

The Scope of Our Prayers and Our Mission 1 Timothy 2:1-7

For many of us, our attention has been fixed on the elections in our country. While this passage touches on the need to pray for our leaders, it goes way beyond that, drawing attention to the church's global mission. Paul teaches us to embrace the world in prayer, and to engage the world with the good news. [Pray]

In 2004, I went on a mission trip to Greece during the Olympics, a great opportunity to talk to people from around the world. (I've always loved the parade of nations during the introductory ceremony; makes me think of the multitude of nations worshiping in Rev 5)

- One day we decided to do some beach reach.
- Once we found the part of the beach that required clothing, we began engaging people in conversation. (The first part of the beach we went to was not the best setting for evangelism!).
- A group of Bangladesh guys kept trying to sell us these little beach mats.
- Finally, I said, "I'll buy one of your mats for \$5 if you give me 5 minute to talk about Jesus. He said, "\$3." I didn't know if that meant he only wants three minutes, but I went in quickly to try to explain Jesus as the bridge between humanity and God.
- I decided to do it in picture form, using some objects at the beach... cigarette bud and a water bottle... The presentation wasn't the best but hopefully we put something in his mind to consider.
- This passage shows us that there is one mediator between humanity and God; one way of salvation for the whole world.

It draws our attention beyond our country to the global needs of the world. It certainly encompasses our country, for America is part of the world, but it goes beyond our area, giving us a glorious vision of our mission to the world.

What stands out in this passage is **the universal scope of it**.

Notice the references to "**all**" or "**everyone**" "panta antropon" [all people, v. 1, 4)

- Our prayers are to be made for all people. (1-2). We should not confine our prayers to only our local/immediate concerns, but should include the world.
- God's desire for the salvation of sinners concerns all people (4); salvation is not for one particular group, but the nations.
- Christ's death concerns all people (6); he came into the world to ransom a people from every tribe, language, people and nation.
- Paul's mission (and by extension the church's mission) concerns all people (7); reference to the **Gentiles is made in 2:7**, is the word "**ethne**" – ethnicities/nations.

In contrast to the false teachers in Ephesus, Paul is defending the idea that the gospel is intended for the nations; some were downplaying the importance of reaching the Gentiles.

- See chapter 1, Jewish teachers tangled up about genealogies, myths, etc.

- They were all about their little tribe.
- But God is not a tribal deity.
- He is not simply the God of America, England, France but the God of the nations.
- He desires the salvation of all types of people – all races, nations, classes.

²² “Turn to me and be saved,
all the ends of the earth!

For I am God, and there is no other. (Isa 45)

- He is worthy of the worship of all types of people everywhere.

But notice not only the **inclusive** nature of this passage (everyone is invited to come to Christ), but how at the same time it is also **exclusive** – as it shows us that there’s only one way of salvation.

- One God, One Mediator, One way of salvation, for the whole world.

Christianity is both inclusive and exclusive; we pray for all people and preach to all people about the one way of salvation in Christ.

Let’s consider this passage in two parts: (1) embracing the world in prayer, and (2) engaging the world with the good news.

#1: Embracing the World in Prayer (2:1-4)

A. The Priority of Prayer (v. 1)

- “I **urge**” (Rom 12:1) – strong exhortation is coming... **see 1:3**
- “**first of all**” –speaking of the vital importance of prayer.
- In 1 Timothy, he is describing the roles of pastors/deacons, and the order of the church. Before he gets to those important subjects, he reminds the church of how important it is that they be a **praying community**.
- Prayer is one of the most important activities we do as Christians.
- It taps people into God’s power; it gives to people what we cannot give them.
- We must preach the gospel and defend the gospel (1:12-20) and we must pray for everyone.
- How are your prayer times? Prayer walks? Prayer with others?
- **Matt Chandler: prayer walks at Village Church for their community...**
- **2:8** – stop holding up your fists in quarreled, and start holding up your hands in prayer.

