



Pray for the Nation ~ INOI MO TE MOTU

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The LORD said, "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

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Jesus said to His disciples, "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." (Acts 1:8)

Towards Pentecost

In the last two weekly *Prayer Updates* 974 & 975 we were praying through the 10 days from Jesus' ascension to Heaven, to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (31 May this year). For those people who do not receive our Prayer Updates, this is repeated below, for your meditation and prayers.

Peter said, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone who the Lord our God calls to Himself." (Acts 2:38-39)

THE PROMISE OF THE FATHER (Acts 1:4-9). After His resurrection, Jesus said to His disciples, "Receive the Holy Spirit". Forty days later He told them to wait for the promise of the Father – the baptism with the Holy Spirit. This was promised in Joel 2:28-32, repeated by John the Baptist (Matthew 3:11), and quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-18). **Pray** for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church today.

PENTECOST (Acts 2:1-4). Pentecost was a harvest festival – the gathering in of the first-fruit. It occurred 50 days after Passover, when Jesus died and paid the penalty for our sins, bringing us forgiveness and salvation. Water baptism signifies death to the old life, washing from sin and its consequences, resurrection to new life and being "born again". Hence John the Baptist's words in Matthew 3:11, and Peter's words in Acts 2:37-39. **Pray** that Christians will be baptised in water, symbolising washing from sin, and in the Holy Spirit for power to witness

and live in the fulness of God's Spirit, as He intends.

JESUS, OUR EXAMPLE (Matthew 16:24 "Follow Me"; 1 Peter 2:21). Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit, baptised in water and the Holy Spirit, and lived by the power of the Holy Spirit. He said, "As the Father has sent Me, so I am sending you." (John 20:19-22). **Pray** that all Christians will be true followers of Jesus, following His example, living in the power of His Spirit, as salt and light in a dark, corrupted world (Matthew 5:13-16)

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT (Ephesians 3:16-17; 2 Timothy 1:6-7). In order for the Church to move and minister in the power of the Spirit, Jesus gave gifts to His people – the gifts and ministries of the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, the command to love one another and be united. We are to be continually filled with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-20) and witnesses to Him, first at home (our "Jerusalem"), city and nation, and worldwide. **Pray** that the power, gifts, ministries and witness of every Christian will reach out to a lost world.

WAIT ON GOD "Wait ... for the promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4-5). The disciples waited for 10 days, waiting in prayer and worship, expectantly; then the Holy Spirit came! We need to: have **faith** in the promise, **desire** what is promised, **ask** for what has been promised, and **receive** the promise – then praise, worship and obey the Giver of the promise! **Pray** that we will have these four essentials in our lives as we wait on God.

WHAT MUST WE DO? (Acts 2:37-39). When many people saw what happened to the disciples on the day of Pentecost, Peter shared about Jesus and His death for us, and they cried out, "What must we do?" Peter replied, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of

Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone who the Lord our God calls to Himself." **Pray** for repentance (e.g., Psalm 139:23-24), and calling out to God for forgiveness, the fullness of His Spirit, and being an active part of the Body of Christ (Acts 2:41-47).

FOLLOW ME! The power of God's Spirit is more than a "gift to enjoy". It is to change our lives, equip us with everything we need to serve and love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, and be witnesses to Him – bringing those who are lost to salvation and into the Body of Christ (His Church). 3000 were saved and added to the Church on the day of Pentecost. **Pray** for this throughout our world today! The harvest is ripe; the reapers are few. Isaiah said, "I saw the LORD ... I heard His voice ... and He said, **"Go! and say to this people ..."** (Isaiah 6:1-9)

REVIVAL "Will You not revive us again so that Your people may rejoice in You." (Psalm 85:6). Revival includes being raised from the dead, new life, renewal and restoration. It is the Spirit of God Who does this – in the lives of unbelievers, bring them to faith in God and His Son Jesus Christ; and in the lives of believers who are slumbering or asleep in their awareness of God, their walk with God and their service in the Kingdom of God. (Revelation 2:4-5; 3:2-3; 3:15-19)

Pray that the Lord will open our eyes and ears to see and hear all that God wants to do, and wants *us* to do. Pray that God will raise up people from being spiritually dead, save them, breathe upon them, and fill them with the Holy Spirit.

