

June 30, 2024

PRAYER AND PREACHING THE GOSPEL TO ALL PEOPLE

1 Timothy 2:1-7

(4 of 15 in a series through 1 Timothy)

Last week I began the sermon saying that it can feel almost miraculous for an individual to persevere in the faith when you consider all that is against us. Well, I think I might say the same thing about the church obeying and fulfilling the Great Commission. We've been tasked with preaching the gospel in all the nations of the world, baptizing individuals who repent and believe, and then teaching one another to obey all that Christ commands. And that has been the task given to the church since Jesus rose from the dead and charged his people in Matthew 28:18-20.

But think about all that has gone on in world history since that time. The people of God have often found themselves living through times of world upheaval, including two world wars and many other wars confined to certain nations or regions. In some cases, governments attacked Christians, declaring that it is illegal to share the gospel and persecuting or killing someone who might. And for many places in the world and for most of our history, just traveling to other areas with the gospel was dangerous. Think, for example, of Paul facing shipwreck and being adrift at sea, or of missionaries losing their spouses and children to disease and attack. And yet none of this is a surprise or unexpected reality to the Lord. Jesus made clear that he was sending us out as sheep in the midst of wolves.

Therefore, we might think that this is simply the way it is. We go forth, taking the gospel everywhere, while knowing that it will always be difficult, that it may well cost us our lives, and there's nothing we can do about it. And that's partly true. The first part is absolutely true. We should expect tribulation. The Bible makes clear that we should anticipate persecution and that it is through many tribulations that we'll enter the kingdom of God. But it's not quite true that there's nothing that we can do about it. And the reason I say that is because of the exhortation that comes to us in the text we're looking at this morning: 1 Timothy 2:1-7.

Starting in chapter 2 of 1 Timothy, Paul turns his attention to focus on matters of corporate worship. He'll end the chapter, talking about the roles of men and women in the church before focusing on the offices of elders and deacons in chapter 3. But the first matter he takes up in chapter 2 is the need for offering prayers in our time of corporate worship, what that should look like, and why we should do it. And what we'll find is that prayer is a powerful weapon we have at our disposal as we think about our overwhelming task of obeying the Great Commission.

We'll also see in our text that Paul weaves in a number of different topics, including prayer, living a peaceful life, God wanting all people to be saved, there being one God and one mediator between God and man, Jesus giving himself as a ransom for us, and Paul being appointed as a preacher for the Gentiles. And when you hear all of those topics, you may think, "Good grief, is Paul just tackling every topic that happens to pop into his mind as he writes?" But what we'll see

is that there is a tight logic that ties each of these things together. So, as we walk through the text, I want to simply provide points along the way that will help us follow the logic of Paul's argument. Therefore, we'll start where Paul starts, seeing that we should pray for our leaders so that we might live in peace and pursue godliness.

We should pray for our leaders so that we might live in peace and pursue godliness

As Paul begins this section, he starts with the primacy of prayer in our gathering. He writes, "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions" (vv. 1-2a). Now, when he lists all these different words for prayer—supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings—I don't think he wants us to think long about what precise kind of praying we're doing at a specific time in our corporate worship. Rather, he's saying that your praying in corporate worship should contain all times of prayers. He mentions supplications, which suggests we should ask God for his grace, blessings, and provision. He speaks of intercession, which indicates prayers where we pursue the Lord on behalf of another. He writes of thanksgivings, which obviously refer to prayers where we give thanks. And then he simply notes in general "prayers." So, Paul instructs us to pray in our service, voicing the full spectrum of what might be found in one's prayers. But then he seems to focus on supplications and intercessions—that is asking God for something and asking with regard to others.

He notes that these prayers are to be made "for all people," before focusing on government leaders, writing, "For kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (v. 2b). This focus on leaders helps us understand what Paul means by his exhortation for us to pray "for all people." I don't think he means for every person without exception. That is, Paul isn't telling us each Sunday to pray, trying to work through the world's population by name, perhaps taking note of the week's births and obituaries just so we can try to keep up with the changes, nor simply uttering some general prayer for "every person on the face of the earth." Rather, it seems that by saying we should pray for "all people," Paul is saying, "all kinds of people." That is, we pray for the poor, the wealthy, those in our city, others around the world, the unborn, those who are suffering, those who rule, and on and on. In other words, as we pray together, we should work our way through all kinds of classes and groups of people in our world—something we try to do and almost certainly can improve on.