B. The Variety of Prayer (v. 1b)

- The variety of terms highlights the richness of the experience of prayer.
- George Knight’s definitions:
 - *Deeseis*: making requests for specific needs
 - *Proseuchas*: bringing those in view of God (basic word for prayer)
 - *Enteuxeis*: appealing broadly on their behalf
 - *Eucharistias*: thankfulness for them
- The main point is that we offer all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people.
- We do this because our God hears and responds to his people.
 - Not like the idols (Ps 115)

C. The Objects of Prayer (1c-2)

Pray for “**all people**” — those near us/those far away — for enemies as well as friends.

- He has just mentioned some people that made shipwreck of their faith, and the warfare that is involved in this life (1:18-20)... in light of what’s at stake, pray for everyone.
- And he is about to speak of praying for peace and the spread of the gospel.

Both peace and the spread of the gospel our emphasized here in 2.1–7.

- Some writers label this passage *evangelistic prayer*.
- We call **Matthew 28 the Great Commission; 1 Timothy 2 is the Great Intercession.**
- Our private prayers and our public prayers should include a global reach.
- We try to make a habit of that in our public gatherings: praying for church renewal across the world; church planting, evangelism and the work of justice and mercy.
- I have never forgotten the rebuke to church leaders given by John Stott when I was just starting in ministry:

Although Paul uses this cluster of four words, they all focus on a single theme, namely that they should *be made for everyone* (1). This immediately rebukes the narrow parochialism of many churches’ prayers. 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 lady 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 worshipped 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.

May we never be a village church with a village God.

We are a global church with a global God.

The God who rules the world wants his people to embrace the world in prayer.

Including Leaders (v. 2)

- When Paul says pray for everyone, he means everyone – including leaders.
- This may have been a big surprise when this letter was read out loud in Ephesus.
- Pray for Nero? Pray for pagan rulers? Prayer for those who want to persecute us? Yes, yes, yes.
- There were no Christian kings in these days, and Paul still says include them in your prayers.
- We do so knowing that God “is the Most High, the Great King over all the earth” ...
 - “God reigns over the nations; God sits on his holy throne” (Ps 47.2, 8)
 - “For kingship belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.” (Ps 22.28)
 - “The Lord reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!” (Psalm 99.1)
- We are to pray for global leaders regardless of what you think of their policies in view of God’s sovereign rule over them.

- And if you don't like them, you have even more reason to pray for them, as prayer changes our hearts toward others.
- Chrysostom: "No one can feel hatred toward those for whom he prays."
- Clement of Rome wrote concerning rulers and governors:
 - "Grant them, Lord, health, peace, harmony and stability, that they may blamelessly administer the government which you have given them... Lord, direct their plans according to what is good and pleasing in your sight, so that by devoutly administering peace and gentleness the authority which you have given them they may experience your mercy."
- David Platt: Trump visited the church and he prayed for him – that's it, he read this passage and prayed, and he got called everything under the sun.
- That's our job, to pray for leaders.

D. The Reasons for Prayer (2b)

1. Peace

- Clement's reference to peace fits this passage as well: "that we may live a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way"
- Christians were to be peacemakers, and to avoid being public agitators.
- Here they are called to pray for such peace.
- Stott: "Thus church and state have reciprocal duties, the church to pray for the state (and be its conscience), the state to protect the church (so that it may be free to perform its duties). Each should acknowledge that the other also has a divine origin and purpose. Each should help the other to fulfill its God-given role."
- Like the captives in Babylon we should pray for and seek the peace and welfare of our society.

O Lord our Governor, whose glory is in all the world: We commend this nation to thy merciful care, that, being guided by thy Providence, we may dwell secure in thy peace. Grant to the President of the United States, the Governor of this State (or Commonwealth), and to all in authority, wisdom and strength to know and to do thy will. Fill them with the love of truth and righteousness, and make them ever mindful of their calling to serve this people in thy fear; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end. Amen.

[BCP]
- We should pray for Christians living in violent regions of the world, who are not experiencing civil peace.

2. Piety

- Our prayers are to have the pursuit of godliness in view (reverence and resemblance); and the pursuit of holiness (walking in the light not the darkness); but that may be difficult when there's war and upheaval and anarchy.
- Pray for godliness to abound...
- That is pray for spiritual renewal...

3. Proclamation

So the gospel may be advanced... that's where this passage goes...