UNITY Just before Jesus went to the cross He prayed earnestly for the unity of His Body, the Church of Jesus Christ that He is building; even today, that we might be one, even as He and the Father are one (John 17). This includes producing the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and obedience to the two Greatest Commandments to love (Matthew 22:37-40; 1 Corinthians 13:13). We see this in the early Christian community, in Acts 2:42-47. **Pray** for unity of the Church; for love, fellowship and service – within the local churches and within the one worldwide Church; and our community. Disunity is a destroyer!

SHARING THE CHRISTIAN FAITH The Christian faith, the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ, and walking with the Lord, are not

just for us! Jesus told His disciples (and us, His followers too) to "Go into all the world and proclaim the Good News (Gospel) to the whole creation (everyone God has created)." Mark 16:15. Just as Jesus is the "Light of the world", so He also calls us to be "lights" in a world of darkness (Matthew 5:14-16). In the beginning the world was in darkness, and the first recorded words God spoke were, "Let there be light", and there was light; God saw the light was good and He separated the light from the darkness. (Genesis 1:1-4). **Pray** that the glorious light of the Gospel will shine in the hearts of multitudes of people who don't yet know the Lord; that they will inherit eternal life, be separated from darkness, and will forever live in God's light and salvation. Pray that all of us will let the lights of our lives shine for His glory!

PENTECOST Pentecost is not just a one-time experience or annual event. We are not only told to "be filled with the Holy Spirit" but to continually walk (live) by the Spirit – in God's power, using God's gifts to us, serving Him and other people. The Spirit-filled life includes living in fellowship with God's people, seeking to build up the Kingdom of God on earth, and seeing His will being done on earth even as it is in Heaven. **Pray** that all these things will be done – in our lives and throughout the Church of Christ.

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QUESTIONS

1. What promises has God given to those who meditate on his Word? (Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2-3)
2. How can we distinguish truth from error in the Church? If some doctrine or tradition is neither found in the Bible nor contrary to it, what should we do?
3. What is the significance of the fact that three times in Matthew 4:1-11 Jesus said, "It is written ...", and that the devil also quoted Scripture?
4. Can there be authority in our preaching if we do not preach and use God's Word? (cf. Acts 2:14-36 where almost half of Peter's sermon, as recorded, was quoted Scripture).
5. Why is there so little true *expository* preaching of the Bible today?
6. Does 1 John 2:27 mean that we no longer need to read the Bible or listen to people teach God's Word? If not, what does it mean?



REVIVE US AGAIN!

5

A Return to the Word of God

One of the things which marks backsliding and apostasy is a denial of, or turning away from, the Word of God. When God's Word is neglected and persistently disobeyed, moral and spiritual problems quickly follow. This is just as true of society as a whole, as it is of individuals.

"The Law is a school teacher to bring us to Christ" (Galatians 3:24), but if this Law is watered-down, liberalized, "re-interpreted" (that is, given token acknowledgment but in fact denied), then sin will abound, leading to apostasy.

Conversely, in all times of true revival, there has been a return to the Word of God as the authoritative, inspired direction and laws of God for His people. E.g., Ezra (Ezra 7:10, 25-26), Josiah (2 Chronicles 34:14-33); cf. Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 36:1-32). In times of revival there is a return to the reading, studying and preaching of the Bible as the authoritative, inspired Word of God, the authority by which our lives are to be governed.

The inspired, authoritative, infallible Word of God

1. Inspired

By "inspired" we mean that the Bible was inspired by God and that, while He used men to write it down, the thoughts and content were of divine inspiration, not human invention. Therefore we cannot argue against it; as Christians we are to obey it! The Bible is not like a lamb which needs to be defended; it is like a lion – let it loose and it will defend itself!

Over 200 years ago a very well-known French philosopher Voltaire said that within 100 years the Bible would be a forgotten book. One hundred years later the house he had lived in was the headquarters of the Geneva Bible Society! Voltaire is almost unknown today, while the Bible continues to be the world's best seller! Voltaire has no effect on most people's

lives today, while the Bible has a profound effect on the lives of hundreds of millions of people!

2. Authoritative

Because the Bible is inspired by God, it is the supreme authority in the life of the Christian, and the Church as a whole. Unscriptural traditions, superstitions, the doctrines of men, etc., are to be rejected. There is one book, the Bible, that is uniquely inspired and our sole authority; there is no other such book. This does not, of course, mean that we should never read other Christian books. It simply means that while other Christian books may have some measure of inspiration, they do not have the stamp of total divine inspiration and authority, or infallibility. All other books will pass away, but God's Word will never pass away (Mark 13:31).

