Calvary. Revival without the Redeemer.

Is it possible that in our pursuit of the fruit, we've neglected the Vine? "I am the vine; you are the branches," Jesus said. "If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Fruit is the outcome of a relationship. Pursuing revival without a relationship with the Redeemer is like marrying someone for his money. You love his wealth and the material comforts that wealth provides, but the marriage is simply an arrangement—a means to an end.

Jesus says, "If you abide in Me—remain connected to Me in a saving, intimate relationship—the fruit of revival will naturally come. But apart from this connection to Me, you will be fruitless." Is it possible that in our pursuit of revival, we have left Jesus outside, knocking and seeking entrance into His own church?

I believe in this moment we have been summoned to let Jesus in. God is calling us back to our first love—to return to the basics of our faith and discover again why we are Christians in the first place or if we are indeed Christians.

This is a moment for you and me to do as the apostle Paul says: "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?"

(2 Corinthians 13:5). The Classic Edition of the Amplified Bible says it this way: “Examine and test and evaluate your own selves to see whether you are holding to your faith and showing the proper fruits of it. Test and prove yourselves [not Christ]. Do you not yourselves realize and know [thoroughly by an ever-increasing experience] that Jesus Christ is in you—unless you are [counterfeits] disapproved on trial and rejected?” (AMPC).

*Nothing reveals what's
really in the heart
more than life's bitter
experiences.*

According to Paul, there is a time of testing and examining. And what is being tested is us. If you think that this period of crises—COVID and racial injustice and economic and political instability—is solely a time of judgment and testing for the world that is rejecting Christ, you are mistaken. I believe this current period of crises is equally a time of judgment and testing on the church that claims to represent and follow Christ. After all, who is Paul talking to when he says, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith”? The world? It's not in the faith. He's talking to those who allegedly have Jesus Christ inside them—unless they are counterfeits, which can only be revealed under testing.

The testing time

We see such testing brought by God on the children of Israel following the deliverance at the Red Sea. God may have taken His people out of Egypt, but He still had to take the Egypt out of them. And the desert was His operating room.

Three days beyond the Red Sea, they reached a place called *Marah*—a word meaning “bitterness.” The former slaves were thirsty. The good news for the thirsty people was that there was water at Marah. The bad news was that the water was bitter! It was undrinkable and foul!

Now remember, who led them to Marah? To bitterness? God. And why did He lead them there? Exodus 15:25 says that there He “put them to the test.” Deuteronomy 8:2 reveals the nature of the test: “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.” God led them to Marah to see what was in their hearts.

Nothing reveals what's really in the heart more than life's bitter experiences.

And how did they do on the test? “The people grumbled against Moses,

saying, “What are we to drink?” (Exodus 15:24). They failed it miserably. They were like the boy who went to his college professor and said, “Professor, I don’t believe I deserve this F that you gave me.” The professor said, “Son, I don’t believe you deserve it either, but it’s the lowest grade we had.”

Remember, *Marah* means “bitterness.” We don’t know whether it was called Marah before the children of Israel got there. If it was already known by that name before, maybe they would have expected the waters to be bitter. But maybe it was named Marah after this experience. We don’t really know.

What we do know is that the word means “bitterness.” But the root word goes even deeper. The root word of *Marah* means “deliberate, defiant, disobedience.” Think of a pouting child with pursed lips, squinting eyes, and furrowed brow, whose arms are folded in defiant rage. Maybe you’ve seen that look in your own children or grandchildren. I know I’ve seen that face on mine. It isn’t pretty.

I remember having to physically remove a young man from a classroom at church after he had caused a disturbance and was verbally abusing others in the class. My wife and I asked him to leave the room. He became *Marah* and refused to leave. After multiple attempts to reason with him, we physically had to pick him up and carry him outside where we could talk more freely and let him know his behavior was unacceptable and that he owed the class an apology.

In the Torah, it says, if you have a son who is *Marah*, you have to stone him. That’s how severe *Marah* can be. (Fortunately, we didn’t have to go that far with the young man!) It’s not just a bitter experience. That’s part of it, but along with that bitter experience comes a deliberate, defiant disobedience. It’s *Marah*!

