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1 Timothy 2:1-7

The Church's Prayer and Universal Mission

John Stott was a faithful English pastor in the twentieth century. On one of his trips to the countryside of England, getting away from the big-city of London where he pastored, he visited a small country church, and described his visit this way: "Some years ago I attended public worship in a certain church. The pastor was absent on holiday, and a lay elder led the pastoral prayer. He prayed that the pastor might enjoy a good vacation (which was fine), and that two members of the congregation might be healed (which was also fine; we should pray for the sick). But that was all. The intercession can hardly have lasted thirty seconds. I came away saddened, sensing that this church worshiped a little village god of their own devising. There was no recognition of the needs of the world, and no attempt to embrace the world in prayer."¹

The problem Stott's describing here is really two-fold: 1. First, the problem of *prayerlessness* in the church, barely spending any time at all in corporate prayer, losing sight of just how big our God is; and 2 secondly, the problem of being so *inwardly focused* as a church that we lose sight of the world around us, outside our walls, losing sight of just how big our *mission* is. These are widespread problems and temptations for churches, not just in the countryside of twentieth century England, but in all different kinds of churches, including in America, in our day, as well. There are many churches that do not pray much or for very long at all in corporate worship; many that have done away with the prayer meeting altogether. And it is far too easy for us, as individuals and as churches, to *navel gaze* - to become too inwardly focused, that we lose sight of the world beyond us, that we lose sight of the vast scope of the world-wide mission of the gospel that Christ has given us, the Great Commission. *We* may be tempted to grow short-sighted in our prayer because we lose sight of the power of prayer - because we lose sight of how big our God is. *We* may be tempted to grow inwardly focused because we lose sight of just how big our God's *mission* is.

This has been a temptation for churches in every age - even in the early church, like in the church of Ephesus. We see Paul tackling this very issue here in our text today, 1 Tim. 2:1-7. It would appear that the church of Ephesus was growing too inwardly focused and exclusive, and so Paul calls them - and us - to have a renewed vision for just how big the scope of the gospel

¹ John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, pg.44.

and our mission really is. As we saw last week, Paul wrote this letter to Timothy about how to deal with the false teachings and problems at the church in Ephesus. After laying down the importance of confronting these false teachings and fighting for the sake of the gospel in chapter 1, Paul now turns to the main body of the letter, giving positive instructions for how the church should operate. He's going to tackle issues about corporate worship, teaching and leadership in the church, and how we are to operate to relate to one another in the church, over the next few chapters. But he begins, "First of all," with the issue of prayer - particularly, with our corporate, public prayer together. He urges prayer - specifically, urging two commands, praying for "all people" and for governing authorities - in vv.1-2. But this section turns out not to be all about prayer; it's actually all about how the offer of salvation in the gospel of Christ is for *all people*, as he makes very clear in verses 3-7. But lest we fail to see the connection between this and prayer, the overall point is that our priorities in prayer - particularly public prayer in our corporate worship as a church - must reflect the universal scope of the gospel and the mission of the church. In other words, I think we can summarize the *main idea*, or the *main argument*, of the passage like this: *We must pray for and pursue the salvation of all people because of the free, universal offer of the gospel and the universal scope of the mission God has given to the church.*

The first thing we see is...

I. We Must Regularly Pray, Especially for Salvation, for All People (2:1)

We are to be a *praying people*. Paul begins with an exhortation for the church to offer up *all kinds of prayer* for *all kinds of people*. We see this in verse 1: "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people." Paul uses four different words for prayer here: "supplications," "prayers," "intercessions," and "thanksgivings." There's a lot of overlap between these words. *Prayer* is the most general; *supplications* (or *petitions*) and *intercessions* both get at the idea of making requests in prayer to God; "thanksgivings" is the most distinct, being prayer of giving thanks and gratitude to God. But I don't think Paul is trying to establish four different kinds of prayer that we are to give; the words are far too similar for that. Instead, I think he's simply stressing the point that we should be praying *all kinds of prayers* - full of all kinds of requests and all kinds of thanksgivings. The obvious question is, "For whom should we pray and make these requests?" Paul's answer: for *all people*.

But when he says “*all people*,” we have to ask, does he mean all people “*without exception*” or “*without distinction*”? This is an important question we’re going to have to keep asking throughout this passage everytime we see “all people” in order to understand it: all people *without exception* or *without distinction*? If it means “all people *without exception*,” that would include every single individual that exists; if it means “all people *without distinction*” that would include every *kind* of person, so that no one is off limits. Clearly, it can’t mean all people *without exception*. That would mean that Paul envisions us praying on behalf of every single person in the world, by name. That’s clearly impossible and not what he has in mind here. Instead, he means pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people, *without distinction*: all-encompassing; no one is off limits. Our prayers should not only be limited to us as a church, or who we know, or the people that we like, but should instead have a scope so large that they encompass *all people*; so that we pray for those near and far, those like us and those different, believers and non-believers, our churches and others, and so on and so forth.

