

## Marks of Gospel Fueled Prayer

1 Timothy 2:1-7

*"For even the Son of Man came...to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Mark 10:45

**Introduction:** This past week I had the privilege to sit with other leaders in Atlanta to pray, discuss, and dream about the present and future of global missions. This meant that not only did I miss the fires around here by an hour, but also got to hear some news and update that was both inspiring and concerning, both hopeful and cautionary, both exhilarating and disappointing. We heard about the persecution of the African churches in the CAR and Chad, how one pastor was meeting with 5 of his leaders to begin planning their Christmas services when a tribal gang interrupted, told the pastor to leave, and proceeded to gun down the other 5 men. This is happening to Grace or Charis church pastors and churches, who are having homes and church buildings burned with the hope that they will simply leave and allow the warring factions to come in and occupy. Despite this, church planting in this region is on the rise, with now some 3,700 Charis churches counted, with the number growing every year. But there was some discouraging information. Two statements stood out to my mind and heart:

*"Recently I heard someone observe that America may be entering the **era of 'post-missions'**. While we still enjoy a positive status with the evangelical church, it seems interest in cross-culture missions is steadily eroding on almost all fronts. In my lifetime and in our culture as a whole, missions appears to be sliding steadily from **celebrity status** to tolerated status to irrelevant status to **offensive status**. The ongoing and erosive elevation of '**Gospel presence**' over '**Gospel proclamation**' should concern all of us greatly."*

When Jim Elliot died by the hand of the Auca Indians of Ecuador in 1956, along with four others, they were hailed as heroes, not just of the faith, but nationally. *Life* magazine did a 10 page spread on their life and mission, celebrating their efforts. The reaction in our day when a young man named John Chou died trying to reach an island people was one of disappointment, ridicule and a head shaking anger at this *needless* death.

The other phrase that struck me in this paragraph is the elevation of **gospel presence** and the lessening of **gospel proclamation**. "We want to *be Christ to people*" has largely come out of a philosophy that is credited to St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach the gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words". This is dangerous thinking. The sentiment is understood: we want to live out the message of the gospel, since many have *heard* it but have not *seen* it. But when we cut out the **proclamation of the gospel** (which literally means "good news" to be heralded), we can lose the message all together.

"Missions has been so redefined that sending long term workers to difficult ministries is no longer considered **necessary or wise**."

Whether it's the tension of trying to keep a church going, the call of our culture to **safety** and **security** (1 Thess. 5:3), a **misunderstanding of a Biblical mandate**, or a lack of obedience to it, the church in America is by and large waning on its zeal in making disciples who would be sent to reach all nations, proclaiming Christ, and calling people to follow Jesus, obeying Him. *What does this have to do with our church? More specifically, what does this have to do with 1 Timothy?*

We can only plan so far. We are totally dependent on God working, drawing those He's called to Himself, in ways that only He has ordained through Jesus Christ. So our prayer does not dictate what will specifically happen. We are not sure on the other end of our prayer if God will accomplish what we ask for. But we know one thing is sure. **God will not do anything through us in terms of our mission of making disciples without prayer.** What we pray for is what we ultimately care about and value. What we care about and value will drive the activity, passion, and resources of life. Our desire is to pray, and pray after the **heart of God, to pray for the things He's passionate about, so that we can walk in obedience and live according to His purpose.** This is what we see in the beginning of 1 Timothy 2.

#### Gospel Fueled Prayer Includes All People (1-2a)

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings **be made for all people,**<sup>2</sup> **for kings and all who are in high positions,**

#### Content of Praying for All People

Notice that Paul gave this issue "first importance" when it came to corporate gatherings, something that he commanded rather than suggested. I don't think we'd argue that prayer is important in our life or that it shouldn't be a primary action, but I'm not sure "**what**" we pray for is always clear. There are **4 descriptions of prayer** here, each one describing an aspect of gospel driven prayer.

- 1) **Supplications** – This word has to do with **need**, the root word coming from a "lack or being deprived of something." In gospel driven prayer, it is a reminder of the great need that others have for salvation, the lack of hope with which they are living.
- 2) **Prayers** – This is a general word for prayer, but it is always directed toward God. It carries the idea of worship and reverence, coming to God in fear rather than flippancy.
- 3) **Petitions** – The idea is a description of prayer that has free access to God with childlike confidence while we plead on behalf of others. It has a sense of advocacy, empathy, compassion, sympathy, and involvement.
- 4) **Thanksgiving** – A spirit of gratitude to God for the extension of grace in the gospel. Thanksgivng to God should color every one of our prayers (Phil. 4:6), and reminds us that nothing can happen outside of His will and power.

#### Concept of praying for All People

There are two groups that are to be prayed for, one broad and one specific:

- 1) **All people** – We are to pray for all people, even those we do not know. It was clear in this command that one of the teachings of the false teachers was the wrong kind of **exclusivity**. The gospel is exclusive on its own, with the gateway of salvation being regeneration and saving faith. But the false teachers were adding to that mix, saying one had to keep the finer points of the Law or have some sort of secret knowledge to gain salvation and access to the church. People had to become LIKE THEM before they could receive salvation. So the reminder to the church is that we have a **global call**, a desire to see all people come to Christ. Prayer is what lifts our head and perspective in the midst of busy distractions. Our minds and hearts follow our prayer life, and though we cannot reach everyone personally, we certainly can pray for them. One of the reasons that the church universal loses its evangelistic and missional edge is that she stops praying for the most important things. When prayer stops, so do our efforts, squeezed out by many other good and lesser things.