But then Paul mentions one specific group that we should pray for that he wants to focus on, namely, our government leaders. He singles out "kings and all who are in high positions." Why? Paul answers, telling us that it is so "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way." Well, what does that mean and how does it work?

Here seems to be Paul's logic. We're dependent on our government leaders—whether kings, presidents, governors, or local leaders—in order for there to be peace in our city, state, nation, and world. We can see examples of how our leaders can do this poorly just thinking of recent examples. When Hamas attacked Israel, or Putin invaded Ukraine, or many other such examples, those decisions by government leaders throw the lives of people into tumult—the opposite of

peace. Or when many governors in our own nation prohibited churches from gathering in worship for extended periods of times—some of which the courts ruled acted unconstitutionally—that limited many from living a peaceful, godly life (since corporate worship is necessary to that). Or, when government officials don't clamp down on crime and allow criminals to rob, vandalize, or harm others without fitting punishment, it only escalates crime and forces its citizens to live in fear. Or when government leaders impose laws that allow people to kill the unborn, or irreparably harm children with puberty blockers and other such measures, or same-sex couples to marry and adopt children. Each of these acts brings violence and upheaval to a society. And we could point to many other manifestations of this, but these should suffice to show that our government leaders can play a big role in whether or not we're able to live a peaceful and quiet life, pursuing godliness.

Therefore, Paul instructs us to pray for them. We should pray that our local, state, national, and world leaders make decisions that lead to peace, punishing evildoers, enacting good and just laws, recognizing our right to worship, and on and on. These should be matters (and people) for whom the people of God are found praying for faithfully as we gather because they play a huge role in our ability to live a quiet, peaceful life, pursuing godliness.

But it's here that someone might say, "Then why did you begin with the Great Commission," since it can sound like the focus is just on one's ability to park your car, for example, without fear that it'll be broken into?" And the answer is Paul's second point in his logical argument. Peaceful conditions enable us more easily to reflect God's heart, taking the gospel to all.

Peaceful conditions enable us more easily to reflect God's heart, taking the gospel to all

Notice in the text how Paul moves from praying for leaders to enable us to live peaceful, quiet lives, to a focus on all peoples being saved. He writes, "This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (vv. 3-4).

Paul's logic seems to be that one key reason we pray for our leaders to enable us to live in peace and quietness is that such peaceful and quiet environments make it easier to proclaim the gospel world-wide. This is obviously true if we consider times or places where government leaders specifically persecute Christians, make it illegal to share the gospel, or punish anyone who would profess to be a Christian in baptism. It doesn't take a genius to see that evangelizing your neighbor is harder in those settings. And we know of places today where that is true, which is why missionaries often try to keep secret where they're going and what they're doing. And we know that throughout most of our history, to be a Christian is to face persecution or even death in many places. So it's obviously clear in those settings that if government leaders make decisions *not* to persecute Christians or make it *permissible* to share the gospel, that aids in the world-wide proclamation of the gospel.

But it's also the case that simply enacting good laws and enforcing them faithfully make gospel proclamation easier as well. As a simple example, if you can park your car without fear of it

getting broken into, while you're parking to go share the gospel with someone—that makes it easier. Or, ratcheting it up a bit, if we're in the midst of war and it's dangerous to go outside, then preaching the gospel to all men is quite challenging. There's a reason, for example, we pull our missionaries out of areas on occasions when war breaks out in that area. We're trying to save their lives, and we're acknowledging that this disruption of peace is making it quite difficult to carry on the work of evangelizing, baptizing, and teaching people to obey Jesus in that area. But so many of these situations can be controlled by our governing leaders.

And so we pray for our leaders to enable there to be peace because it allows us more easily to share the gospel with all people everywhere, and the reason we want to do that is because that's the heart of God our Savior. Our God did not want merely the Jewish people to know him. That's why he promised Abraham that he would bless all the families of the earth through his offspring, who is Christ. It's why the Lord scattered the first believers into Samaria and Judea to preach the gospel. It's why he raised up Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles. And it's why in the Great Commission he tells to make disciples of all the nations. Our God is God of all people, and therefore he will save people from every tongue, tribe, and nation. That's his heart. He wants all people to be saved, and it's why we preach the gospel to all people everywhere. It's why we've sent Casey and Giuly to the jungles of Peru, Timothy and Haley to the mountains of Utah, the Ortizes and Kagarukis to the streets to the bustling city of New York, and many others to many other places. We know our God's heart is to save people from all peoples of the earth, and so we take the gospel everywhere and preach it to all men indiscriminately. So we pray for our leaders to enable there to be peace so that we might more easily take the gospel to all people, knowing that this reflects the heart of God our Savior.

