

Pray Like God Prays – 1 Timothy 2:1-7 – 8/18/2019

Recently, China began cracking down on Christianity again. Crosses are being burned. Banners are being replaced with pictures of their current president. Minors are not allowed to enter. A current pastor faces up to 15 years in prison. What kind of prayer do we say for such a government?

What about the El Paso shooting? A man massacres 22 people in a Walmart. They find him in his car a mile down the road. He gets out with his hands up and is arrested without incident. What kind of prayer do we say for that man? I'm guessing we all have some conflicting thoughts running through our head. Thoughts of justice, thoughts of him getting what he deserves, thoughts of forgiveness, hope he turns from his evil ways. Did anybody come up with this: prayers of thanksgiving?

This is a hard teaching Paul gives us. **“Make petitions, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving for all people— for kings and all those in authority.”** Imagine how difficult to swallow this was for Timothy and the others who read this letter. The year was about 64 ad. Christianity was still a minor religion, but by now it had spread throughout the Roman Empire. Nero was in charge. He was not a popular emperor. 5 years in, he had his own mother murdered. What Nero is most known for is playing his fiddle while watching the city of Rome burn. Now, this probably isn't true, for one, fiddles weren't invented for hundreds of years after this. But there was a fire. It burned for three days. Two-thirds of the city was destroyed. Half the population was left homeless. Rumors spread Nero started the fire to make room for a new palace. Nero needed a scapegoat and he found it in the Christians. He rounded up a few of them and tortured them into confessing. This began the first national persecution of Christians. Punishment for being a Christian included being burned and torn apart by wild animals. Put yourself in these Christian's shoes hearing Paul's words for the first time. Pray for, give thanksgiving for, Nero?

Perhaps our first thought is that God would rain down his justice on such people. That he would smite them like he did Sodom and Gomorrah. But we better stop and think about what we're asking when we call down God's justice. How well does our life hold up under God's justice?

Let's look at just one small part of our life—prayer. Again we hear Paul's teaching, pray for all people. Maybe our own prayer life is pretty sparse, to begin with. We're like one of those friends who only come to you when they need something. You don't hear from them for years until you have something they need. Then they're suddenly your best friend in the world. Is that how we come to God? With silence and indifference until things are going bad? Or maybe we do pray. In fact, we don't just pray for ourselves, we pray for those we love. We thank God for the blessings he gives us. Maybe, maybe we even understand that praying for rulers leads to peace and that's good for us too. So we pray for the president even if they're a republican or even if they're a democrat. Brothers and sisters in Christ, don't get me wrong, that kind of prayer is not sinful. But let's look deeper. Why are we to pray for all people? Paul says it's because God wants all people to be saved.

Is that our attitude too? Or do we just want all people like us to be saved? Do we want our church to be filled with people regardless of who they are and what they've done or is church a social experience we want filled with people we can be comfortable around? God is perfect. He wants us to love as he loves. So many of our thoughts are self-focused, self-centered, and selfish. If we're calling down God's righteous judgment, we're the number one deserver.

We heard about God's judgment in our Genesis reading. God was going to destroy a whole city for its wickedness. So how can God say he wants all men to be saved? How can God be a God who demands righteous perfection and at the same time say he is a loving God who wants all people to be saved. It just doesn't add up. We find the answer to this paradox in verse 5. A mediator, a go-between

between God and man. A man to represent mankind but also, as our VBS kids learned on Monday, true God. Able to calm a storm with just a few words.

Have you ever wondered where the term, a king's ransom came from? In 1193 Richard the Lion Heart was returning from the crusades when he was captured by the Holy Roman Empire. They demanded that England pay three tons of silver to get him back. The people of England loved their king so much they submitted to extra taxation. Nobles donated their fortunes. All to get King Richard back. After a few months, the ransom was paid. It took a whole nation to pay the price for that king.