- 2) **Kings and those in authority** - A subset of the call to pray for all was prayer on behalf of those in political authority over the people of the church. This brings clarity on a few levels. **First**, it is a reminder that God is the ultimate authority over governmental structures (Rom. 13:1) so rather than fighting against the government the church is called to submit, including the paying of taxes (Rom. 13:5-6) knowing that God raises up and tears down kings (Daniel 2:21). **Second**, since the ruler of the day of Paul's writing was **Nero**, and since Nero was evil and wicked to his own people and Christians alike, it was not the merit of the person that warranted prayer, and **Third**, the prayer offered was that of salvation for the king or authority figure. It was not a prayer for the rising up of a political party or the implementation of a particular agenda. It meant fervent prayer for repentance and faith of kings.

**NOTE:** As a principle, does this characterize our political involvement? This does NOT exclude a Christian's activity in the process, especially in a country like ours that welcomes it. However, the transcendent principle in ALL areas for ALL time is that we are commanded to pray for salvation for those over us. What would be different about our attitudes if we implemented this? What would that do for how we viewed those in opposition?

### **Gospel Fueled Prayer Walks Alongside Godly Living (2b)**

that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way

#### **Walks in Peace**

The best advertisement for Christianity is Christians. The story is told of Thomas Huxley:

*"As far as we know, Thomas Huxley, the famous agnostic, never put his faith in Christ, but he did experience some degree of conviction. Toward the end of his life, Huxley was a guest at a retreat in a country home. Sunday came, and most of the guest went to church. Naturally, Huxley did not go. Alone he approached a man known to have **simple and radiant Christian faith**. Huxley said, 'Suppose you don't go to church today. Suppose you stay at home and you tell me quite simply what your Christian faith means to you and why you are a Christian.' 'But,' the man said, 'you could demolish my arguments in an instant. I am not clever enough to argue with you.' Huxley gently replied, 'I don't want to argue with you; I just want you to tell me simply what this Christ means to you.' The man stayed and did as Huxley had requested. When he finished, there were tears in the old agnostic's eyes."<sup>1</sup>*

We pray that God would save those in political power **so that we can live:**

**Peaceful** lives, which means the "absence of outside disturbances"

**Quiet lives**, which means the absence of *internal* disturbances.

This is similar to the charge of **1 Thessalonians 4:10b-11**, *"But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before **outsiders** and be dependent on no one."*

#### **Walks in Active Obedience**

Far from being a prayer of ease and comfort, this is a prayer that would see the church be able to play out its mission to the world without needless disruption. Paul followed that up with a focus on **godliness**, which would be a proper *attitude and reverence to God*, and **dignity**, which would be a *moral earnestness and proper behavior in the world*. Paul knew that anyone desiring to live a godly life would

<sup>1</sup> Kent Hughes, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, p. 60.

face persecution (2 Tim. 3:17), and that we are still to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt. 5:43-44). The prayer was NOT that we would be people who avoided conflict, but who only endured the right kind. It meant that the church should not be known as a thorn in the side of governments or communities but blessings. Our church should seek to bless Simi Valley, who is known to care for the lowly and love our neighbors, and if we are to be rejected, hated, and persecuted (which we will!) we make sure it is for the TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, not the way we act.

### Gospel Fueled Prayer Knows the Heart of God (3-4)

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

#### Our Saving God's Desire

This is admittedly a hard phrase if left alone out of the context of 1 Timothy, the New Testament, and all of Scripture. At first blush the logic would seem to be that: **What God wants He gets; He wants all people to be saved; Thus all people will be saved**, which is the teaching of universalism. But if we understand this in context, we begin to see this is a monumentally powerful expression of God's heart. The word used in verse 4 is **thelo**, which is the word that expresses desire that springs out of emotions and inclinations rather than deliberation. It is also in the *passive voice*, which reads "to be saved" rather than "wishes to save all men". God's desire is that **none would perish but that all would reach repentance** (2 Pet. 3:9), since He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23) He not only desires that everyone would be saved, but would come to a **full, experiential knowledge of the truth** (epignosis). This is His heart, His passion, and set the course of all of redemptive history.

#### Our Saving God's Will

There is another word for "will" or "desire" which is actually in verse 8, and its the word *boulamai*. This is a will of **purpose or deliberation**. Paul used it as a command in verse 8. This will is what comes about, and everything that God *boulamai's* will come to pass. We see this in terms of our salvation in sections of Scripture like Ephesians 1:4-5, which says that God chose His own before the foundation of the world, and predestined them in love. 1 Peter 1:1-2 Peter directs his letter to the elect...according to the foreknowledge of God. And John 6:37-44 points out that Jesus saved all those that the Father sent Him, and He would not lose one (see also 2 Thess. 2:13; Rom. 8:30; Matt. 11:25-30; Acts 13:48). Later on in 1 Timothy 4:10, Paul states that God is the Savior of all men, but **especially to those who believe**. In other words, God's heart is that all would be saved, but only those that believe will be saved. Is this a place that the Bible is saying two different things?

