

Praying God's Truth - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 2:1-7** (#529)

Introduction: Think of a church that exists in a place where the Bible is not believed and where Christianity isn't held in high regard. A culture that is happy to embrace all kinds of thoughts about what it means to be male and female except for what the Bible says about men and women. A city that is perfectly at ease with celebrating every kind of religious belief so long as it doesn't affect wealth and prosperity or shake things up too much like Christianity is prone to do.

If you are thinking “that church and that land sounds a whole lot like our own,” you'd be right. But if you're thinking that it sounds a whole lot like first century Ephesus, you'd be right again. The parallels are striking, which is one of the reasons that I wanted us to spend time in **1 Timothy**. As each year goes by, I'm increasingly convinced that the early church and our own church have more in common than we might think. Rather than driving us to despair, that should give us a unique hope, because it means that we can open our Bibles and read and see even more clearly the timeless applications given by God's Word for we, His people.

Given the world that I've just described and that we are now living in, what should God's people be doing? Now that's a loaded question, isn't it? It wouldn't take more than a minute or two to fill a notebook with all of the calls from every direction that Christians should be doing this or that: we should be promoting social justice, we should stand against BLM; we should rally behind certain kinds of politics, we should ignore politics completely; we need a smaller government, we need a larger government; we need more Christians online sharing their faith, we need fewer Christians online getting worked up about every issue under the sun. The opinions would be endless – we could go on and on.

But rather than polling the world or ourselves for answers, why don't we just look to the Scriptures? Our temptation is to think that the primary ways Christians are to engage the world are through politics, activism, or how we spend our money – but those responses aren't what we find in the Scriptures. While each of those might be good and appropriate in certain circumstances, none of them are the applications given for God's people in the New Testament.

What do we see instead? That the primary way Christians engage their world is by their own personal holiness. That's right: your own devotion to the Lord, even when it isn't seen by anyone else, even when it will never make the six o' clock news or be "liked" on social media or talked about by influential people, that's what your neighbors and family and friends need most from you. The way that Christians make a difference in the world is largely through lives of quiet integrity, focusing not on all the ills of the world but instead on the ways that we ourselves fall short of God's commands. Case in point: Paul's answer to this kind of a world – the answer that he starts with for Timothy and the Ephesian church – is not about changing the city council or using wealth and influence to change the region. No, Paul's answer is prayer. Let's see that radical answer in our verses this morning...

2:1-2 We have come to a transition. Paul opened his letter by writing to Timothy about false teachers and what it means to hold to the truth of the Gospel. Now, Paul will continue with writing about what it looks like to hold to this truth – the practical "nuts and bolts" of living the Christian life alongside one another. His first topic involves prayer – not just in general, but in the context of God's people, which will then turn into a discussion about the church later in this chapter and continuing into **chapter 3**.

What do we have before us in these verses? We begin with four words. The ESV translates them as “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings;” these translate four words in the Greek that all have similar ideas. We might think that Paul is writing about four kinds of prayer, as if the ways that we should pray for all people somehow must involve each of these four ways of praying. Another thought could be that these four very different ways to pray build on one another: starting with pleading on behalf of somebody else and ending with thanksgiving.

I think it’s more helpful to see these terms as expressing similar ideas – they are all about prayer – but they do so in a way that gives us a larger picture, a bigger idea: we are to pray for all people not simply in one narrow sense. Not only in the ways that we might be comfortable or familiar with, but instead we are to come before the Lord in every way possible. We are to plead on behalf of others (supplication), we are to pray in general for all things – large and small – in our lives, we are to intercede not only for other people, but also for situations; and we are to give thanks – not only for prayers answered, but for all of the ways in which our Lord and Savior has already been good and gracious – faithful and merciful – to us.

In short, this is big picture praying. This is the sort of praying that, to paraphrase Jesus, moves mountains. And those mountains move not because of our power or faith, but because of the One whom we pray to. If Paul calls us to this kind of prayer, we need to each ask ourselves: do I pray this way? And if not, what needs to change? I suspect that, for many of us, we don’t make time for this kind of deep prayer. It seems that of all the things we do make time for, everything we call important in our lives, prayer usually ends up last, fit into our leftover time at best. We don’t say that, of course, but our actions show that we just aren’t willing to block out the time. So let’s take this head on: make a routine. If you need to, put an

entry on your calendar or a Post-it on your mirror. Block out 15 minutes at lunch, or before you eat breakfast. Turn off the TV 10 or 30 minutes earlier at night and use that time to call upon the Lord who has saved you, the God of the Universe.

