

1 Timothy 2:1-7 (*but starting our reading back at chapter 1, verse 18*)

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, ²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

¹ First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 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. ³ This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. 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. (ESV) TITWOTL

There is an old story I once heard R. Kent Hughes, the retired pastor of the College Church at Wheaton tell. It's the story of an old saving station along a dangerous, rocky seacoast, a long distance between lighthouses. The saving station was not more than a hut, and there was only one boat, but a few devoted members of a volunteer group kept a constant watch over the sea, and with little or no care for their own safety, they would search tirelessly for the lost.

Over time, many of those that had been saved and others who appreciated their reputation became associated with the station, and gave of their time and financial support. And over time, new boats were bought, and new crews were trained. Everything that was crude and quaint was updated. Some thought there should be a more spacious and permanent structure. And when that was built, old cots were replaced with beds and good furniture was bought for the new, larger building. The fact that the old hut still was in use while the new structure went up meant that they could really decorate the new quarters nicely. In fact, once they moved in, they found something interesting. Fewer members of the station wanted to leave the warm, plush station to go out to sea on life-saving missions. So they had to recruit and hire people – surrogates – to do the actual work of lifesaving!

One dark, stormy night, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of wet and cold, half-drowned people. It was clear that they were dirty and sick and coughing from their ordeal, and obvious that they were from distant shores and a translator would be needed to meet all of their needs. This ordeal *so* traumatized the rescue staff that there was a movement to contract to have outbuildings built so that if this happened again, the aesthetics and decorum of the new staff quarters wouldn't be ruined.

Then a rift developed over the purpose of the station. Some wanted to maintain the present set-up as a social club and a tribute to the old life-savers, while another group insisted that lifesaving was the very purpose for which the building was built for rescue, and pointed out that this IS called a life-saving station, after all. The point is to be operational, not merely recreational. But the second group was ignored by the larger first group, and were told that if *that* is what they wanted they would give them some money to start a new station down the coast, and that is exactly what they did. Over time, that second, break-off group succumbed to the same dynamic

and temptations as the first group and became very comfortable, and once again there was another break-off group to start a new station. And on it went, until the coastline was dotted with large and well appointed stations with very few people actually being saved at any of the stations because everyone was busy caring for their own. And the lost were perishing.

Now, this is a familiar trend in all sorts of organizations that humans control, right? And while that story is a parable, it's a parable that has its roots way back in this church situation here in Ephesus. This church – a church Paul helped to start by preaching there – was a lighthouse for the lost. It had been the most active church rescue station in Asia Minor to that point. But in a very short period of time, members on the inside – elders, even – like Hymenaeus and Alexander, had made a shipwreck of their faith by giving up on the original purpose of the church. Less grace and rescue of others and more self-satisfaction on the inside. They had given up their faith and a good conscience.

Somehow, probably through Timothy, Paul had stayed involved and decided he needed to clean house so that the rescue mission of the church would continue, and he handed these two elders over to their own desires. Maybe they would figure out what they were missing by the absence of it.

Now he turns back to those that are trying to stay true to their original mission – to save people by being a light to the lost, and bringing them into the church to know Christ and be saved. This is the mission! Verses 3 and 4: "God our Savior ... desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." And now – here in chapter 2 – he says, "Here's how. Here is the way to maintain the purpose for which WE were saved and created."

This morning we want to look at:

- HOW we stay faithful to our mission (pray)
- FOR WHOM the mission is for (all)
- WHY we must stay faithful to the mission (peace & salvation)
- THE PURPOSE of the mission (the ransom)

So, how do we stay faithful to our purpose, our reason for being, our mission? And the answer is very clear: verse 1 says "First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people."

First things first: pray.

Now why that *first*? Notice, there is no second! And notice, too, that this word "urge" is the same Greek word we read back in chapter 1 verse 3 where Paul urged Timothy to stay there in Ephesus so that no one would teach any different doctrine that would change the church into something self-satisfied rather than one that preaches the gospel to everyone. Why now follow up that urgent command, with *this* urgent command to pray?

