

Salvation for All People: 1 Timothy 2:1-7
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This is a great text for Easter Sunday, and I'm so glad that in God's providence we have arrived at this passage this morning. Because as we rejoice in the resurrection of Christ we are going to be inspired by the universal impact of what Christ has accomplished. The Good News that Christ died for sinners and rose on the third day is a message that must go to all people. This is not something that we celebrate because it is right for us, and others can follow whatever seems right for them. The truth of the Gospel is for all people. It's not one truth among many. It is *the* Truth. And Jesus is not one Savior among many. He is the one and only Savior. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life, and no one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6). And as this passage says, He is the one mediator between God and men. So as we work our way through these verses, I pray that it will be an inspiring way to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ, realizing that His resurrection is intended to impact the whole world. And it *will* impact the whole world. First we'll look at verses 1-2 under the heading, Prayer for All People. And then we'll look at verses 3-7 under the heading, Salvation for All People.

Prayer for All People (verses 1-2)

In verse 1 Paul urges that prayers be made for all people. He uses four different words to highlight various aspects of these prayers. The prayers to God should include both petitions and thanksgiving. We ask God for particular things and we thank Him for particular things. And in this context the prayers that are being urged are prayers for all people. We ought to intercede on behalf of others, asking God to bless those individuals and thanking God for the blessings He bestows on them.

Verse 1 is general, referring to all kinds of people. Verse 2, then, focuses on a particular group of people for whom we should pray, "for kings and all who are in high positions." This is a convicting exhortation, because the tendency so often is to criticize those in high positions rather than pray for them. But think about how it would affect our own hearts if, instead of criticizing and complaining about civil authorities, we prayed for them. It's important to realize that when Paul wrote this, the emperor was Nero, who persecuted Christians. So we can't read this verse as an instruction to pray for Christians in high positions, or for those in high positions whom we happen to like. No, it means we ought to pray for the civil leaders whether or not we like them, whether or

not they are believers, whether their worldview is supportive of or antagonistic toward the Christian worldview.

What is the purpose of these prayers for the civil authorities? Paul tells us in the second half of verse 2, “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” Paul was very aware of the hindrance that civil unrest could be to the Gospel ministry. For instance, in Ephesus, the very city that Timothy was in when Paul sent this letter to him, there had been a riot concerning Christianity. This is recorded in Acts 19:23-41, and we see that things were so chaotic that Paul’s disciples wouldn’t even let him attempt to speak to the crowd. It wasn’t until the uproar ceased that Paul was able to encourage the disciples and then depart. So we pray for kings and all who are in high positions, recognizing the benefits of living in a place where there is freedom and order. For in this setting we can live peaceful and quiet lives.

This is not to say that we can expect to avoid persecution, or that we should seek to avoid persecution. Paul also said in 2 Timothy 3:12 that “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Paul is not contradicting that here in 1 Timothy 2. George Knight writes in his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, “An evaluation of Paul’s own life leads one to realize that this ‘quiet’ does not mean a sheltered life but rather freedom from the turmoil that threatened to thwart his ministry” (pg. 117). Thus, Paul instructs us to pray for our civil leaders, that they will exercise their authority justly and honestly and wisely so that we can focus on growing in godliness and spreading the Good News. The evangelistic aspect of this is implied by verse 4, that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Our godly and dignified lives will be a means to that end.

Let us pray for our leaders. Maybe you’re tempted to think that criticism and complaints will have more of an impact than prayer, but the Bible tells us otherwise. As we pray for the president and governors and mayors and judges and members of the congress and senate, who knows what God will be pleased to do through those prayers—for the spread of the Gospel and the sanctity of life and the sanctity of marriage and the protection of the freedoms we enjoy in this country. I’m convicted by this personally, because I don’t pray nearly enough for our civil authorities. But I’m inspired by this passage to pray earnestly for our leaders, to pray that God will bring them to faith in Jesus, and that they would live upright lives and be men and women of integrity, that they would stand for justice and make wise decisions.

As we ask God for these things we must also use the freedom we have to pursue a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. Think about the amazing freedom we have in this country. Think about the amazing opportunities we have to study God's Word and have fellowship with other believers and talk about the Gospel openly with friends and family and co-workers and even strangers. We should not take these freedoms for granted, but thank God for them and use them to pursue godliness and the spread of the Gospel.

Salvation for All People (verses 3-7)

To under gird this call to prayer, Paul moves on in verses 3 and following to proclaim the universal scope of God's desire and God's design for salvation. Verse 3 says, "This is good," meaning the prayers for all people. Our prayers and concern for all kinds of people, including kings and those in high positions, is a good thing. And it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior. It brings God delight to see His children petitioning Him on behalf of all kinds of other people. Don't ever feel like you're bothering God when you pray. He loves it when we come to Him in our need, asking Him to reveal His power and make Himself known and glorify His Name in our midst. That is not an annoyance to God. It's a delight. It pleases Him.

And now we see why it pleases Him in verse 4. It pleases Him when we pray for all people, because He desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Therefore, when we pray for all kinds of people, our prayers are right in line with God's desires, because He wants to save all kinds of people.

