

1 Timothy 2:1-10

I want us to take a second look at the verses we did yesterday, and then we'll continue on into verses 8 thru 10. There is just so much truth in this section that is amazingly relevant to our current situation that it would be a shame to miss out on what God is saying to us.

The focus right here is on praying for the effectiveness of the gospel of Jesus Christ – alongside that, there is the distinctive ethos of the gospel ministry, we are commissioned to proclaim the good news of Jesus by the lifestyle that we follow. In other words, we are called to make a difference in our community, a radical difference in our world; we do that best by fleshing out the gospel of grace in a fallen world. The theologians label it, incarnational Christianity.

I came across an illustration of that truth, one that gripped me and deeply challenged me. It's all about our involvement as we seek to rescue those who are perishing.

The story went something like this: on a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occurred there stood a lifesaving station. It had been there for many years. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few members were totally dedicated to the task. They kept a constant watch, day and night; they went out in all weathers searching for those in danger on the high seas.

Inevitably, a number of those who were rescued wished to help the folks in one way or another; they were keen to give of their time and energy and money to support the tremendously needy work. They did it because they valued the hazardous work of these brave individuals. They were alive because someone was willing to put their own life at risk in order to throw them a lifebelt. As time marched on, new boats were bought and new crews trained. The lifesaving station grew.

After a while some of the new crew became concerned that the station was so crude and poorly equipped. It was basic, to say the

least; they felt that a bigger place should be provided as the first refuge of those snatched from the sea.

The emergency cots were replaced with decent beds, and better quality furniture was purchased for the enlarged building. The station became a popular gathering place for its members – a kind of on-shore social club, they decorated it beautifully and furnished it lavishly. It was one of those classic no-expense spared projects. Fewer members were now interested in leaving the plush office suite to go to sea on lifesaving missions. They much preferred the warmth and the fun of the recreational facilities on shore; so they hired surrogates to do the rescue work. However, the guys on-shore retained the lifesaving motif in the club's decorations, and a ceremonial lifeboat lay in the room where club initiations were held. One dark stormy night a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and obviously from distant shores. The pristine looking station was in total chaos – it reeked from top to bottom. The event was so traumatic that the committee decided to contract out such happenings for all future rescues at sea. They wanted less hassle!

Eventually, a major rift developed in the station. Most of the members wanted to discontinue the station's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to their normal social life. To their credit, some folks dug their heels in and insisted that rescue was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station.

Unfortunately, they lost the vote and were bluntly told if they wanted to risk their lives for the sake of others then they could start up their own lifesaving station further up the coast. That's exactly what they did!

However, over time those individuals fell prey to the same temptations as the first group, they began to think more about Number One rather than rescuing the perishing. After a while, a few brave souls went their own way and formed another life-saving

station. And on and on it went ... today, if you visit that stretch of coastline, you'll find a number of hugely impressive lifesaving stations. Sadly, and tragically, shipwrecks still occur in those choppy waters, but most people are lost.

That's a parable, but, oh, how true it is to real life. We hear it, and we say 'ouch'. It touches a raw nerve – it is symptomatic of so much of what is happening today in evangelicalism. We have lost the vision of people perishing, we have lost our sense of deep responsibility to reach out to those who are dying in sin; we don't like it when our comfort zone gets a squeeze – we have become complacent; in a sense, we pass the buck.

The bottom line is that people need the Lord, the world needs Jesus. Before we take a short music break, the question has to be asked: do we have the passion that inspired John Knox to cry out, 'Give me Scotland or I die'? Is our attitude like that of George Whitefield, who prayed, 'O Lord, give me souls or take my soul'? Can we, like Henry Martyn, say, 'I cannot endure existence if Jesus is to be so dishonoured'? I think it was the Methodist revivalist preacher John Wesley who said: 'Count your ministry a failure unless souls are won to Christ.' Don't forget, the Lord honours evangelistic prayer.

MUSIC BREAK

Well, prayer certainly makes a world of difference – it impacts the lives of ordinary people all around us. Many of us can look back to the influence of godly people and their praying for us; I reckon most of us are deeply indebted to the faithful prayers of so many – some that we know, many we probably have never met. Prayer changes lives.

