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Ankerberg: According to the writings of those who participated in it, the Founding Fathers opened Congress with a three-hour prayer session.

### **What happened during that prayer time?**

Barton: Well, perhaps there's no better description of what went on in that prayer time than the letters between John and Abigail Adams. Now, those are fascinating letters. They're worth reading. You can get them at a local library. You'll never see letters written back and forth between two people that have as much Scripture as those letters between John and Abigail.

John told Abigail what had happened that morning, and in his writing to Abigail he said, "Just this morning we had heard that Great Britain had opened fire on Boston." And that's a great concern, because we were still British subjects. We did not have an army. We did not have a navy.

We had no way to defend ourselves. And so they were greatly concerned.

John told Abigail, he said, "But our Psalm for this morning was Psalm 35. He said, "I beg you, read that Psalm." He said, "God used Psalm 35 to put our hearts at rest. We know it's going to be all right. We prayed Psalm 35 as a Congress this morning." And Psalm 35 is an excellent prayer for these people, particularly feeling that they had an unprovoked attack coming at them.

Now, Congress read and prayed Psalm 35 over a three-hour period. Well, John continued a very faithful correspondence with Abigail and in another letter that he sent to Abigail he told her, "Today, Congress did one of the wisest things it could possibly have done. Today, we called for a national day of prayer and fasting." And he told her, "We've appointed a continental fast." He said, "Millions will be upon their knees at once before their great Creator imploring His forgiveness and His blessings, His smiles on American council and arms." And he told Abigail, "Abigail, can you imagine the impact of having millions of people upon their knees at once praying to God?"

This is a very common act of our Founding Fathers. They called for national days of prayer and thanksgiving on a very regular basis. They were very specific in their prayer requests. They were very emphatically Christian in their prayer requests. They called the nation to prayer and fasting time after time after time. And they were so serious about it that when they called for a national day of prayer and fasting, businesses shut down so that they could dedicate the entire day to seriously fasting and praying for the nation.

### **This was a time of serious prayer.**

But what's also fascinating is the fact that Congress itself was a very faithful recorder of God answering prayers. You see, when God answered one of those days of prayer and fasting, Congress would then turn around, document the answers to the prayers, and would then proclaim a national day of prayer and thanksgiving. And in that day of prayer and thanksgiving they would list all

the specifics how God had answered their prayers throughout.

Now, on one of these days of thanksgiving John Adams again wrote Abigail and said, "You know, we've had this day of prayer and fasting. You wouldn't believe what's going on now."

And he gave her five examples of things that should not have happened.

Again, this was still before we had officially separated from Great Britain; we had no army; we had no navy of our own. We were just individual citizens starting to stand and rise and fight. Groups like the Minutemen.

We didn't have an organized militia yet. And yet John Adams said after that last day of prayer and fasting, "Colonel Smith and a group of our militia"—now, this is American farmers basically—"captured a British fort."

Now, Britain is the number one military power in the world and here one of our colonels with a handful of soldiers captures a British fort with the loss of no lives.

Then John went on to say, he said, "On another occasion, one of our little galleys captured a 64-gun British man o'war and captured a 20-gun British man o'war." And we did not have our own navy. Our navy very literally amounted to a rowboat with a cannon on each end. I mean, we still have some of those ships left from the early years of the American Revolution. At best, we could mount two, four, six guns in a ship, and yet we captured a 64-gun British man o'war?

### **How can that be explained?**

Well, this is the way John Adams explained it to Abigail in his letter:

"It appears to me that the Eternal Son of God is operating powerfully against the British nation."

### **Summation**

Now, this is what the Founding Fathers put in their own writings and they were very faithful in prayer throughout.

Now, it's inconceivable that people who called the nation to prayer, who had such a firm reliance of God, would want a policy that would prohibit students from having the opportunity to voluntarily pray.

This first official act of the Founding Fathers **completely** disproves any notion that they wanted to separate religious principles from public affairs.

**Psalm 35 King James Version (KJV)**

- 35 Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive with me:  
fight against them that fight against me.
- 2 Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help.
- 3 Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me:  
say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.
- 4 Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul:  
let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt.
- 5 Let them be as chaff before the wind:  
and let the angel of the Lord chase them.
- 6 Let their way be dark and slippery:  
and let the angel of the Lord persecute them.
- 7 For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit,  
which without cause they have digged for my soul.
- 8 Let destruction come upon him at unawares;  
and let his net that he hath hid catch himself:  
into that very destruction let him fall.
- 9 And my soul shall be joyful in the Lord: it shall rejoice in his salvation.
- 10 All my bones shall say, Lord, who is like unto thee,  
which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him,  
yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?
- 11 False witnesses did rise up;  
they laid to my charge things that I knew not.
- 12 They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.
- 13 But as for me, when they were sick,  
my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting;  
and my prayer returned into mine own bosom.
- 14 I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother:  
I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.
- 15 But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together:  
yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me,  
and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not:
- 16 With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.

- 17 Lord, how long wilt thou look on?  
rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.
- 18 I will give thee thanks in the great congregation:  
I will praise thee among much people.
- 19 Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me:  
neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without a cause.
- 20 For they speak not peace:  
but they devise deceitful matters against them that are quiet in the land.
- 21 Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me,  
and said, Aha, aha, our eye hath seen it.
- 22 This thou hast seen, O Lord:  
keep not silence: O Lord, be not far from me.
- 23 Stir up thyself, and awake to my judgment, even unto my cause,  
my God and my Lord.
- 24 Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness;  
and let them not rejoice over me.
- 25 Let them not say in their hearts, Ah, so would we have it:  
let them not say, We have swallowed him up.
- 26 Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together  
that rejoice at mine hurt:  
let them be clothed with shame and dishonour  
that magnify themselves against me.
- 27 Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause:  
yea, let them say continually, Let the Lord be magnified,  
which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant.
- 28 And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness  
and of thy praise all the day long.