Now I need to show you why I think "all people" means "all kinds of people," because this is a debated verse. This statement that God desires all people to be saved, along with the statement in verse 6, that Christ Jesus "gave himself as a ransom for all," is used by many people to argue against the idea that Christ died specifically for the elect. Many people will say that Christ died in order to give everyone an opportunity to be saved, but it's ultimately up to our free will whether we will choose to put our faith in Christ or not. The determining factor is our free will. And on that view, God's desire for all people to be saved and Christ's ransom for all means that He made salvation available for every person and is hoping that every person will exercise their free will and turn to Him in faith.

There are at least two significant problems with that view. First, there are passages like John 10:11 where Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." This verse and others point to the fact that Jesus died particularly for the elect—for His sheep. And secondly, Christ's

death and resurrection does not merely make salvation *possible*. It assures that the elect will be saved. Just a few verses later in John 10, in verse 16, Jesus says, “And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice.” He knows who His sheep are, and they *will* listen to His voice. Or in 2 Timothy 2:24-25 Paul writes, “And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth.” So while the will is certainly involved in repentance and faith, God is the One who must grant for this to happen. His grace must change our hearts before we will ever repent and believe.

Therefore when we examine 1 Timothy 2 and try to understand it alongside these other biblical statements about God’s sovereignty in salvation, we discover that the context indicates pretty clearly that “all people” refers not to “every individual” but to “all kinds of people.” That’s the idea in verse 1. We ought to pray for all kinds of people, and then he mentions a particular group of people consisting of kings and all who are in high positions. Also, in verse 7 Paul says that he was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher of the *Gentiles* in faith and truth. Paul was called to the Gentiles, to the *ethnōn*, to the nations. This is the context of these verses. Paul urges prayer for all kinds of people. He refers to his ministry to the nations. And in this whole section he is likely combating an exclusivist tendency among the false teachers. He wants to emphasize that the Gospel is not just for Jews, but for all peoples.

For these reasons, I think the appropriate way to understand these verses is to recognize that “all people” is referring to “all kinds of people.” God’s desire is that all types of people, rich and poor, slave and free, those in high positions and those in low positions, men and women, Jew and Gentile, that individuals from all of these groups and classes would be saved. John Calvin says, “the Apostle simply means, that there is no people and no rank in the world that is excluded from salvation . . .” (*Calvin’s Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*). The phrase in verse 6 that Christ Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all” is right in line with the glorious proclamation of Revelation 5:9, the new song that is sung to the Lamb, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.” The Gospel is for all peoples. Christ died for individuals from every people group in the world. And He will save those for whom He died, which will involve missionaries going to these people groups and proclaiming the Gospel. This is the significance

of Christ's death and resurrection. It is universal in its intent and its impact.

Before moving on to verse 5 let's just pause to consider what it means "to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." Coming to the knowledge of the truth is a crucial part of being saved. One needs to have a knowledge of who God is—that He is holy and righteous and good, that He hates sin and is separated from sin and must punish sin. One needs to see the truth of his or her own sinfulness—a very tough pill to swallow, but necessary nonetheless. We have to come to the knowledge that we are wretched sinners in desperate need of a Savior. Then there's the wonderful truth that Jesus Christ died for sinners, and the truth that those who repent and believe in Him will be saved, meaning we are spared the punishment that we deserve and we receive an eternal inheritance in heaven which we do not deserve. This is the truth of the Gospel, and it's by coming to a knowledge of this truth, not just affirming it in our minds but embracing it with our hearts, that a person is saved.

Verses 5-6 explain how this salvation is accomplished. I focused on these verses in the message on Good Friday, so I won't repeat everything I said then. But it's important for us to see how these verses fit into the flow of thought in the paragraph. Paul has just written that God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And now He gives a basis for that statement, which is indicated by the word "For" at the beginning verse 5. He says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." And we might wonder how these statements provide a basis for the fact that God desires all people to be saved. It's not immediately clear how God's desire for all to be saved is connected to the fact that there's one God and one mediator. It's helpful to look at some of the other places where Paul affirms that there is one God, especially Romans 3:29-30, which says, "Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Do you see the connection in those verses? The logic is that God is the God of Jews and Gentiles, because there's only one God. There isn't a god for the Jews and then various other gods for other ethnic groups. There is one God who has planned to save people from every ethnic group. He is not a tribal deity. He is not one among many. He is the One and only. He is the God for all peoples. And in this way His desire to save all kinds of people is connected to the truth that He is the only God and there is only one way to get to Him.

Isn't this an amazing dynamic in the Christian faith? In one sense this text seems very exclusive, because it excludes all

other religions. It denies the validity of all other religions, because there is only one true God. And not only that, the verse then excludes all paths to God other than Jesus Christ. There is only one God, and there is only one way to get to this one God, and that is through the one mediator Christ Jesus. So on the one hand the text is very exclusive. But on the other hand it is gloriously inclusive, because this one God desires all people to be saved. It has been His plan from the very beginning. He told Abram in Genesis 12:3, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” And we see this very thing happening now as the Gospel spreads to the ends of the earth, impacting more and more people groups. Many ethnic groups are yet unreached, but as the Gospel is proclaimed and people put their trust in Jesus, this promise is being fulfilled. The exclusive means of salvation is intended to be universally inclusive. There is one God and one mediator, and this one God desires to save all kinds of people.

