

## 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Paul moves up a gear when he writes in chapter 2 that we are to pray for everyone! It's not that the preacher man is moving the goalposts, far from it; it's more a case of him widening the nets – Paul is fanatically keen to remind us that prayer works. The reality is you don't know, and I don't know, how it works, and we don't have to know; that said, it definitely does work! We say a hearty 'amen' to that!

It appears from Paul's huge concern in these opening verses that it's something we should do a lot more of! It's easy to talk about prayer; however, it's a different matter when it comes to us doing it. I think prayer is a wonderful means of you and I tapping into all the divine resources that are available to us, the sad reality is, all too often we live impoverished lives because we fail to do it. God has given us a blank cheque and we don't fill it out and cash it in.

This is number one on Paul's agenda for them – we know that in his choice of words, for he writes, 'first of all'. This is not a secondary issue, it's top priority. It's fundamental. It seems to me that Paul focuses here on the pre-eminence of prayer in our personal lives as well as in our ministry for the Lord. It's a pity but so often it's those of us in fulltime service for the Lord who know the most about it but do the least of it!

Peter Deyneka, founder of the Slavic Gospel Association, once said: 'Much prayer, much power! No prayer, no power!' The story is told of Pastor F B Meyer, he woke early one morning at a conference with A B Simpson only to discover that Simpson was weeping in prayer as he clutched a globe.

So great is the longing on Paul's heart that he pleads with them, he 'urges' them, he exhorts them to pull out all the stops and go for it. He just wants them to pray, pray, and pray. Here are the divine directives for prayer. It's an impassioned appeal from an old man— Paul realises there is a tendency to play down the importance of intercession, hence his valiant attempt to stir the local church into

action. He wants to see all of them, young and not-so-young, driven to their knees. At the end of the day, the church is meant to be a worshipping community – a body of people who exercise their role as priests.

In verse one Paul outlines four basic kinds of prayer – he uses a cluster of four words: ‘requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving’. This underlines the tremendous scope of prayer, it shows how wide-ranging it really is. Basically, it’s doing the same thing in four different ways – these are four angles on you and I seeking God’s face. Each one homes in on evangelistic praying from a slightly different perspective. I like to think of it like this – this is praying God’s way! And no one is exempt from our prayer hit list. In that sense, when we talk about ‘requests’ we’re thinking of a number of items on a kind-of shopping list. This is the starting point for prayer – it’s zooming in on a particular felt need. It’s when we admit our total helplessness before the Lord, our huge sense of inadequacy, our feeling of utter weakness – for us, that is a good place to arrive at; when we’re there, all we can do is call out and cling on! In today’s world, people need the Lord – we should sense the tremendous need all around us, and pray on and pray through for their precious souls.

The next one on Paul’s list is ‘prayers’, this seems to emphasise the person of God. This is a fairly general word for prayer in the Bible and it is used only in reference to God. That implies it carries with it an element of worship and reverence for who he is. In this context, prayer for the lost is ultimately directed at God as an act of worship, because the salvation of sinners causes them to give glory to him. God is glorified when people seek him in repentance and faith.

Number three is ‘intercessions’ – that’s where he reminds us of the need to bring specific situations to God in prayer – in other words, we are to name names. This turn of phrase only appears here and in 4:5 in the entire New Testament. It comes from a root that suggests to ‘fall in with someone’ or ‘to get involved with them’. It’s you and I putting ourselves in their shoes and we do that best when we

lovingly intercede for them. We bring them before the Lord not in a cold, detached manner – we do so with a heart full of compassion and genuine care for their need as well as a mega concern for their eternal salvation.

The final one is a rich ingredient that is often conspicuous by its absence in our prayer life – we take so much for granted that ‘thanksgiving’ doesn’t slip off our tongue as easy as asking the Lord for this or that. Yet, what a difference it makes when we express our heartfelt gratitude to the Lord for answers to prayer – two words ‘thank you’ that make a world of difference. In the context of verse 1, we have so much for which we can lift our voices in thanksgiving – we’re still in the dispensation of grace, God is working globally in the hearts of men and women as he draws them savingly to himself, there is to this day power in the gospel of Jesus Christ – we thank the Lord for the sense of privilege and for the opportunity of sharing our faith.