People’s true characters are not totally revealed until the time that they do not receive what they sincerely believe is rightfully theirs. Do you think you would have responded any differently? How about now? Are you responding differently today?

Through COVID-19, nationalistic unrest unlike we’ve ever seen, and hate-mongering, the world has been brought to a *Marah* moment. And what is in the hearts of many is being revealed. What’s in your heart in this *Marah* moment? If Facebook and Twitter are any indications, then what’s in the heart of even God’s people is often shameful. *Marah*.

This *Marah* moment is not just about the wickedness and coming judgments on the world—what’s happening “out there.” It’s about the people of God and what’s happening “in here.” The crisis of the times is revealing what’s in our hearts and who bears the Father’s name. The question is

not—as the Capital One ad campaign asks—“What’s in your wallet?” The question for our moment in time is, What’s in your heart?

I was reading a blog post by Carey Nieuwhof, titled “Why Attending Church No Longer Makes Sense.”⁴ In it, the author made a case for the death of churches where attendance is prized over engagement. The blog generated more than two hundred comments. As I read through them, I decided that one of the reasons fewer people are attending church is because of Christians like these who were making comments like the ones I was reading.

In the wake of the Capitol riot as the electoral votes were being ratified, the pastor and founder of Heart of the Father Ministry, Jeremiah Johnson, apologized for making what turned out to be false prophecies regarding the election. He took ownership of his error and made a humble apology. He expected some pushback from those who might be disappointed both with the election outcome and his recantation. What he didn’t expect was the demonic rage aimed at him from some of his “Christian” followers:

People’s true characters are not totally revealed until the time that they do not receive what they sincerely believe is rightfully theirs.

After publicly repenting on January 7th, I fully expected to be called a false prophet, etc., in some circles but I could have never dreamed in my wildest imagination that so much satanic attack and witchcraft would come from charismatic/prophetic people. I have been flabbergasted at the barrage of continued conspiracy theories being sent every minute our way and the pure hatred being unleashed.

To my great heartache, I’m convinced parts of the prophetic/charismatic movement are far SICKER than I could have ever dreamed of. I truthfully never realized how absolutely triggered and ballistic thousands and thousands of saints get about . . . [the election]. It’s terrifying! It’s full of idolatry!⁵

It’s *Marah*. Some believers think that if they’ve been hurt or if someone disagrees with them, they get a pass to lash out with cutting words and scathing rebukes. But the Bible gives no such pass. The Word says, “In your anger do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). It also says to “get rid of all bitterness [*Marah*], rage and anger” (verse 31). Today’s default setting for attitudes

outside and even inside the church is *rage*. And prayer, no matter how sincere, cannot survive in that atmosphere.

God brought Israel to the place of bitterness on purpose. The test was part of His plan to train them, under comparatively easy circumstances, for the experiences they would face in Canaan. They needed faith in smaller matters so they would have faith in larger matters later.

Sound familiar? “The ‘time of trouble, such as never was,’ is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain.”⁶ If we can’t trust God now, when things are comparatively easy, how about later? “If you have raced with men on foot and they have worn you out, how can you compete with horses? If you stumble in safe country, how will you manage in the thickets by the Jordan?” (Jeremiah 12:5).

God’s purpose in bringing His people to the wilderness was the same as it is for us—to prepare a people to be His bride and to live with Him forever. But the bride of Christ must have the mind and heart of Christ before the wedding. Obtaining these requires nothing less than rebirth. And so, one of the closing prayers you and I must pray before we cross over into heavenly Canaan is the prayer, “Change me.”

Have you been born again?

“Very truly I tell you,” Jesus said to Nicodemus, “no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again” (John 3:3). Have you been born again? Have I? This was the simple and often offensive question that helped spark the Shantung Revival in northern China from 1927 to 1937. The revival was birthed in a time of military conflict, social instability, and lukewarmness in the church. Here’s a snapshot of the state of the work in the northern China Mission at that *Marah* moment:

- There was a mass exodus of missionaries due to discouragement.
- Evangelists gave discouraging reports of work among cold, apathetic, and “dead” churches.
- In the northern China Mission at least seventy churches had “died.” Many had accepted God’s grace as an outside coating of whitewash but had only “covered” their sins, not received forgiveness.
- A discouraged Chinese evangelist reported that more than a thousand people had been converted to Christianity, not to Christ. (A situation all too common today.)

