

Prayer and Witness

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Date: 03 October 2021

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, everyone. As has been said, my name is Alistair. I have the privilege of being the assistant pastor here at Brunnsfield. And this morning, it is my joy and privilege to lead us in as we turn to God's word, 1 Timothy chapter 2, verses 1 to 7.

So please do keep that passage open in front of you. But I want to start by asking you a question. Hopefully a number will come up on the screen. What do you think the number? Now I need to try to get this right.

7,794,798,739. It's going to be a long time to learn that.

What do you think that number is? Population of the world. Exactly. That is the estimated number of people who were alive in July 1st, 2020.

It is estimated that today the world population is 7.9 billion, with an estimated of 385,000 babies being born every single day.

[1 : 08] To us, the number of people on this screen are just that, digits on a screen.

We don't know all of these people. We couldn't even begin to comprehend knowing this number of people. To us, they are just a number on a screen. But let me tell you something that is both humbling and glorious.

Each individual that makes up the current world population of 7.9 billion people is known to and loved by God.

There are no exceptions. Every single person in this world bears God's image and is full of worth and dignity.

Now I'm saying that because this morning we need to understand God's heart for the world.

Because that is key to understanding our passage in 1st Timothy this morning.

[2 : 09] As Paul is writing this letter to Timothy, the church in Ephesus had started focusing on themselves only. Their care and all their time seemed to be taken up mostly with how they were doing as a church.

And the goings on in their local body. It's as if they were standing in a circle looking in on themselves. And they'd forgotten everyone else around them.

Now the same can be true for churches today, can't it? It's so easy for churches to become insular. To forget anything going on outside of our own building.

And there can be a mentality in the church. That says everything inside a church building.

Everything within Christian circles is good and everything outside is not.

The thinking that we are the good guys and everyone outside is bad. That mentality leads to neglecting the world and people who are made in God's image.

[3 : 13] That mentality leads to not sharing the good news of Jesus with people and it leads to a false sense of superiority. That's what Paul was seeing in the church in Ephesus.

And it's one of the reasons that he sent Timothy to lead that church. They were focusing on themselves and neglecting the world around them. And so in chapter 2 verses 1 to chapter 13 to chapter 3 sorry verse 13.

Paul gives descriptions of godly living within the church. And chapter 2 is all about their worship as a gathered church. A passage this morning is a call for the Ephesian church to pray for all people.

Now if I had to summarize the message of 1st Timothy 2, 1 to 7 it would be this. The church should be a praying and witnessing community that reflects God's heart for the world.

That message was needed for this first century church. But that same message is needed in every single church today including Brunnsfield Evangelical Church. As a church we should be a praying and witnessing community that reflects God's heart for the world.

[4 : 36] We're going to look at these verses under two headings. First the instruction to pray and witness and second the reasons to pray and witness. So the first thing we see in this passage are the instruction to pray and witness in verses 1 to 2.

The instruction to pray and witness. Look with me at verse 1. I urge then first of all that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.

For kings and all those in authority. That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. So in chapter 1 Paul highlighted to Timothy his responsibility as a church leader to stand up and oppose the false teachers.

And now turning to the church body as a whole, Paul said that prayer should be a priority in their lives. Four different words are used for prayer in verse 1. But Paul isn't saying that these prayers rank differently.

He uses these different words which focus on different elements of prayer. To highlight that all kinds of prayer must be given for all people.

[5 : 56] And in the context this means that Timothy and the church should be praying for those false teachers that they need to correct. Praying for those who have been deliberately deceiving people and causing trouble in the church.

Praying for all people obviously includes our neighbors. Our friends, our families, our work colleagues. It means praying for the persecuted church.

It means praying for those who do not know Jesus. And it means praying for those we rub shoulders with day by day. It means praying for those who are well liked and loved.

And it also means praying for those who are the so-called outcasts in our society that we were thinking about with Stuart earlier on. And everyone in between. We should be praying all kinds of prayer for all people.