But Paul continues his logic by noting that one reason we preach the gospel to all people is because there is one God and one mediator between God and men.

We preach the gospel to all people because there's one God and one mediator between God and men

We can clearly see that this is what Paul says next in our text, as he writes in verses 5-6, "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." But why does Paul note each of these things? How do they support the need for us to preach the gospel to all people and the argument Paul has made to this point? Well, let's take it one element at a time to see Paul's logic. First, Paul notes that there is one God. Why say that?

Well, the most obvious reason to note that is because though people all over the earth may worship different gods, there is only one true God before whom we will stand in judgment and who can save us (which is why Paul calls God, "God our Savior" in v. 3). So, you may go into the jungles of Peru and find a tribe of people worshiping their god and being very faithful to him, but that will not lead to their salvation because that god is simply the creation of their minds (or hands). He, she, or it is simply not God; there is only one God. Everyone on this planet is

required to worship not the god they simply dream up or want to exist. They're required to worship the one true God.

But, we might counter by saying, "Sure, but maybe there are many ways to come to this one true God. Maybe we can be saved by worshiping another god and the Lord will allow that to count. Maybe we can come to the one true God by whatever means we want or by worshiping whatever god we want, as long as we're sincere?"

This is what C. S. Lewis believed. In the last book of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Lewis records this conversation between the true God (Aslan) and a man who worshiped a false god named Tash. Here's how he records that conversation:

"Alas, Lord, I am no son of Thine but the servant of Tash."

He answered, "Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. . . . I take to me the services which thou has done to him, for I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore, if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man does a cruelty in my name, then though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted." ...

But I said also (for the truth constrained me), "Yes, I have been seeking Tash all my days."

"Beloved," said the Glorious One, "unless they desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek."¹

So, is Lewis right? Can we just worship whatever god we want, and the Lord will allow that to be the means whereby we are saved before the one true God? As great and as helpful as Lewis was in a number of areas, the answer is absolutely not! What Lewis is teaching is not simply wrong but dangerous, and it undermines our urgency to preach the gospel to all people. But how does Paul show us that Lewis and arguments like the one he makes are wrong? Well, after telling us that there is one true God, he adds, "And there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time (vv. 5-6).

There is only one way to the one true God, and that is through Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He alone is mediator. A mediator is one who can represent each party in an issue. But who can bring mankind to God, representing each? There is only one—the God-man. Jesus is God in that he is God the Son. And he is also fully man. He is fully human as well as fully

¹ C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: Collier Books, 1970), 164-65.

God—two natures in one person. And because he became one of us, he can represent us before God. But he not only represents us before God as our human representative, he gave himself as a ransom for us. He died in our place as our substitute, giving himself to pay our penalty so that we might be delivered from Satan, sin, death, and the wrath of God. So it is only through faith in Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that we can be saved.

This is why we must preach the gospel of Jesus Christ to all men. God is the only true God, and Jesus Christ is the only way to know this God as your Savior. He alone is mediator. You must repent of your sins and trust that Jesus is who the Bible says he is and that he lived, died, and was raised for us and for our salvation. It is through Jesus alone that we are saved. There was a time in OT history that you could be saved by faith without knowing the name Jesus, but—as Paul notes in Acts 17:30-31—“The times of ignorance God overlooked but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.” That man is *the man*, Jesus Christ. And he is the name alone whereby men must be saved. Therefore (and this is the last point), we must preach the gospel to all people.

Therefore, we must preach the gospel to all people

This is where Paul began and ends. He notes at the end of verse 6 that Christ’s saving work is “the testimony given at the proper time,” which is a confusing and difficult phrase to translate but probably refers to the fact that Christ came at the right time in human history and is now to be testified to. And this is something Paul makes explicit in verse 7. He was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher to the Gentiles—that is to all the nations—so that all men everywhere might hear the gospel, believe, and be saved.

And thus Paul’s logical argument ends. Let us, therefore, pray for our leaders to govern in such a way that there is peace. Then, let’s use this peaceful setting to go forth with the gospel because this reflects the heart of God who desires all people to be saved. And let’s feel the urgency of our task as we recognize that there is only one true God, and the only way to come to him is to trust in his crucified and risen Son who alone is mediator between God and man. Therefore, go forth and preach, as hearing the gospel is man’s only hope for salvation and God’s ordained plan to bless peoples from all nations. And let’s express our hope in this gospel message now as we come to the table. Amen.