Into this scene of despair came a small Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran woman named Marie Monsen. In her quiet but probing way, she visited mission stations and churches, giving her testimony and speaking on the seriousness of sin. There was no sensationalism. One missionary wrote, “Miss Monsen herself is one of the quietest speakers I ever heard. There was very poor singing, and no invitation for public decisions.”⁷

After each service, the diminutive woman greeted the Chinese and missionaries alike with the probing question, “Have you been born again?” The question insulted some and angered others. But she spared no one, asking preachers, deacons, missionaries, and others the same question. When their anger subsided, the Holy Spirit began to search hearts. People discovered and admitted they had not been born again.⁸

The heart searching sparked by Miss Monsen’s question produced soul grief and repentance before God that gave way to revival. Revival prayer meetings sprang up not only in churches but also in schools, hospitals, and seminaries. Students in one school began confessing their sins, and the school was closed to allow the revival to have free rein. Services were held every day, morning and evening. At the end of ten days, six hundred girls and nine hundred boys were saved. Miracles occurred, and eventually, the estimate was that there was at least one Christian in each of the one thousand homes in the town.

The revival started with a simple question of self-examination that, at first, caused offense. Spiritual pride prevented people from seeing the reason for the question. After all, they were missionaries! They were suffering from spiritual *anosognosia*—also called “lack of insight.” *Anosognosia* is a symptom of severe mental illness that is connected to anatomical damage in the part of the brain involved with self-reflection. This impairs a person’s ability to understand and perceive his or her illness. It is the single largest reason why people with schizophrenia or bipolar disorder refuse medications or do not seek treatment. Without awareness of the illness, refusing treatment appears rational—no matter how clear the need for treatment might be to others.

Today’s Laodiceans must suffer from this mental illness as well because they lack self-awareness of their condition, thinking they are rich and increased with goods, having need of nothing, and not having a clue that they are, in fact, wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked (Revelation 3:17). Their lack of awareness is why Jesus is on the outside trying to get in. My friends, at this critical hour, we must pray continually to be born again, to receive new minds and hearts, and *let Jesus in!*

Necessary change

Why does revival tarry? Perhaps we need to start with the simple question: Have you been born again? Have you settled for church instead of change? And if your first response is, How much change are we talking about? I'll answer that by asking, How much change is required for a caterpillar to change into a butterfly? Metamorphosis is pretty dramatic, wouldn't you say? So is the second birth. It's more than just a little tune-up on our personalities. We must have new DNA, new hearts, and new minds.

How much change are we talking about? Your first clue is found in the words of Jesus: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The change Jesus is talking about requires a death to self and a new creation. It requires a new way of seeing, a new way of thinking, a new way of being, and yes, a new way of praying. Prayer that responds to the simple yet profound question, Have I been born again?

Don't take offense. Take stock. The coup d'état most needed today is the one on the capitol of our own hearts. Self must be deposed, so the King of glory can come in.

Who is this King of glory?

The LORD strong and mighty,
The LORD mighty in battle. . . .

Who is he, this King of glory?

The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory (Psalm 24:8, 10).

Our King is about to return. The everlasting doors are poised to open. "However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Will He find those who were willing to choose change over church? Those who wanted more than three dollars' worth of God? Those who wanted the Vine even more than the fruit? Those who were truly born again?

The answer is directly related to your willingness to pray one of the most important closing prayers we could pray: *Change me!*

Closing Prayer

*Lord, change me. I ask to be born again. "Take my heart; for I cannot give it. It is Thy property. Keep it pure, for I cannot keep it for Thee. Save me in spite of myself, my weak, unchristlike self. Mold me, fashion me, raise me into a pure and holy atmosphere, where the rich current of Thy love can flow through my soul."*⁹ Amen.

My Closing Prayer

Write yours here: _____

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7. C. L. Culpepper, *The Shantung Revival* (Atlanta, GA: Crescendo Pub., 1976), 11.

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9. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald®, 1941), 159.