But Paul highlights in particular kings and those in authority. Now a bit of historical background. At this time Nero was the Roman emperor.

[7 : 06] The Romans didn't like the Christian church and they were being persecuted. Now at this point I hadn't quite reached the height of systematic persecution that would come in just a few years.

Nero is known for violence. For sending hundreds of Christians into coliseums to be killed. For sport and for pleasure. Crucifying Christians who didn't renounce their faith in Jesus.

And Paul says pray for that man. Pray for those who are in authority. The principle to pray for rulers and leaders applies both in good times and in bad.

The government has at this point had the power to act on laws and policies that could either protect Christians. Or put a target on their backs.

So Paul says pray for your leaders. Or put yourself in their shoes. As a persecuted minority at this time. The temptation would be to focus on praying for themselves.

[8 : 15] Now their persecution would end wouldn't it? But Paul flips it on his head and says no consider God's heart for the world and pray for all people.

Pray for those who persecute you. Pray for those who rule over you. Pray for those who are attending the pagan temple on a daily basis. Pray for the false teachers that they would become Christians.

Pray for your leaders. Pray for those who persecute you. Pray for those who persecute you. But we do the same today don't we? Take Afghanistan for example. We rightly pray for the minority Christian church there.

The Barnabas Fund estimate that there are only 1,000 Christians at present in Afghanistan. And every single day they are under the constant threat of death because of their faith in Jesus.

It is good and right for us to pray for them. But Paul also instructs us to pray for the Taliban. Paul is instructing the Christians in Afghanistan to pray for the Taliban.

[9 : 26] We should pray for the Christians to be protected. But we should also pray that their witness in that country would win over the Taliban. And that God would work and bring people to know Him.

We need to pray for all people. Pray, Paul says, so that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

So there are two aims here. Pray so that one, they can live peaceful lives. So that they can freely gather as a church, sit under the teaching of God's word.

And be Christians in peace. It's a prayer for religious liberty. But two, the second reason that this church should pray is so that the life of the church, the life of every single believer would be marked by godliness and holiness.

Because that is the kind of life that is pleasing to God. So the first reason speaks of the governing authorities' role in allowing the church to meet.

[10 : 34] And the second is about the church's witness to those around them. As Christians, our lives should be marked, should be a witness to those around us that we are different.

We are to conduct ourselves with godliness and holiness because it pleases God. The way we respond to situations that anger us.

The way we raise our kids. The way we talk in the pub, in the pew and in the pulpit. Should be a living testimony to how great God is and His goodness in our lives.

And should be a witness to those around us. Paul told us about that last week in chapter 1 verse 16. Our lives are to be a constant example of the gospel.

That's how we witness to the world. We are to be examples of Christ in every aspect of our lives.

And that same instruction to pray and to witness that Paul gave Timothy and the Ephesian church is true for us today.

[11 : 40] As a church, we are instructed to pray for all kinds of prayers for all people. Now that may sound overwhelming.

Where on earth do you start praying for all people? Well, I'd like to highlight just a few tools for you. The Good Book Company have produced a little series of books to help us pray biblically.

And to help us make prayer a priority in our lives. Each book has, as it says on the cover, five things to pray. For your kids, for your parents, your city, your church, and for the world.

And there are others as well. These books don't include everything, but they are a tool that can help us pray for all people. Practically, come to the prayer meeting.

Sadly, in churches today, the prayer meeting is often the least attended meeting there is. At a prayer meeting, we come before our great God and we pray all kinds of prayer for all people.

[12 : 49] Tomorrow night on Zoom at 8pm for just 30 minutes, we have the opportunity to do that. We have the opportunity to do exactly what this passage is telling us to.

Would you join us and do what God is asking us to do and pray all kinds of prayer for all people. But also pray for our leaders.

We need to pray that they would have wisdom. And that they would govern in a way that glorifies God. And pray that they would come to know Jesus for themselves.

Governments only have authority because it has been given to them by God. And so we must pray that they use it well. And they use it for His glory. The UK today is often described as a post-Christian society.