So how does this apply to us today? First of all, it urges upon us the importance of prayer - particularly corporate prayer, as a church. Again, this is “first of all” the instructions Paul gives concerning church practice in this letter; this is talking about public prayer in corporate worship, as verse 8 makes clear as well. Therefore, the way we practice prayer in our corporate worship, including *what we pray for*, is obviously very important. For starters, this is a reminder of why *publicly praying together* is an absolutely crucial and essential aspect of our public worship. This is why we have the Sunday night *prayer meeting*, where we encourage everyone to come together so that we can pray petitions and thanksgivings of every kind for one another and for all kinds of other people in all the world. This is also why we set aside so much time for prayer during our corporate worship on Sunday mornings: for example, we always begin with prayers of adoration and intercession after our call to worship; we make intercession for our offerings, the preaching of the Word, and our response to it; and we also always have a time of prolonged corporate prayer to make supplications for all kinds of different topics and people, every Sunday, as a part of our worship together: we aim to pray *all kinds of prayers* for *all kinds of people*. I don’t think this means that we have to cover everything every Sunday, but rather that we try to cover all the different kinds of things we’re told to pray for in Scripture for *all kinds of different people*, in all the world, over the course of *many* Sundays. And the hope is that as we model this

for one another in public, it's also teaching and encouraging each of us to pray deeply and widely in our own, private prayers, as well.

But the *most important* thing that we're called to pray for, for *all people*, is for *salvation*. In fact, I think this is the obvious conclusion demanded by the context of the passage. After giving another command for prayer in v.2, Paul then says in vv.3-4 that "this is good" for us to do - that is, pray for all people - because "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." So the clearest application for us here is that we, as a church and as individuals, should be regularly praying *for the salvation of all people*. This is why, when we gather for worship and pray together, we always link it, to some degree or another, to the salvation of others - ultimately, to the salvation of all. This is meant to reflect our priorities: seeing salvation as the greatest need of all people. But it's also more than that; when we pray as a church in this way, we directly contribute to the Great Commission in a powerful way.

The church's prayer for the lost is an essential aspect of participating in the Great Commission. The most important thing we can do for those who are not saved is to pray for their salvation. There are a million needs people have, especially not believers, but the most important need (whether it feels like it in the moment or not) is always the state of their souls. Praying for physical and emotional needs is good, but it should always push us to pray for their salvation above all. When we're praying for others - whether it's together, at our church prayer meeting, or individually, in our private prayer - we should never be satisfied to just pray for someone's physical, mental, emotional, or earthly well-being; we should always pray for their spiritual well-being, for their *salvation*. We can't change anyone's hearts; if we know someone that isn't saved, the most important thing we can do is pray for their salvation. So I just want to encourage you all in this: don't grow weary in praying for your lost loved ones; keep praying for their salvation! Keep asking us to pray for their salvation with you! come to our Sunday night prayer meeting, share it with your Wednesday night small group, and let us keep praying for their salvation *together*.

But this also means we should regularly pray for the salvation of all, for missions, for the gospel to go forth in all the world, that all might be saved. I praise God that this desire and practice is alive and growing here at our church and among many of you! So I just want to

encourage us, as a church, that we keep growing in this, to keep making an effort to regularly pray, together and privately, for *all* people - especially for all to be saved.

Secondly, Paul urges us to *pray for governing authorities*...

II. We Must Pray for Governing Authorities for the Sake of All People (2:2)

In verse 2, Paul continues the command to pray, urging that we pray for all governing authorities, for the sake of all people, and ultimately, for the spread of the gospel to all people. So, Paul “urges supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings” secondly, in v.2, “for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Now, I know what you’re thinking: we’re Americans, we don’t have kings. But no, that doesn’t give us a free pass, we still have to pray for the government, too. “Kings” and “all who are in high positions” makes it clear that he’s referring to *all governing authorities*. And note that he doesn’t say all of “our” or “your” governing authorities, but for “*all*” who are in high positions, meaning this isn’t just limited to our own government, but extends to kings and governing authorities elsewhere, too. So again, we must ask: all *without exception*, or *without distinction*? *Without exception* would mean: we have to pray for every single individual person in government, by name, as part of our corporate worship; I don’t think that’s what he’s getting at. It would *also* mean that we have to pray for all the governing authorities *of every nation*; again, I don’t think that’s what he’s getting at. Instead, we should pray for all governing authorities *without distinction*: whether we like them or not, good or bad. We pray for “all who are in high positions,” at every level of government, for every *kind* of governing authority. For us today, that means local government up to the federal government. And I think it’s fair to say that this also includes every government - not just limited to *our* governing authorities, but expansive; goes beyond our national borders to lead us to pray for other governments as well.