I find this truth so inspiring, and I hope God will use it in your life too, in order to give you a global vision of what God is doing and plans to do among the nations. We serve a big God. He’s not just at work here in Pittsburgh or in the United States. And He is instilling a desire in many hearts to leave home, to leave what’s comfortable, to leave what’s familiar, in order to take the Good News to those who have never heard, to go to people groups who have never had the opportunity to hear about Jesus Christ. Maybe God is putting that desire in your heart. I encourage you to fan the flame of that passion by praying for the unreached people groups of the world and researching the modern missions movement to understand what is being done (and what is not being done) to engage these unbelieving people groups. What is God laying on your heart? How does He want you to be involved in His mission to bring in all of His sheep, from every tribe and language and people and nation? He has promised to do it. He *will* do it. How might He be pleased to use us to accomplish these great plans?

As we looked at Friday evening, we see in verses 5-6 that Christ is the mediator between God and men. He gave himself up, referring to His sacrificial death on the cross. And He is our ransom, which shows that His sacrificial death was substitutionary. He became our substitute. He died so that we can be freed. And we notice also those important words, “for all.” He gave himself as a ransom for all. Again, I believe in the context of this passage the “all” is best understood as “all kinds of people.” In this we continue to see the dynamic of the exclusive and inclusive nature of the Gospel. There is one God who desires all kinds of people to be saved. And there is one mediator between God and men, the

man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all kinds of people.

At the end of verse 6 Paul says that this is the testimony given at the proper time. By this phrase he transitions to the comment on his personal call to deliver this testimony to the Gentiles. It seems that the testimony is both referring back to Christ's giving of Himself as a ransom, which happened at exactly the right time in history according to God's plan of salvation, and the testimony is also the proclamation of this truth, which is what Paul was appointed for. That's the connection to verse 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." It excites Paul to write about the Gospel, and it's very natural for him then to speak of his personal calling as a preacher and apostle and teacher of this Gospel, and his specific calling to the Gentiles. Paul often had to defend his apostleship, which he does so here by insisting that he is telling the truth and not lying. But he doesn't assert his apostleship in a proud way, but more in a sense of enthusiasm and amazement. Remember his personal testimony in the previous chapter, where he admitted that he was formerly a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, and calls himself the foremost of sinners (1:12-15). And then he writes in verse 16, "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life."

Paul was continually in awe of the fact that God saved him and also called him to be an apostle. And he also recognized that his own conversion and calling could be an example and an encouragement to others. And I think that's how we can apply 2:7 to our lives. Paul's love of the Gospel compelled him to preach the Gospel and teach the Gospel. It was not something merely to study in private and to examine and analyze. It is meant to be proclaimed. It must be preached. And it must be preached to the Gentiles. It's not just for Jews or for any single group of people. It is for all the nations, all the people groups of the world.

This is the theme of this passage, and verse 7 brings us right back to where we began in verse 1, with a concern for all people. In verse 1 we are urged to pray for all kinds of people, including civil authorities. And in verse 7 we have an example of preaching the Gospel to all kinds of people, Jews and Gentiles alike. And we should be emboldened in our prayers for all people and our preaching to all people, because God desires to save all kinds of people and individuals from every people group. And He has provided a mediator through whom sinners can be reconciled to God, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

I want to close with an illustration from the life of William Carey. He was the great missionary to India in the late 1700s and early 1800s. He was a pioneer in the missions movement, and he had to be because so many of the pastors around him were utterly apathetic toward the idea of taking the Gospel to other parts of the world. As a young minister he had the opportunity to recommend a topic for discussion at a meeting of ministers, and he raised the issue of the Great Commission. This was not well received, and he was told, "If God wants to save the heathen He can do so without our help or yours." That was the sad reality of how much the churches in England at that time had suppressed the biblical mandate to make disciples of all nations. Fortunately, their apathy did not dampen William Carey's zeal, and he eventually went to India, where he preached and taught and also translated the Bible and printed it so that the people could have the Word in their own language. With the help of others he translated the Bible into 40 different languages and dialects during his 41 years there.

That is the kind of passion and perseverance that a text like this ought to produce. God's glory and grace will go to the ends of the earth, and what greater joy could we experience in life than to be involved in some way in this mission. So as we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, let us be reminded afresh this morning of the global impact of this event. Let us be reminded that there are millions of people who are not celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ today, and many because they have never heard of Jesus. But the Gospel will go forth, and those for whom Christ died will be saved. And I pray that our hearts will be caught up in the beauty of this truth in such a way that we pursue our own joy in praying for all people and proclaiming the Gospel to all people, to make God's Name famous in the all the world.