1. There is a difference between desire and will. We desire that we would never have to discipline our kids, since they would obey the first time every time. We don't WANT to do it, but our WILL steps in when our desire does not come to pass. We may desire to not go to work tomorrow, but our WILL kicks in when we understand that to stay home will not go well with our soul (or employment).
2. God's desire (thelo) is unfulfilled all the time, since we continuously sin and break His commands. But though His will is hard to comprehend, His desire reveals to us that what He wants is that all people would taste and see that He is good, that Jesus is real, and that there is life offered in Him.
3. Understanding both God's desire and will should **shape the way we pray**. I heard it again recently that those who believe in God's sovereignty in salvation lack evangelistic zeal. If that is what you believe, then you have a complete misunderstanding of God. We should pray along the lines of God's *thelo*, since we do not ultimately know His *boulamai* for every person. When I view my neighbor, daughter, co-worker, or enemy, I have no idea if God will save them or not. But I know without a

shadow of a doubt that God desires that that person would be saved. So we pray. So we proclaim. So we move.

### **Gospel Fueled Prayer Believes the Work of God (5-6)**

**For 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.

#### **Basis of God's Work: *One God***

The fact that there is one God not only ties in the whole of the Bible (Deut. 6:4) in that the Lord is One, but it ties together all of humanity. The fact that there is one God who exists in 3 distinct persons (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) shows the basis of God's work and our **prayer**. People may believe there are multiple gods. Whole religions are built on 'many-gods' foundations. But Paul reminded the church at Corinth that there is no such thing as an idol, since *"an idol has no real existence, and there is no God but one."* (1 Cor. 8:4). The reason this is a big deal is this simply fact: if there are multiple gods, there would be multiple ways of salvation. But every human is under the responsibility and authority of One God, and thus needs to be reconciled with THAT God. This is why we can claim exclusivity to our Savior Jesus Christ, *"And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12). But how did Christ do this?

#### **Basis for Redemption: *One Mediator***

God's saving heart was demonstrated in His SAVING WORK, and that came through Jesus Christ. Notice that the mediating work of Jesus is to stand between **God and man**. This is fascinating. He did not stand between man and Satan, since we did not have to be saved from Satan but from God. A mediator brings two sides together when there is a fracture or break in relationship. We see this in the life of Job, in Job 9:32-33 when he was trying to understand what had happened in his life and how to have an audience with God, who he could not see, *"For he is not a man, as I am, that I might answer him, that we should come to trial together. There is no arbiter between us who might lay his hand on us both."*

**What was Job calling for?** A mediator. What was he longing for: A Savior. This is what Jesus did, He came to bring man and God back together, since our relationship was irreparably broken in the Fall, with the only recourse in God's hand to pour out His wrath on us.

**How did Jesus mediate?** There had to be a **ransom paid**. In the time of 1 Timothy money could be paid to release one who had been kidnapped. In this case, the amount paid would ransom, or take the place of the kidnapped loved one. In this text the simple word for ransom *lutron* is not used, but the word *hyper antilutron*, which carries with it the idea of substitution. Also note the text says that in this case, **Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all**. The cost of buying us out of our sin and from the wrath of God was that He would take our place! He did this voluntarily - John 10:18 says that "No one takes my life from me, I lay it down myself." After being a parent, I think I finally get it. I would give anything, even my very life, to save one of my daughters, let alone all three. And His ransom was for **all people, sufficient for all**. That means that anyone, anyone who would believe, confess, follow, and repent will be saved.

**How does this shape and motivate our prayer?** We pray that all would hear the glorious truth of the work of Jesus on our behalf, that He died in our place, that it was sufficient to cover all our sin, and effective for us when we come to Him.

**Gospel Fueled Prayer Emulates the Same Mission as Paul (7)**

For this I was appointed a **preacher** and an **apostle** (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the **Gentiles** in faith and truth.

Finally, Paul affirmed that this prayer was of utmost importance since it was this exact mission to which He was called. He was appointed to proclaim the message of salvation to all, since *the Gentiles* would have covered all nations. The word for preacher here is from the word *kerusso*, which had to do with being a **herald, public speaker, or proclaimer**. Before the day of mass communication, the way to get your message out was to go to the town square and make your message known publically. This is what Paul did with the gospel. It is no different for us today, since we know that "***everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?***" (Rom. 10:13-14)

We know we are committed to praying for this since "*the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God...For the Jews demand signs and the Greeks wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.*" (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-23).

So we pray. We pray in a way that is shaped by God's desire. We pray believing that Christ died to pay a ransom for all, and those that believe and repent will be ransomed. We desire to see God save all the nations, but also understand that He uses His own to reach the nations, so we need more and more proclaimers of the good news in Simi Valley, Southern California, and to the ends of the earth.