But how exactly are we supposed to pray for them? We’re supposed to pray that they would rule in such a way that “we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” It’s prayer and petition for governing authorities to be able to fulfill their God-given task to keep the peace, carry out justice, and enforce law and order “that we may live a peaceful and quiet life,” rather than one spent in the turmoil and upheaval of war, persecution, or crisis - be it political, economic, cultural, local, or national. It’s praying for the government to be just and morally righteous, to fulfill its God-given task to restrain evil and promote the good, that we

may live lives that are “godly and dignified in every way,” rather than being outlawed from doing the right thing and obeying God, or rather than being commanded by the law to prompt evil or participate in it. Practically speaking, this means praying against corruption; praying for national security and international peace. It means praying for police officers, border control agents, and military personnel to keep the peace, keep people safe, and justly enforce laws for the good of all. It means praying for legislators and just, morally right laws; for courts and judges to have wisdom and integrity; praying against tyranny and civil unrest. It also means praying that our governing authorities would rightly recognize and restrain moral evil and promote moral good, so that we may all live “godly and dignified in every way.” Like, for example, praying against moral outrage and evils like abortion, transgender ideology, no-fault divorce laws, the collapse of biblical morality in our culture, the sexual revolution, euthenasia, and human trafficking; and praying that the government would instead uphold the sanctity and dignity of marriage, sexuality, the family, and human life, at both ends of life.

One of the most obvious applications here is praying for *religious freedom* and *protection from persecution* so that Christians can live peaceful, quiet, God-honoring lives and can freely invite others to do so as well through evangelism and discipleship. It is far more difficult to live a godly life if we’re prohibited by the government and punished for doing so. So, this means praying for our governing authorities so that the gospel would spread throughout our land. Again, this is exactly where Paul goes in verses 3-4, by saying that this is good to pray for since God “desires all people to be saved.” God appoints governments to provide the infrastructure we need for the spread of the gospel and for the Church to flourish. It is very good for us to have safe roads and to live in lands safe from violence, crime, and war so that we can more easily live lives of obedience to God and travel around to carry out evangelism and discipleship. Persecution restricts the spread of the gospel and punishes people for living godly and dignified lives, while a government that protects the Church and promotes the freedom to worship helps promote the spread of the gospel. Yes, in the Lord’s grace, the gospel has spread even amidst persecution at times. But that is not the ideal to pursue; we instead pray *against* persecution and *for* governing authorities to do what’s right that the gospel may spread to all and the Church flourish and thrive in its mission. And this means we should pray for *all governing authorities* so that the gospel would spread to *all people, in all nations of the earth*.

This is good for us to do, because...

III. The Gospel Truly Offers Salvation to All People, Without Distinction, and God Desires it to be Offered to All People (2:3-7)

In verses 3-7, Paul explains why praying for all people and governing authorities is good for us to do, by connecting it to the will of God, the salvation that the gospel freely offers to all people, and the universal scope of the mission that God has given to us. We see this grounded in the will of God in vv.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.” We know what “to be saved” and “knowledge of the truth” mean: salvation means forgiveness of sins, righteousness, and eternal life with God in Christ; to come to a saving knowledge of the truth means to know who God is, through His Word, to be convicted of sin and know that we deserve eternal judgment in Hell for our sin, but also to hear, understand, and believe the good news of the gospel that we heard last week, from chapter 1, verse 15, that Christ came to die for sinners, so that whoever repents and believes in Him will be saved!

But what does it mean that God “desires all people to be saved”? Again, we must ask: all people *without exception* or *without distinction*? If it means *all people without exception*, then it would mean that God desires *all individual people that exist or ever have existed* to be saved. Now, if that’s what it means, there’s a big problem here: not everyone is saved! So does that mean that God desires something that He does not - or cannot - fulfill? If so, that would mean that God isn’t all-powerful; but we know that’s not true, God is sovereign and “works together all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). Furthermore, there are many passages that talk about God predestining, or electing, or choosing, whom will be saved, such as Eph. 1:4, “even as he *chose us* in Him (in Christ) before the foundation of the world... In love he *predestined us* for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ.” When God chooses to save someone, he does it; God doesn’t “try,” or fail, He accomplishes. As Rom. 8:29-30 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son... and those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.” So how do we put this together with the fact that God “desires for all people to be saved”?