It's not that we *have* to pray to God, but because we *can* pray to God! You see, it's because the creator cares enough to create and then be involved with his creation. It's because he cares what his people have to say to him. It's because he cares what is on our hearts. To extend the parable, this is like being saved by the very person that made you, and then once rescued he says, "Sit down. In fact stay *here*. Tell me everything. Stay *always* with me. Abide in me. But *talk* to me. Show me your heart. And once you become a part of my mission, you'll know *my* heart."

Paul's urging, you see, is to pray before everything. Before a meal, before worship, before work, before we preach, before we give. We go to God *first*. And by using these four words here, Paul is saying, fill your prayers with everything! Requests, needs, praying for others, giving thanks... *all of it*.

You see, God has this notion that if we always stay close to him, we will always be safe. That in this fallen world, there are umpteen opportunities to shipwreck your life. Every other place we will look to for safety is a rocky shore. And the way that God has given his people to stay away from shipwreck is the Word of God – yes, doctrine – and prayer. Tonight, right after the evening service, is our monthly prayer meeting. That time in prayer, the prayer you do in your small groups, the prayers you offer up on your way to work, these are the times when we are most intimate with each other because this is when we are to lay it all before the Lord – no we don't use these times to peek into each other's hearts, but rather to get close to HIS heart! This is how we will stay faithful. Prayer is nothing less than acknowledging God for being who he says he is – A God who seeks the lost.

You may think, "I don't need anything right now – that's why I haven't prayed." But you need to pray to stay close to God and acknowledge that the reason all your needs – your daily bread – IS taken care of is because of God! So that's number one. That's the first thing: We pray to stay close to God and stay faithful to him.

Now second, for *whom* the mission is for. Who will we be faithful to pray for? The answer is just as clear. For *everyone*. Like in our rescue station parable, what tends to happen over time is that a group, a person, and even churches, is that we only pray for ourselves. That's what the false teachers did. The false teachers were Jewish in their background and orientation, like most of the first believers. Nothing wrong with that. But the false teachers in *particular* focused on the law, and *not* this idea of God's grace. So they expounded on the law, they expounded on who was right and who was not. They even speculated, then, on who was in, and who was out. They even analyzed genealogies to do this. Their perspective, you see, was exclusivistic. It was, "We *live* right. We *think* right. We say the *right* things. We have the *right* views."

Paul doesn't just say that's wrong. You'd have to say that he effectively blasts that notion out of the water by suggesting – commanding – what he knew was repugnant to the Jewish followers of Jesus AND the new Gentile followers: Pray "for all people (v. 1)," and pray for (v.2) "**kings and all who are in high positions.**" Wow! You have to remember who was the political leader at the time – who was king. It's Nero.

Now Nero wasn't someone who would be first up on any Christian's prayer list. If ever there was another world leader worthy of the Hitler comparison, this is the guy. Now imagine asking Jews during the Holocaust to pray for Adolph Hitler! That's Nero. He's no friend. He's an enemy. Nero would put Christians in the ring with the gladiators. As a prelude to those "games," he would put Christians in the ring with lions so that the fans could watch them being eaten alive. When he had parties or state dinners in the evening, there was no electricity. So he would have some Christians rounded up, tie them up, and then wrap them in tar and place "us" – we Christian folks – up on a pole, and light us on fire to illumine his party (and of course send a message to everyone – "This is what happens to Christians.")

Paul says, pray for that guy? Pray for him? Pray what?! Yeah, I'll pray for him. I'll pray that he gets struck by lightning! We have to wrap our hands around this – we as Christians. Just last month a pastor out in Phoenix preached a sermon titled "Why I Hate (the President)," in which he told his congregants that he prays for the president's death and that he get brain cancer.¹

Now friends, I don't know that pastor. And I have to say, I have my sin and my blindspots. But I think we can say with assurance that that is false teaching. It's saying, "*We* live right. *We* think right. *We* say and do the right things. *We* have the right views. And because we think he doesn't, let's pray that he dies."

