

The Bounty and Goodness of Our God

by Chuck Colson; Thursday, November 22, 2007



It has become the worst drought in the history of the Southeast. The ground is parched; crops are dying. And last week, Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue decided to do something about it. He urged Georgians to pray for desperately needed rain.

Despite much ridicule and some protest, last week, Gov. Perdue led a prayer vigil on the steps of the State Capitol. Praying along with him were pastors from several denominations and hundreds of Georgians.

Gov. Perdue may not have realized it, but he was following in the steps of our Pilgrim fathers and mothers nearly 400 years ago: Joining together with neighbors for prayer was a familiar ritual for the Pilgrims. For example, in April of 1623 — three years after the first Pilgrims landed — the transplanted Englishmen and women planted corn and other crops. A good harvest was essential to their survival. But in the weeks following the planting, it became clear that a dry spell was turning into a drought.

Pilgrim father Edward Winslow recorded their distress in his diary. “It pleased God, for our further chastisement,” he wrote, “to send a great drought; insomuch as in six weeks ... there scarce fell any rain.” The crops began to shrivel up “as though they had been scorched before the fire ... God,” Winslow wrote, “which hitherto had been our only shield and supporter, now seemed in His anger to arm Himself against us. And who can withstand the fierceness of His wrath?”

The Pilgrims decided the only solution was to humble themselves before God in fasting and in prayer. They appointed a day of prayer and set aside all other employments.

Winslow describes what happened next. “In the morning,” he wrote, “when we assembled together, the heavens were as clear, and the drought as like to continue as it ever was.” But by late afternoon — after eight or nine hours of prayer — “the weather was overcast, the clouds gathered on all sides,” Winslow wrote. The next morning brought “soft, sweet and moderate shows of rain, continuing some fourteen days.” The needed rain was “mixed with such seasonable weather,” he wrote, “as it was hard to say whether our withered corn or drooping affections were most quickened or revived, such was the bounty and goodness of our God.”

This dramatic answer to prayer was a witness to the local Indians. As Winslow notes, “The Indians ... took notice ... all of them admired the goodness of our God towards us, that wrought so great a change in so short of time, showing the difference between their conjuration and our invocation on the name of God for rain.”

The harvest that fall was abundant — and the Pilgrims survived yet another year.

Today is Thanksgiving — the day on which we recall the three-day celebration in 1621 in which the Pilgrims invited local Indians to join them in thanking God for His blessings on them — not, as some school children are taught today in class, giving thanks to Indians. And Americans ever since have been celebrating this, an occasion recognized and enshrined by Congress. We ought to take time to thank God for His manifold blessings on us today.

By the way, the day after Governor Perdue prayed on the Capitol steps, rains swept the state — nearly an inch in places. But the drought has continued. So, as we give thanks today, let’s remember those in the drought-stricken Southeast and ask the Giver of all good gifts to bless the land with rain.