And it's easy to think that we are the persecuted minority. And to forget about everything going on outside of our building and only focus on ourselves. But Paul says, no, get on your knees and pray.

[13 : 54] Pray for Boris Johnson and Westminster. Pray for Nicola Sturgeon and Hollywood. Pray for local council members, for school staff, for principals.

Pray for shopkeepers and local businesses. Pray for your neighbours, your friends, your family members who don't know Jesus. And pray for false teachers. Well known and those closer to home.

That they would come to a saving knowledge of God. And live your life in front of all these people. Be a witness to them. Of the glory of God in the Gospel.

Be a church body that through prayer and witnessing reflects God's heart for the world. That is what we are being instructed to do.

And the second thing that we see in this passage are the reasons to pray and witness. In verses 3 to 7. The reasons to pray and witness. Now if a church has become so self-absorbed.

[14 : 58] You can imagine them asking why. Why should we pray for outsiders? Why should we pray for rulers who oppress us? Why should we pray for and witness to all people?

Well Paul anticipates that question. He gives them two reasons. Firstly, so that people would come to know God. And secondly, because there is only one means of salvation.

Which we have already been singing about this morning. Look with me at verses 3 to 4. It says, So the prayers and lives of godliness and holiness in the church.

That we saw in verses 1 and 2 are pleasing to God. Do you see the magnitude of that sentence? God is pleased when his people pray and witness about him.

The desire of every single Christian should be or is to please God and bring him glory and honor in every situation of our lives. And we are told how to do that.

[16:14] We are not left in the dark. God finds joy and pleasure in the obedient prayers and witnessing of his people. So for every Christian here this morning, go and do it.

Pray and witness to those around you. Pray for all people. Witness to all people. Live in a way that glorifies God. Live with godliness and holiness every day for God's glory because it pleases him.

Now that's the easy bit. Then we get to verse 4. And we have to ask, does God want all people to be saved? Now maybe for you that verse didn't really stand out.

Because you do think that everyone will be saved. Or maybe you asked yourself the question, well if that's true, why isn't everyone saved? Or maybe you asked, how does God's will match up with people dying without any indication that they're Christians?

Or maybe you're asking, well if God is sovereign, why does he not just save everybody? Now this is a complicated but very important issue.

[17:33] And so I hope you don't mind if I spend a few minutes digging a little bit deeper so that we're all on the same page. It is important to look at these verses in the context. Because for example, some of you may have been taught what's called universalism.

The idea that everyone is saved in the end. Now if we read passages like Romans 2 for example. That God will judge the sins of the world.

They don't quite match up. And this is where we need to submit to the authority of scripture as Stuart was talking about earlier on. Those who are not Christians, it says in Romans 2, and have rejected Jesus.

Will be under the eternal judgment of God. God makes that abundantly clear in the Bible. That Christians will be saved and spend eternity in the presence of God. And all those who reject Jesus and are not Christians will spend eternity under his wrath in hell.

So thinking back to verse 4. How do we reconcile the truth that God wants all people to be saved? And passages like Romans 2. And there are others that talk about judgment and hell.

[18:47] How do we marry those two together? This is where we need to make sure we are rooted in scripture. Because we cannot cherry pick verses out of context.

To understand what it means that God wants all people to be saved, we need to take a step back. Look at the broader context of this book and the wider context of the biblical narrative.

The whole of the Bible. In the Bible, when it speaks of God's will, there are two kinds of wills mentioned. The first is his sovereign will.

Which refers to his control over the world and our lives. This will cannot be broken. What God has ordained, we cannot stop or hinder.

This sovereign will of God is largely unknown to us. We see it as we look back over time. But looking to the future, we cannot discern it.

[19:44] This aspect of God's will, his sovereign will, is responsible for calling and saving his people. And the second kind of God's will mentioned in the Bible is his moral will.

Referring to his holiness and his godliness. God's moral will is reflected in his commandments. You shall not kill, you shall not steal, and so on.