Paul says – Paul knows this – that we need to pray for yes, Hitlers and Neros and everyone else because that is who HE was. *Paul* was a persecutor of Christians. Paul had Stephen's blood on his hands. Do you remember Stephen's prayer for his murderers? His prayer for Paul in Acts 7 – this Saul who ordered the death of Christians? "Lord, do not hold this sin against them."² He prays for his immediate and worst enemies not to die, but to be saved! That same enemy – now Paul – says, "Knowing what you know now – knowing the forgiveness YOU have received – wouldn't you now pray for a guy like me? A guy like Saul? Wouldn't you pray like Stephen prayed in the power of the Spirit?" He's saying, "Don't think I haven't sat where you've sat. Don't think I haven't had your perspective. Don't think I haven't had your mental obstacles to loving and hanging out with and praying for people you hate. I'm in prison! I hated and persecuted Christians and wanted them all dead. Thank God – someone prayed – Stephen prayed – for someone like *me*."

Friends, don't you see that this is how Jesus prayed for you on the cross? He prayed that you and I – breakers of every commandment including murder – that *we* would be saved. That's where Stephen learned how to pray and why *we* need to be Christ-centered and cross-focused so that we can learn how, too!

As one pastor I know likes to say, "You never know who God loves."³ God loves people you can't stand. He loves them when they are Saul and loves them into being Paul. Stephen's prayer was answered! So pray! You never know whose heart might change and whom he might save.

¹ Actual title was "Why I Hate Barack Obama," but as a pastor I avoid naming names because it distracts people. See: <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2009/08/31/phoenix-pastor-draws-protests-telling-church-prays-obamas-death/>

² Acts 7:60

³ Mark Driscoll

We pray for people as long as they are breathing! It's because prayer works, and because prayer is powerful, that we pray for the impossible – our own Hitlers, those that want to destroy us or seem as far away from God as possible – because when they come to faith it will be a light to those that don't!

Are *you* praying? Are you praying for leaders and kings? Are you praying that they'll change their minds? Great! But are you praying that they be *saved*? God our Savior desires that all people be saved! And are you praying that they be saved NOT JUST SO they will change their minds to match yours, but so that their *hearts* will be changed from sinner to saint?

And this takes us to our next point. WHY we must stay faithful to the mission to pray for everyone and even for the world's Neros?

Paul says, "that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 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."

Now there is a lot here and we don't have much time. **So let's break this one down. We are to pray for everything and for everyone because Peace is Good, Christ is Good, and Only Christ is good.**

So quickly, first, peace is good. If the church is a sort of rescue station which God uses to save humanity from shipwrecking itself, then he wants to keep the church itself – the place of rescue – safe. This is why Paul says that a reason we must pray for kings and those in authority is so that the rescue station stays in operation – that we can do our work without the influences, the encumbrances, the oppression of the government. What we are doing very easily today, cannot even be attempted in some places. This is why foreign missions MATTER. Because we should be praying for and coming to the rescue of those people in those places. Our church can't be merely recreational and self-satisfied, We need to be *operational* – praying for churches and church planting and the house churches in places where it's almost impossible to have a church from which there can be more rescue and outreach. And this is why we need to pray for THOSE governments as well. When was the last time we prayed for Hamid Karzai or even Mahmoud Ahmadinejad? We need to pray for them because the church is there too, and there are people there who need the rescue of Jesus Christ.

When I worked in Network television, people prayed that I would get out of there! They said, "You better watch it there! That place will change you!" They were right to have those concerns! I appreciated their concern. But why didn't they ever pray for me to stay there and take the gospel to the employees there? I remember *one* person who said, "O good. Can you tell me how I can pray for Peter Jennings?" But nearly everyone prayed for me to leave there! My wife was a working actress in New York. She had the same experience. Friends, we have people in this congregation who are in hard places. God has them on a hard, rocky shore and he wants them to speak and by speaking give rescue! Pray that they *stay* there – stay here, too – but GIVE testimony.

Second, Christ is good. Paul says, "This is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior." This God is a *savior*. Friends, every other religion and every "ism" teaches that it's *you* that saves yourself. They give you how-tos, or they give you techniques, or they say they have the way you can be saved, but you have to buy it or put into action. Only Christianity presents a God who *is* a Savior – your savior – if you will but receive him. A God who saves by himself BEING the savior in the person of Christ. Christ is *that good!*

Third, only Christ is good. God desires that all people come to the knowledge of this truth – that Christ IS the way – *only* Christ is the way – and Christ is the truth – *only* Christ is the truth.