- This peace aids in the spread of the gospel.
- This was true in Paul's day, during the Pax Romana.
- Safe roads allowed for the advance of the gospel among the nations.
- It is true that the gospel spreads in persecution; but it also has spread through peacetimes as well.
- Peace and Religious liberty has given us wonderful gospel opportunities; and we should pray that it continues.

E. The Incentives for Prayer (vv. 3-4)

Incentive #1: It's good and pleasing to God. (v. 3)

- God delights in the prayers of his people.
- God delights when we embrace the world in prayer and when we include our leaders in prayer.
- The strongest incentive for prayer: such prayers please God.
- **Our prayers are a sweet aroma: like a barque on a smoker!**
- **When I smoke meat, I smell like it; that's kind of like what happens when in prayer; it changes us.**
- We sense his nearness, his pleasure; we experience his peace when anxious; his joy when downcast.
- Prayer pleases God. "When I pray, I feel his pleasure."

Incentive #2. God desire for all kinds of people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (v. 4)

- This is the great invitation to the world: everyone is invited to come and trust Jesus for salvation.

"Coming to the knowledge of the truth" is another way of describing what happens when one becomes a Christian.

- To be saved is to come to the truth about Jesus – that he came to save a people from their sins.

"God our Savior" (v. 3) reminds us that there is only one who saves.

"Desires for all kinds of people to be saved"

- When we pray for all people to be saved, we align with the heart of God.
- In Timothy's day there was an attempt to limit salvation to one particular group.
 - I already noted the Jewish teachers mentioned in ch 1.
 - Recall how some Jewish Christians thought Gentiles had to become Jews first (Acts 15).
 - The pagan Gnostics were very elitist – claiming that they had special knowledge; they didn't teach salvation was for everyone but for their particular insider club.
- But the gospel is not for a particular race or class.
 - "Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners..." (1 Tim 1:15)
 - That's the category: **sinners**.
- Of course this doesn't mean everyone will be saved, or that God's plans are thwarted.
- God will accomplish all things according to the council of his will (Eph 1.11).

- This statement simply expresses the nature of God's love – he is benevolent and kind in offering the world salvation.

So, embrace the world in prayer.

- The spread of the gospel is in some sense dependent on the prayers of God's people.
- And this should be our great concern: the spread of the gospel among the nations.

#2: Engaging the World with the Good News (2:5-7)

While some dislike the exclusive claim of the gospel (that there's only one way to be saved), we should actually stop and thank God that there is actually a way of salvation!

He could leave us in our sins, but God who loves the world, has provided a solution to our greatest problem – in the person and work of his son, Jesus.

We have good news for the world: there is a mediator that can reconcile you to God.

A. There is One God (v. 5)

- There is not one god for one group of people and another god for another group of people. There is one God, the God revealed in holy Scripture
- There are not multiple gods ruling over different things.
- Pagans in Ephesus worshiped many Gods.
 - Because they believed in many gods, there were many ways of salvation.
- Our God, the one true God, is worthy of the worship of everyone.
- We need a lofty vision of our God...
 - Recall Isaiah in Isaiah 6. Uzziah, reigned 52 years, died. People had put great trust in him, and then he's gone. That's when Isaiah got a lofty vision of God, experienced his grace, and joined him in mission.
 - May idols fall in our land, may we get a vision of our global God and his global mission, and may we trust him him alone.

B. There is One Mediator (vv. 5b-6)

- In contrast to the false teachers in Ephesus who believed there were various intermediaries, Paul says there's only one mediator.
- He bridged the great divide.
- Note Jesus' unique **identity**: fully man/God. That's what makes him the mediator.
- Job cried out for a mediator (Job 9.33), "I wish there was a mediator that might lay his hand on us both"
 - Jesus is the answer to that ancient cry.
 - He is one who reconciles us to the Father.
- Sin fractured our relationship with God, but Jesus has brought harmony and restoration.
 - He has bridged the great chasm, and now we have access to God.
- Note how he accomplished this **work**: "he gave himself as a ransom for all"
 - Have access by his blood.