Now humanity can and does break God's moral law every single day. Christians break God's moral will every single day. But verse 4 is about God's moral will.

That all people will repent and be saved. But it is not his sovereign will. That all people will in fact be saved. Every church is to be a pillar of truth.

And that's what chapter 3 verse 15 says. Meaning that every church and every believer is to hold out the good news of Jesus. To the world. So God's moral will is that every single person in this world would hear about Jesus.

[20:54] And come to know him. As a church. As individual believers. We have a role to play in this. We have to take the gospel to the world.

But not just to some people. Not only to those who are like us. Not only to those of a similar color. Similar class. Similar culture. Similar language.

But we need to break down every single barrier that exists. And share the gospel with all people. So that they can hear it. That is what God wants. Now the will of God is a very deep topic.

And we haven't even scratched the surface of it this morning. No one can really fully comprehend the will of God. He is infinite. And we are finite. He is God.

And we are not. But let me say that there is amazing comfort in God's sovereign will. Because it means that it is not up to us to save people.

[21 : 53] We have the task of praying and witnessing to all people. But we leave the results to him. The great God who works wonders in people's hearts.

And who brings people to a knowledge of the truth every single day. That is his task. And imagine what it would look like if God wasn't sovereign.

There would be no meaning in anything. No meaning in suffering. No certainty that the hand of a good God is somehow working out even the hardest circumstances for good in the life of his people.

If God wasn't sovereign then all the evil that goes on in the world every single day would go unpunished. And God would be helpless to act. If God is not sovereign then he is not God.

If God is in absolute control. Because it means that all the evil we see in this world will be dealt with one day. As every single human being stands before a holy and just God.

[23 : 03] And gives an account of their actions and how they responded to Jesus. In this life people have gotten away with atrocities that I don't even want to mention. Let alone think about.

But God has seen it all. And he will judge all. We are all deserving of that judgment. But through Jesus we have been given the opportunity to be free from the wrath of God.

And instead to be in a perfect relationship with him. So we have scratched the surface of this massive topic. And if you have questions. Or you want to talk about anything.

Please chat to me afterwards and let's meet up. I spend my week walking with people. Talking about the Bible. And I absolutely love it. So please do come with your hard questions and Bible passages.

Let's talk through it together. Get in touch. And let's think through this. What Paul says to the church in Ephesus. And to Bruntsfield Evangelical Church this morning.

[24 : 04] God wants all people to hear about Jesus. So go tell them. Be a praying and witnessing community that reflects the heart of God for this world.

Now think back to that number on the screen. 7.9 billion people are in the world today. 3.27 billion of those people are classed as unreached.

Meaning that they have few or no Christians and little to no knowledge of the Bible or Jesus at all. 3.27 billion.

That is 42.5% of the world who have no idea about Jesus. Are we really reflecting God's heart for the world?

God wants us, his people, to go into the world and to be his witness. Who declare that there is only one means to salvation. That's what we see in verses 5 to 6. Read with me.

[25 : 16] For there is one God. One mediator between God and mankind. The man Christ Jesus. Who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has been witnessed to at the proper time.

Now maybe you remember from religious classes at school. Being told that God is a bit like a mountain. That there are many different roads that lead to him. But in the end you all get to the same place.

That is not true. Regardless of what Mr. Griffiths told you. He was my RE teacher as a kid.

It is clearly not what many religions actually teach or believe either. Christianity is very exclusive.

There is only one God. And only one means to salvation through Jesus Christ. Nobody can stumble into heaven. No one can be good enough to get on God's good side.

[26 : 18] No one can be nice enough to be right with God from the get go. There is one God and one mediator. Jesus Christ.

Hope for salvation. Hope of eternal life. Hope of forgiveness is only possible through Jesus. This is only possible verse 6.

Because Jesus is the only ransom for all people. See Jesus was not just a nice guy or a good moral teacher. Jesus is God in the flesh. Who came in human form.