I think the answer is in recognizing that it means all people *without distinction*. God loves everyone and desires for *all kinds of people* in all the earth to be saved, whether Jew or Gentile, poor or rich, slave or free, tax collector or pharisee, from every tribe, nation, and tongue - anyone

can be saved through faith in the gospel of Christ! In the passage's context, it seems like one of the false teachings in Ephesus involved some kind of "exclusivism," possibly favoring Jews over Gentiles. After all, since we've already seen that these false teachings involved the wrong use of the Law from the Old Testament (1:3-7). And at the end of this passage, v.7, Paul also grounds this in the fact that God has appointed him as an apostle "to the Gentiles." So I think vv.3-4 are saying that God desires all *kinds of people, without distinction*, to know the gospel and be saved - regardless of race or ethnic background, or nationality, or religious background, or soci-economic status, or even moral background, even to the dirtiest of sinners, like Paul! God's offer of salvation in Christ is for *everyone* who repents and believes!

This is what Paul continues to make clear in vv.5-6: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time." There's only one true God; the God of the Bible isn't just for the Jews, nor just the people of the Mediterranean in the 1st century; He's not a local god bound by time and space, competing with other gods and religions; He's *the only God*, over all the world and universe! Therefore, it is good and true and appropriate and in accordance with the desires and will of God that *all people* know and worship Him, as the only GOD, as His people. And there's only *one way* to know the true God and be saved: it's through "*the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" Jesus, the God-Man, is the only go-between for mankind before God! Faith in the gospel of Christ is the only hope *anyone in all the earth* has to be saved! No one can no God the Father or have eternal life outside of Christ. All of mankind has sinned and deserves God's just wrath and condemnation; yet Christ came down and lived the perfect life we couldn't live, died on the cross to bear the wrath of God we deserve, and then rose again, showing that this sacrifice has been accepted! Christ "gave himself as a ransom *for all.*" Now, once again, we must ask, for all *without exception* or *without distinction*? After all, to give himself as a ransom means to *make atonement*; that Christ died and *paid the penalty for our sins so that they no longer stand against us, that he took our place.* So if we say this ransom is for all people *without exception* - for every single individual that exists, period, without exception - then this would be teaching universalism: that all people are saved. But we know this isn't teaching universalism; the Bible is clear that not everyone will be saved. In Matt. 7, for example, Jesus says that the "way is narrow" that leads to life, while the way is wide that leads to destruction. So we know this can't be teaching universalism.

Instead, Christ gave himself as a ransom for all *without distinction* - that is, His substitutionary death, though *effectual* only for the elect, for those who repent and believe, it is *sufficient* for all, so that *whoever believes* in Christ, in all the earth, will be saved! In other words, this is teaching us that the cost of Christ's sacrifice is of such infinite worth and value that is sufficient to save *anyone, in all the earth*, who repents and believes in Him, no matter what their background! No matter how sinful, lost, or hardened they may be! And so, God desires for this gospel to go forth and be made known *to all*, for God desires all people to be saved! Which is why Paul closes the paragraph by pointing to the testimony of his own ministry, in v.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." In other words, what we see here is the *scope of the gospel and the scope of the mission of the church*. The gospel is truly sufficient for *anyone, anywhere* to be saved! Including you, including me, including the person you know that seems farthest from God and the least likely to be saved. What kind of person pops to mind when I say that? What kinds of people do you think least likely to be saved? Violent criminals and terrorists? Liberal atheists? Progressive, rich elites? New Age spiritualists? Your friends and family members? Yourself? Christ's grace is sufficient for all!

It is in accordance with the will of God for us to desire, pray, and pursue for all people to be saved. This is His revealed will, that we pray and work towards that end. God has promised He will save His people, whom He's chosen, through the universal offer of the gospel to all. We, like Paul, must be committed to proclaiming the gospel of Christ "in faith and truth" to those who do not know Him. So as we pray for the salvation of all people, especially the unbelievers in our lives, let us also go forth and *share the good news of the gospel*, the offer of the free gift of salvation to them, for this gospel truly is the power of God to save; Christ's grace is sufficient for everyone, everywhere. And that means it's sufficient for me and you. So if you're not a believer today, the most important thing you need to know is that there's only one God, and only one hope of salvation: that you turn from your sins and be forgiven of them by believing in Jesus Christ, the only mediator between us and God, who died on the cross and rose again to save sinners from our sin; His grace is sufficient to save you, too! Simply repent and believe in Him. If you have questions about how to do that, or what the next steps are once you do, I'd love to speak with you; just come and speak with me after the service. Let us pray.