There is no other basis for doctrine, correction, reproof, Christian conduct, morality, etc., other than God's Word (2 Timothy 3:14-17). All Christian faith, hope, belief and living is based on it.

God's Word is not relative; it is absolute! God does not say "I think this ... or possibly this is true". He says "Thus saith the Lord ..." and "I am the truth" (John 14:6).

In these days when there is so much "relative" teaching ("situation ethics", "political correctness", etc.), where nothing is taught as black and white but everything is taught as shades of grey, it is reassuring to know that there is a sure foundation upon which we can stand; a basis for discerning right from wrong, truth from error, good from evil.

3. Infallible

By "infallible" we mean that the Bible, as originally given, was without error of any kind. It is completely true, correct and perfect in every sense of the word.

The earliest parts of the Bible were probably written about 3500 years ago, and the latest about 1900 years ago. So we no longer have the original manuscripts, and the copies we do

have may differ slightly in various parts, especially in the Old Testament where the meaning of some phrases is uncertain. Moreover, all English Bibles are translations of what was originally Hebrew, Chaldean, Aramaic (a derived Hebrew dialect) and Greek.

However, God has so over-ruled in the preservation of very old texts, and in translation, that there is no major doctrine or important fact that is in dispute as a result of this. While the meaning of a few verses or parts of verses may be still in doubt, they in no way affect the life, faith or conduct of Christian believers today. God has miraculously preserved His Word over 3500 years of history!

So the Bible is the only basis on which we can discuss differences in doctrine, Church practice, etc. It is our sole authority, our final judge, in all matters of faith and conduct.

A warning!

However, having said that, let us beware that we do not allow doctrine to divide true Christians. In “defending the faith” we must beware that we do not attack fellow Christians! Herein lies the problem: while we must earnestly seek after and practice the truth, we will find that other true believers differ in some points from us. If they are born-again Christians who believe God’s Word, and are seeking to do His will, we should by all means discuss doctrinal differences but not allow them to divide us.

How can we know the truth?

The Bible is our final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. If something is Scriptural, then we are to believe it and do it. If it is contrary to Scripture, then we must have no part in it.

Jesus said to the Jews who believed in Him, “If you continue in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the Truth, and the Truth will make you free” (John 8:31-32). Notice that those who know the truth are those who are true believers in Jesus Christ and who obey His word. Jesus also said that “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all the Truth” (John 16:13). In both these passages the word “you” is in the plural; that is, the whole Truth is not given privately to individual Christians but the Truth is revealed by the Holy Spirit to the Church as a whole (cf. 2 Peter 1:20).

Thus, to know the Truth we must **believe**, we must **obey**, and we must have our ears open to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to and through the Church as a whole. If we do not believe the Bible to be the inspired, authoritative Word of God then our own minds will lead us into all sorts of heresies. If we do not obey the Bible then we will deceive ourselves (James 1:22); in fact, we have to deceive ourselves in order to disobey what we know is true! If we fail to realise that God is revealing Truth to the whole Church, the whole of His Body, then we will become petty, introverted, exclusive, narrow-minded little denominational cliques, instead of the mighty Church of Jesus Christ that we are meant to be. It is, of course, “exclusive truth”, usually revealed to one individual person, that begins a cult.

The written Word

In the Bible we have the written eternal Word of God (**logos**) given to all people for all time. We must, of course, be careful how we apply this Word to our lives. Picking verses out of context for guidance, picking out promises, etc., can lead us into error. However, it is the objective, un-changing Word of God which keeps us from going into the extremes of existentialism or the experiential. Over-emphasis on spiritual experiences and the supernatural, to the exclusion of God’s written Word, has hindered revivals in the past. We need both the Spirit, and the Word, of God.

The quickened Word

The quickened Word (**rhema**) is when the Holy Spirit takes a portion of the written Word and applies it very directly to our lives today. It is quickened (made alive) to us in such a way that we *know* God has spoken to us then and there, by His Spirit.

The revealed Word

The revealed Word (**apokalupto**) of God is when the Holy Spirit speaks directly to our mind and spirit, giving us a personal word or revelation concerning His will for us. He may bring understanding of the Scriptures, reveal the future, guide us, assure us, or help us in some particular area of need, etc. This, however, in no way excludes the need for the written and quickened Word. All three must be kept in balance.

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