We’ll pause for a short music break at this point and when we come back we’ll explore the kind of people whom Paul reckons stand in need of our prayers.

### **MUSIC BREAK**

So often when we pray we have the blinkers on; we’re wrapped up in our own tiny little world – it’s me and my family and that is just about the sum total of it. Well, yes, we do have immense needs on personal level, there’s no doubt about that; but there’s a big world out there that desperately needs Jesus. That’s why I feel the beat in Paul’s heart when he exhorts us to pray for ‘everyone’. No one is beyond the reach of prayer and no man is too bad for God to save. Paul knew that better than most – he himself is an answer to prayer. Paul then singles out a specific group for inclusion in our prayer ministry – he wants us to pray ‘for kings and all those in authority’. Such folks tend to be remote from most of us; we do not have easy access to them; they don’t have too much to do with the ordinary man in the street, except at election time! It would be easy for us to

forget them in our prayers – the fact is they need our fervent intercession.

So many folks bad mouth those who walk the corridors of power; we see them as objects of derision and we're inclined to target them with barbed arrows of bitterness and animosity. At the same time, they need our prayers and we owe it to them to mention their names before the throne of heavenly grace. It is an obligation that is ours – we have no option when we read the comments of Paul in verse 2.

Bearing in mind the circumstances in which Paul writes these words, it makes it even more amazing – but that's what grace is able to do – it helps us pray for those we don't like! Paul calls the church at Ephesus to pray for the emperor – and, remember, he was no friend to the Lord's people in the first century; Nero was a ruthlessly cruel and vicious blasphemer. Even though he was such a devilish scoundrel, and a persecutor of the church, the people of God were still to pray for his redemption. In our day, the challenge is, when was the last time we prayed for the former Iraqi president, Saddam Hussein?

We are not to specifically pray for them to be kicked out of office, we are to seek God for their salvation. They need the Lord every bit as much as the man next door or the girl across the street. Maybe, if we spent less energy in our lobbying and more time in our praying, we might see something positive happening in our land. It seems to me, the key to changing a nation is the salvation of perishing sinners, and that calls for faithful earnest prayer.

By and large, that's something we have forgotten in the twenty first century – however, it's a principle the early church proved in a big way; we see evidence of that from the writings of the respected theologian, Tertullian. The message is crystal clear, things actually happen when people pray!

One of the major reasons for such prayer is summed up by the apostle at the end of verse 2 – it's so that 'we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.' You see, when we pray for

those in leadership in our nation, when we ask the Lord to do what only he can do through those in authority in our land, that changes us on the inside as well; it gives us a new perspective on what's happening all around us.

Any thought of rebellion or any trace of resistance against them is obliterated as we spend time down on our knees; see what it does, it transforms those of us who love the Lord Jesus into peacemakers, not reactionaries. These folks who rule over us are not to be seen as our enemies, rather they are our God-given mission field, we see them as potential fodder for the kingdom of God.

If we're going to enjoy the benefits of a peaceful and quiet life, it doesn't mean we sit back and twiddle our thumbs, far from it; it does mean, however, that we are living a life of holiness, that we are pursuing godliness 24/7, that we are trusting the Lord to shape us into a generation of people who will leave a legacy for those that follow after us.

Let's take a short music break and when we come back we'll see what Paul has to say to us in verses 3 and 4.

### **MUSIC BREAK**

Ever wondered, what brings joy to the heart of God? Well, the answer is right here in verse 3! Paul writes: 'this is good, and pleases God our Saviour.' The obvious question is: what is he referring to? Well, it's back to what we have just been talking about!

John MacArthur develops this thought powerfully in his superb commentary on 1 Timothy – he reminds us this is the reason for evangelistic prayer. It answers a couple of questions that have been asked down through the generations: Why pray for the lost? Why reach out to the heathen? This has to be one of the most definitive statements in all of Scripture – this is what the cross is all about, this is what redemption is all about, this is the heartbeat of the Christian gospel.

There are six reasons in all – one, evangelistic prayer is morally right. Paul says 'this is good'. This is the proper thing for us to do; I would

take it one step further and say that it is the least we can do. They can't and won't pray for themselves, we can do it for them! Knowing their ultimate fate in a Christless eternity, a place of everlasting punishment, that should drive each of us to our knees to pray them into the kingdom of light.