Maybe you're hearing this and thinking "Pastor, come on, who has time for that?" Jesus did. We read in **Mark 1** that Jesus got up early in the morning to pray. In **Matthew 14**, Jesus goes up on a mountain to pray alone – and this is in spite of the very pressing and real needs of those around Him. At the end of His life, Jesus deliberately makes time to pray in the garden prior to His arrest (**Matthew 26**). Friends, if the God of the Universe makes time to pray, if He isn't too busy to pray, then neither are you or I. Will this be countercultural? Yes. Will it be inconvenient? Likely. But will it be faithful? Is it necessary for the Christian life? Will it be worth every minute you can give? Yes, yes, and yes.

Now, when it comes to "all people," we might fall just as short, too. Are your prayers only for yourself – your needs and wants? Maybe including your family? That's a wonderful place to start, but Paul calls us to more: what about pastors in Afghanistan right now? What about churches here in Sioux City? How are you praying for individuals to grow in the faith in our own church? And, as Paul continues, how are you praying for our mayor? Our governor? Our president?

Now, don't misunderstand: I realize that many of you *do* pray for those in "high positions" already, but I want to challenge you to pray in the way that Paul has in mind. Note that Paul's prayers don't have to do with asking the Lord for political change or for cultural renewal. Those aren't wrong to pray, but how often do we pray for our leaders in the sense that we read here? How often are our prayers asking that these folks would lead and govern in a way that enables you and I – as

Christians – not to have power or influence, not to have our agendas met, but instead, that we would be able to witness to Christ more openly and effectively? Said another way, Paul’s point isn’t that we should simply pray for freedom from oppression (which is a fine prayer!), but instead that we would pray for the freedom to serve the Lord – which assumes that we will use our freedom, even give up some of our other freedoms, so that we can better tell those around us of the God “who desires all people to be saved,” of the Lord who wants all folks “to come to the knowledge of the truth.” What Paul is commanding the Ephesian church is that their prayers would be Gospel-oriented, discipleship and evangelism-saturated; not primarily about making their own lives better for their own enjoyment. Take a moment and ask yourself: “how can this be my pattern, too?”

2:3-7 I’ve already alluded to Paul’s reason for speaking of prayer in this way: it’s because what our friends, neighbors, and coworkers need most isn’t the solutions that politics or money or influence can provide. It isn’t the relief that a government program offers. No, what they need most is to grasp what real, genuine, truth is.

By this, I’m not referring to “truth” in the sense that gets talked about on different news channels, that idea that is so popular now about how there are alternate facts and different versions of the truth. No friends, that’s not truth at all – its opinion masked as fact. Instead, the “truth” that Paul speaks of here is the unbending and unchanging truth of who Christ is and what He has accomplished.

Far from what some think of the Christian faith, our Lord does not take delight in condemning our sins. That doesn’t mean He won’t or doesn’t – of course He does, His standard is holiness after all. But it does mean that the picture of God sitting up in the clouds and waiting for a chance to zap somebody just isn’t accurate. God’s

desire is that all people would be saved. That's His bent, His inclination. But, He has also made the universe in such a way that people have the freedom to reject Christ, to ignore what the Bible says about their need for a Savior. And the same Bible tells us that most people will tragically not respond to Jesus because they love themselves and their sin more than the life and faith that Christ offers.

Yet this shouldn't lead us to think that evangelism or discipleship are pointless: that's never the response we see from faithful folks in the Bible. Instead, the point is that there are some whom God *is* drawing to the faith – that's you, by the way, if you'll follow Jesus. And just as you have come to faith through the Lord using the efforts of somebody else, so too do you have a role in being used by the Lord to draw others towards Jesus. A big part of how we do that involves dedicated, vital, prioritized prayer – for them, yes, but also for you and I: that we would have the faithfulness and courage to speak and live in ways that reflect Jesus. How so?

What people need to know is that there is one God and one mediator, and that it is Jesus who gave Himself as the sacrifice for sins – there are not many gods, being good won't save anybody, neither will social justice, or anything else; only Jesus. If that is true, and Paul stakes his very life and mission on it as does every Christian, then what should we do now? Paul will turn to that in our verses for next week, but for today, I want to leave you with these two simple points: we are to be a people who pray. And the content of our prayers is to be saturated with the Gospel. Pray in the patterns that the Bible gives us. If you aren't sure where to start, look to the prayers of Jesus or Paul – look at what they emphasize. Notice what they don't emphasize. Ask the Lord to change your thinking and praying to value what He values so that you would live as He has called. When we do that, we display our trust in the Lord and we can better know our Savior's own goodness.