Who lived the perfect life of obedience to God. That we couldn't even begin to imagine living. And yet he died the death that each one of us deserves.

Because as Jesus was nailed to that cross. He bore the weight of our sin. He bore the weight of God's just righteous wrath against the sins of the world. And yet Jesus did not stay dead.

[27 : 21] He rose victorious from the grave. Defeating sin. Defeating death. And he is now seated at the right hand of God the Father. Interceding on behalf of his people.

For God to be just and good. And punishment for sins must happen. But God in his grace and mercy sent his own son Jesus. To take the punishment for all those who would call on him and repent and believe.

Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all people. That's what verse 6 says. There is only one to be saved. So Christianity has an exclusive message. But it is also inclusive.

Because this is a call to come and follow him. Friends if you are here and you are not a Christian. If you are wondering what significance any of this has in your life.

It is right there in verse 6. Jesus gave his life as a ransom for all people. That includes you. If you are in church this morning.

[28 : 30] And if you are known to even just one of us in this building. I guarantee you that we have been praying for you. That you would come to know the truth of who Jesus is. And if that is you this morning.

Listen to the call. Repent. Turn from your sin and run to Jesus. God desires for you to be saved. Listen to his call this morning. And come to him.

Do not delay. And for us as Christians. As a church family this morning. I want to challenge us practically. About praying and witnessing to the world. This afternoon go home.

Think of three people who you know who are not Christians. Three people. Write their names down. Keep them on you at all times. And pray for them every single day. That they would come to a saving knowledge of Jesus.

But don't only pray. Witness to them as well. Tell them the truth about Jesus. Proclaim Jesus to them. The life of a Christian and a church.

[29 : 33] Should be always one of prayer. And witnessing. That reflects the heart of God for the world. So go and do it. That is the task we have been given.

Pray that God would give you his same desire. To see all people be saved. Pray that your heart would reflect. His heart for the world. Pray that God would give you a burden for this neighbourhood.

For this city. For this country. And for the world. And share Jesus intentionally. That's what Paul defines his role as in verse 7.

He is a herald. An apostle. A faithful teacher. Of the truth to the world. He's an example of the kind of life. That we should live. One of prayer and witnessing.

That reflects God's heart for the world. Friends. And we should live. That we should live. That we should live. Friends. Beyond those doors. We do not find a world. That is bad. And should be avoided.

[30 : 34] Beyond those doors. We find our mission field. Beyond those doors. As you rub shoulders with people who are lost.

With people who are dying. And going to hell. Because they do not know Jesus. Pray and witness. For all people.

Pray that they would come to know Jesus. The quote that always comes to mind. When I think about the importance of prayer. And witnessing. To all people. Is this from Charles Spurgeon.

An English pastor from many years ago. And he said this. If sinners be damned. At least let them leap. To hell over our dead bodies.

And if they perish. Let them perish. With our arms wrapped. Around their knees. Imploring. Them to stay. If hell must be filled.

[31 : 43] Let it be filled. With the teeth of our exertions. Let no one go unwarned. And let no one go unprayed for. Deepsxkachep.

so now think back to that number on the screen the world's population of 7.9 billion people we only know a few of them but to God each and every single one of them is loved and valued and his desire is that they would all hear about Jesus and be confronted with the truth God has a heart for all the people of this world friends we need to be a church we need to be Christians that are praying and witnessing in such a way that reflects that heart for the world so let's do that just now and pray together Heavenly Father we come before you this morning and we have a massive task ahead of us 7.9 billion people 46.5% of whom have no idea who you are

Father help us not leave feeling that we are in this alone but help us remember that you have given us your Holy Spirit who empowers us every single day to be a praying and witnessing community that reflects your heart for this world Lord give us a burden for the people you have placed around us give us your love for them and help us act on it Father make us a church and make us Christians who reflect you in every single way we ask this in Jesus holy and precious name Amen I'll be very impressed by our fellow LostIndex All■■■ Resumes Tip
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