The second reason is that this tallies with God's desire – he has a longing for 'all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.' The won't go away fact is that not all men will be saved, not all men even want to be saved – that said, the Lord is actively pursuing those who will find him if they seek him with all their heart. If men choose to reject God's offer of salvation, if they spurn his love and mercy, they have no one to blame but themselves. No man can blame God for their unbelief. It's not God's fault – he has made the way accessible for all, it's as simple as ABC. The living God longs for men to trust him. The glorious gospel of grace is available for all men, but it's only effective for those who embrace Jesus personally. That's why Jesus came into this world two millennia back. It is highly significant that Paul speaks of him in verse 3 as God our Saviour – his role is to redeem men and women who are lost in their sin. God has absolutely no pleasure in the damnation of the wicked, we know that from the message of Ezekiel and also in Romans 9:22-23. God isn't smiling when sinful men end up in hell; that said, he will still be glorified because his purposes have not been thwarted.

The third reason is found in the opening phrase of verse 5; this brand of evangelistic prayer reflects the uniqueness of God for we read 'there is one God'. This is fundamental to the teaching of scripture; we find this truth embedded in the heart of the Old Testament. We live in a world of many little gods, but our God is stunningly incomparable, he is unrivalled, he is a one-off.

It seems to me this is the bedrock of the gospel message – this is what makes the good news so distinctive. There is one way for men to get into heaven and Jesus is that way – we see that in John 14; this was the theme of Peter's outstanding message after Pentecost,

we read all about it in Acts 4 – there is no other name under heaven by which sinners must be saved.

Reason number four is also found in verse 5, such praying is in harmony with the person of Jesus Christ. Paul describes him as the ‘one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.’ A mediator is a go-between, someone who intervenes between two individuals to restore peace. Jesus is the sole mediator of the new covenant, there is none other – that, again, underlines the primacy of the gospel of grace; at the same time, it shows us the stark uniqueness of the way of salvation.

When it comes to our seeking after God, there is only one way to come – and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. He’s the one who makes it possible – the Man Christ Jesus. As the one and only Son of the Father, as the perfect God-man, he brings God and man together. So, when we come to God, we do it on his terms alone and we do it his way – that royal route into the kingdom of God is Jesus.

Another valid reason for such focused evangelistic prayer is that it pays tribute to the fulness of Christ’s atonement – this is what Paul reminds us of in verse 6 where he talks about Jesus as one who ‘gave himself as a ransom for all men’. It seems to me that every word in that statement is pregnant with truth – it is one of those compact sayings from the pen of Paul that we could spend all day drooling over. Every single word is made to count.

For example, ransom is a rich theological term that describes the substitutionary death of Christ for us. Look at it like this, on the cross the Lord did not only pay a ransom to free us, he actually became the victim in our place. He died our death, he bore our sin. He willingly gave himself.

We are reminded also of the sufficiency of the atonement for he died for all men – the death of Jesus is sufficient for all men, it’s only effective in the hearts of those who say ‘yes’ to him. It is unlimited in its sufficiency, but limited in its application. I see in that statement a window into the heart of God – this is the big picture so

far as the Lord is concerned. This is the main reason why he gave Jesus to be our Saviour – he longs for us to be with him in Glory for the everlasting ages. When we pray in this manner, we are extolling the virtues of his atoning death as well as honouring his sacrificial work on the cross.

The final reason is echoed in verse 7, such prayer is in accord with Paul's divine commission. There is no contradiction in the mind of Paul – this is why the Lord appointed him, this is his calling. He is there to proclaim Jesus Christ is Lord and that he is a truly wonderful Saviour. This is supremely good news, hence his portrayal as a 'herald' – he's an evangelist in every sense of the word. That's what earths this whole section to reality – that's why we take it on the chin when Paul exhorts us to pray, pray, and keep on praying.

For you and me, this is our mandate, this is our responsibility in a fallen world – we're here to pray men into the kingdom of the Lord, but we have to do more than simply pray, we're here to tell others about Jesus and his ability to save; it's our privilege to also share our faith as God provides opportunity for personal witness – in that context, Paul is right on target, his punchline is summed up in four words: people need the Lord.