And that's part of the reason why Paul focuses in verse 2 on the wide-ranging nature of prayer. We are to remember all those in authority so 'that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.' Let's be absolutely clear, this is not a prayer to live a quiet middle-class life free from stress and lots of hassle. Paul never encouraged that mindset, full stop. The chances are, if we live out and out for Jesus Christ that we will be given a rough

ride by folks all around us – but that’s par for the course. ‘Quiet’ refers to circumstances around us, while ‘peaceful’ refers to a calm attitude within us. The net result is a life that is godly and honourable.

Paul’s appeal here for those in authority implicitly asked for peaceful conditions in which Christians could freely live out exemplary lives, so the unsaved would speak well of Christ and their teaching.

Actually, Paul said pretty much the same thing in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. Yes, your life and mine can be a conduit of blessing to others – it makes all the difference when the conditions are right. Like flowers, we bloom best when we are planted in the right kind of soil.

In reality, this is Paul coming at the subject of praying for the lost from a slightly different angle – when we pray, God works. The lesson from church history is that God works powerfully through prayer. Trace the spiritual revivals down the years, see the huge strides forward in gospel work – all of these exciting events can be attributed to the simple fact that people prayed, and when people prayed, God did what only he can do.

In fact, prayer brought down the Berlin Wall. In May 1989 at Leipzig, in the historic St Nicholas Church where the Reformation had been introduced exactly 450 years earlier, a small group began to meet in one of the church’s rooms to read the Sermon on the Mount and pray for peace. After a while the group expanded so they moved to a larger room and finally began to meet in the church’s nave, which began to fill up.

The Communist authorities were alarmed, so they sent some of their officials along. They threatened those gathered and jailed some of them. They wanted to teach them a lesson. On prayer nights they went so far as to block the city’s nearest Autobahn off-ramp.

Then on 9 October 1989 some 2,000 individuals crowded in to pray for peace, and another 10,000 gathered outside. And soon the Berlin Wall came down! Was that coincidence? Definitely not! This

was the kind response of a caring, all-powerful God to the prayers of his people.

Think about that today – what difference would we make if we prayed more? What walls would come tumbling down? What barriers could be removed? The strongholds of the enemy are in our sights, let's pray together that God will do a miracle in our lifetime. Hey, in this evangelistic context, our ministry to rescue the perishing would be cranked up a gear.

MUSIC BREAK

The next few verses (3-7) shine the torchlight on the awesome grounds behind the call to pray for all people. There is, first, the desire of God in verses 3 and 4; second, there is the work of God in verses 5 and 6; three, there is Paul's missionary call in verse 7. No matter how we look at it today, this call forms one of the most significant missions and evangelism passages in the New Testament. God's all consuming passion is for men and women to put their trust in him as Lord and Saviour. He longs for all men to be in his international family. There is nothing exclusive about it, the gospel appeal is to all men everywhere – it reaches every ethnic people group on the face of the earth. Says the chorus, red or yellow, black or white, all are precious in his sight.

Remember the parable I told you at the top of the programme: well, Paul knocks their mindset for six. Their mission field had become the 'frozen chosen', their mission that of instilling a deeper-life chill, lowering the temperature of their souls. I agree with Pastor Kent Hughes when he says that 'this kind of spiritual elitism feeds on the classism and racism and tribalism and nationalism that comes so naturally to us sinful human souls.'

This is what almost drove the young William Carey round the bend. It infuriated him; it maddened him when the leaders in his church told him: 'Young man, if God is going to convert the heathen, he will do it without your help or ours.' That response drove the impassioned William Carey out of his church and on to India, where he became the father of modern missions. His life-saving

endeavours were signally blessed of God and even to this day his name is a household name. The same man also coined the phrase: 'expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.' Paul outlines for us in great detail the tremendous work of God in that he gave Jesus to be our Mediator – he is the go-between a holy God and sinful man. Because he is both God and man, he can represent both sides equally. In effect, Jesus answered in his person the cry of Job 9:33, 'If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both.' Jesus lays one hand, so to speak, on the Father and the other on his children, he is our 'mediator'.