In Jesus, we find the opposite. All mankind was hopelessly corrupted by sin. The world owed an unimaginable debt for their crimes against God and one another. So Jesus, true God, became true man. He lived to God's perfect standard. Then he did something only God could do. He offered himself as the ransom price. His life in exchange for the world. It took a whole nation to pay the price of a king who they loved. It took God's Son to pay for the sins of a world who hated him.

That means the world's sins are forgiven. If the world's sins are forgiven, your sins are forgiven. Because look around, you are part of the world. Our struggling stumbling prayer life is forgiven. Our selfish inward-looking attitudes are forgiven. Those sins taken away. Paid for.

In fact, all people's sins really and truly are forgiven. When God said he wants all people to be saved he meant it. He paid the price for them all. Imagine I opened a bank account in your name and filled it with a million dollars. That money is yours. It's there waiting for you, all you have to do is go to the bank and get it. The price for our all sins has been paid. How does the world receive the benefit of that payment? It's by coming to a knowledge of the truth. By knowing who Jesus is and trusting in him.

So when it comes to being a mediator, Jesus makes a better door than a window. When it comes to our sins, Jesus stands between us and God. God looks at us and sees only Jesus perfection and righteousness. God's demand for perfection is met. When it comes to our access to God, Jesus is the door to eternal life. Trusting in him as our savior is our way to be saved.

This whole truth is summed up in the words our kids sang today, "All our sins were like an ocean. We were drowning day by day. Then our Life Preserver, Jesus, Came and took our sins away. Jesus died and rose to save us, even though he's God's own Son. Now we're safe inside his lifeboat where there's room for everyone."

But if God already wants all people to be saved. Why does God want us to pray for it too? The fact that all people were saved in Christ. The fact that Jesus died and rose for all people. This was the fact that Paul was now sharing with the world. We learn to know the truth by hearing the truth. That's the way God chose to bring this message to the world. Let's follow Paul's logic to see why our prayers are so important for that.

Pray for all people. Pray especially for kings and those in authority. For one thing, those in authority can bring peace and make life better for all people. It also allows Christians to study God's word in peace and also to spread God's word in peace. This is pleasing to God because God wants all people to be saved, that is, to come to a knowledge of the truth. When Christians can spread God's word in peace, it gives people the opportunity to come to a knowledge of the truth. What is that truth? There is one God and one way to come to God. Jesus. Jesus gave himself for all people. We know God wants all people to be saved because he died for all people. To tell the world what God has done, this was Paul's whole purpose in life. Therefore, pray for rulers so that the gospel can be preached.

God promises to answer your prayers. God already knows exactly what is going to happen. Yet he still actually takes into account our prayers and lets them influence his plan for the world. There's an overused phrase on the internet, "sending thoughts and prayers." It's mocked because a tragedy will happen and people will change their facebook profile picture to show support and type out thoughts and prayers thinking they've done some good in the world. There's some truth behind it, back up your prayers with action but don't be fooled. Prayer is powerful. Prayers get answered. When we pray for our rulers, it creates peace. Peace in this world so believers and unbelievers alike can live in quiet. But also it allows us to practice our religion, to share our religion, to tell others about the wonderful news of Christ. Our prayers bring peace in this world and peace in the world to come.

But this still doesn't answer our original question, does it? How can we pray a prayer of thanksgiving for those who murder and persecute? Reason number two to pray for all people. Children learn by imitation. A child sees his father shaving and wants to put shaving cream on their face too. Kids will walk around in their parent's shoes pretending to have conversations on the phone in meaningless babble. When a kid is learning to talk they repeat things, in broken sentences at first but they get better and better. When we pray, we merely repeat God's promises and attitudes back to him. And as we do, we learn.

So pray like God prays. Pray in thanksgiving that Jesus died for a wretched sinner like you. Realize that Jesus died for those who murder, those who hate, those who persecute Christians. That's how much he loved them. God wants them to be saved too. Pray that they come to know the truth. Pray they come to know Jesus. Because you know Jesus.