He “**gave himself**” – his life was not taken, but rather he laid it down (Jn 10:18)

- He died a sovereign death.
- And now we give ourselves to him (Gal 2:20)

As a “**ransom**” – this refers to the price paid to rescue and release of a prisoner

- He died in our place for our sins. (**Mk 10:45**)
- By his death for sinners he has given us freedom (Rom 8:1)
- “**Oh come oh come Immanuel, and ransom captive, Israel**”
- He came, he appeared, and he has rescued a people through his substitutionary death and victorious resurrection.

But Jesus is not just the mediator who did something for us in the past; he lives **now** as our Mediator as well.

- Right now he is at the father’s right hand interceding for us.
- Through him we have access to the Father.

Jesus paid this price in a timely fashion: “which is the testimony given at the proper time” (**6b**)

- He revealed God’s purposes for humanity at the right time.
- At just the right time, Christ died for the ungodly (Rom 5:6-8; Gal 4:4)

C. There Is One Obvious Implication: World Mission (v. 7)

- God’s desire for everyone, and Christ’s death which concerns everyone, naturally leads to the church’s mission to everyone. It’s the obvious implication of this passage.
- Further, because there’s only one way of salvation, then we must get the message to the world.
- We must not become so preoccupied with the needs of America that we lose sight of the lostness of the world.
 - We have folks who are being sent out all over the world... pray for them, consider joining them...
 - And we have people from all over the world near us.
 - We have a great privilege of heralding the good news, and a great responsibility for doing so.

But we have to put to death the spirit of Jonah.

- **Imagine a country filled with the most violent, vicious, and vile individuals that you could imagine. A country that was evil and powerful.**
- **God says He will destroy them. But** then He sends you to preach to them **saying “If they repent, I’ll withhold my judgment and mercifully save them.”**
- You might like that first idea, **but not the second!**
- The whole book moves toward 4:11, **Should I not pity Nineveh?**
- It leaves the reader with the question: **“Do I have God’s heart of compassion?”**
 - **Jonah did not.** Jonah was too **ethnocentric**; too **nationalistic**; too **self-righteous**.

It's possible to have a PhD in theology but not graduate kindergarten when it comes to having God's heart for the world.

Paul exemplifies both...

Apostle, Herald and Teacher – Paul's calling.

- **"I am not lying"** – some in Ephesus challenged his apostleship.
- These words speak to our mission.
 - We are sent ones.
 - **Neighborhood check-ins - 30 people encountered, 20 prayed for.. in an hour.**
 - We announce the good news that Jesus is Lord and that you can be saved.
 - Faith comes by hearing the word of God.
 - We explain the message of Scripture carefully.
- This commission (Acts 9; 22) that Paul received is also the commission of the church.
- We are engage the nations/ethne in **"faith and truth"** – this speaks to our fidelity to the gospel.
- Be faithful to preserve the truth of the gospel; and be faithful to commend the gospel to others.
- God is not willing that any perish, but all come to the knowledge of the truth – he's giving people time to repent and become followers of Jesus.

Richard Baxter, the old English pastor, put it this way:

Let your heart yearn for your neighbors. Alas, there is but a step between them and death and hell. Many hundred diseases are waiting, ready to seize on them and if they die unregenerate, they will be lost forever. Have you hearts of rock that cannot pity men in such a case as this? Do you not care who is damned as long as you are saved? If so, you have sufficient cause to pity yourselves, for it is a frame of spirit utterly inconsistent with grace. . . . Do you live close by them? Or, do you meet them in the streets or work with them or travel with them or sit and talk with them and say nothing to them of their souls? If their houses were on fire, you would run and help them. Will you not help them when their souls are almost at the fire of hell?

That's the **heart of Jesus'** who looked with compassion over the multitude who didn't embrace him.

And he prayed, ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; ³⁸ therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." (Matt 9)

Let us pray for a harvest; and let us engage the world as our harvest field with hearts filled with compassion.

And we go with confidence, knowing that Christ will have a people for himself from around the globe:

Revelation 5

⁹ And they sang a new song, saying,

“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,

¹⁰ and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,

and they shall reign on the earth.”

Yes indeed, he shall reign forever.

Let us live on earth in light of that glorious vision.

Let us be about the church’s work of embracing the world in prayer and engaging it with the good news.