At Calvary's cross, he gave his life as an infinite ransom to redeem us to himself – you see, in this pulsing confessional statement we see that everything is of God. That means, when it comes to world mission, everything rests on God's work. In this context, the local church has a universal, lifesaving mission – the church is to pray for all people in verse 1, and the church is to proclaim the gospel to all people in verse 7. We are to be God's people, joyfully declaring his glory to the nations.

The final section spans verses 8-10. Paul says nearly the same thing as he mentioned earlier when he writes in verse 8: 'I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing.' Paul assumes they will pray with upraised hands, that's the way Jewish men did it – their arms were extended and their hands open to heaven; but his biggest concern right here is not how they do it, but the attitude they have when they do it – he wants them to be free from anger and quarrels. The important criteria is not the posture of the body, but the posture of the heart.

The basic thought behind 'holy hands' is that it is symbolic of a blameless life, a holy life, a clean heart – we have echoes of that truth in Psalm 24:4. The fact is, if we have sin in our lives, we cannot pray and expect God to answer.

In other words, he wants them to pray and he wants them to be united as they do it. It's important for us to be on good terms with

those around us. When Paul speaks of 'disputing' he says we should learn to disagree without being disagreeable. There is a way to handle situations when they arise. He wants them to join hands and hearts as they pray around the world – this is so amazing, what a difference it would make, what stunning grace this would produce in mission.

In verses 9 and 10 he moves on to lifestyle issues, particularly those involving women. Let's be clear, there is no way that he is putting a blanket ban on women having their hair done, nor is he hammering women for wearing jewellery. That's not in his thinking at all.

Rather, he was forbidding the imitation of the elaborate new hairstyles and extravagant dress of the Roman court as depicted on the Roman coins in circulation at that time. They were over the top, as we sometimes say. Paul says, by all means, go for the best, but do all things in moderation – strike a balance, and don't forget, the Lord is more impressed with the inside than he is with the outside. We're not here to ape the world and we're not here to mimic its standards when it comes to femininity. It seems in today's world that anything goes – well, says the apostle, fashions and fads come and go, but a woman who loves the Lord can have a lasting impact on those around her.

That's where a woman with a sensitive heart for the Lord can have massive influence in her home and among her circle of friends; a godly woman's 'good deeds' bear silent testimony to the grace of God in her life. We must never underestimate the power of a God-centred lifestyle. Glamour is skin-deep, it has an artificial feel to it – godliness, however, is lasting both in its beauty and attractiveness. I love the way Warren Wiersbe puts it: 'A woman who depends only on externals will soon run out of ammunition! She may attract attention, but she will not win lasting affection.' For me, a woman is not to flaunt her sexuality; rather, she is to exhibit a warmth of personality that comes from a vibrant relationship with the Lord Jesus. In other words, when her heart is ok, that will be evident in her choice of clothes, in her jewellery, in her hairstyle, in her

cosmetics, and in her ministry among others. I endorse what John Stott says, in typical fashion he makes the valid point that 'Women need to remember that if nature has made them plain, grace can make them beautiful; and if nature has made them beautiful, good deeds can add to their beauty.' Put simply, looks aren't everything! So, at the end of today's study, let me say this: if it weren't for women serving the Lord on the mission fields of the world, we would be a lot worse off; Norman Grubb of WEC said one day that 'his best men were women.' Paul is not the woman-hater as some have libelled him; he's not a crusty old bachelor either – if the truth be told, Paul is following in the footsteps of Jesus when he valued women and saw their vitally important role in the work of the gospel.

So, ladies, you have a job to do – let's remember that church and ministry is not a fashion parade, we are not there to draw attention to ourselves, we're there to worship Jesus. And, men, don't be so busy that you don't have time to pray and seek the Lord's face. For both sexes, we're in the business of rescuing the perishing, and holiness of life is essential.