Now I know some of you are probably scratching your heads and saying, "C'mon, pastor. How can you say Christ is the only way when it says that this God of yours wants *ALL* to be saved? Doesn't this mean that some people won't be saved? Yes, it does. Doesn't this mean that people who reject Christ won't be saved. Yes. Can't God do anything he wants? Yes, he can... as long as it isn't against his nature. Does he want all to be saved... not just all people groups and all places, but every single person? That is likely – yes – what this means. Does he save all those people? No? Why? Because he saves in and through Christ, *the* Savior.

One pastor out in Seattle puts it this way: This is the big E at the top of the Christian eye chart. "There is One God." There aren't different gods; there are not different kinds of gods; the same God doesn't pop up in different ways with different messages in different religions. There is ONE God.

But then Paul says there is One Mediator (v. 5) between God and man. Because there is this distance AND this conflict between God and man, God mediates that conflict.

The bible says we have a dispute with God. Our argument, the bible says, is that we would prefer to be our own God and make our own rules and then follow our own rules to our liking so that we can judge ourselves to be as good as we think we are. But God says, "There is one God. And it's not Buddha, and it's not Allah, and it's definitely not you, either." So who will mediate between God – whom the bible says is holy and righteous – and us – who are unholy and sinful?

If there is to be a rescue and peace, then there has to be a mediator that brings these two sides together. Now, people instinctively know this. People are seeking out shamans, and life-coach's and self help leaders and spiritual gurus, and they have chosen religions to stuff into that gap, Krishna or Mohammed, philosophies, psychology and even denominations into that gap. But you can try to say, "I am saved by being a Presbyterian" all you want, but that's not the mediator! There is only one mediator between us and God.

Jesus Christ. This is why *ONLY* Christ is truly good because only Jesus can broker this split between humanity and God.

Now finally, the purpose of the mission. And it's right here in verses 5 and 6: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time."

Now I have used the word "rescue" a number of times this morning. But it's a rescue that happens in a certain way. It's a specific category of rescue. A ransom. What is a ransom?

David Letterman has been in the news the last couple of days. But even before these recent revelations about an alleged blackmailer, he had run-ins with people who wanted to get money from him. Back in 2005, an ex-con was charged in a plot to snatch Letterman's toddler son and nanny from his Montana ranch and hold them for \$5 million ransom. That's what a ransom is. It's a sum of money, demanded or paid, for the release of a captive. You see, it's a specific kind of rescue, where the price of release is this ransom. Now the bible has a lot of these sorts of ransoms paid for someone's release. The bible speaks of the price that it costs to free a slave or free a prisoner. Sometimes the bible uses the word redeem – to pay back a debt that perhaps a slave owes so that they can be freed – that redemption price is the cost of release.

So now, when Paul says that Christ has paid the ransom, what is he talking about? From what have we been set free? Ransom presupposes some sort of captivity or slavery... what is the bondage that's being referred to? What is the debt that is over our head? What has us held kidnapped as a hostage? How do we need to be set free and rescued?

You see, Jesus IS the mediator who is bringing God and humanity back together, but there is a problem. We don't *want* to come back to God. We don't. We are enslaved to ourselves because we are held hostage by our own sin. It's a bondage to sin. To sin and its guilt. To sin and its curse. To sin and its power.

In the school my children attend, they have as a part of their curriculum developing good habits and cultivating godly character; building habits of kindness, attentiveness, diligence, obedience, and respect.

Now have you ever thought about why we have to do that? Since good character and attentiveness and diligence and respect makes life easier, why are we not this way naturally?

Last year there was a day when Pastor Matt was preaching and I was on nursery duty – and by the way, you should all get yourselves on nursery duty. Go sign up! Because you can learn a lot. There were two boys in there that day and one seemed to think that the other boy had a toy he wanted. SO he picked up a matchbox car – three inches of iron – and went over to whack the other boy over the head so that he'd drop the toy and it would be his.

No lesson required. No class needed to figure that out. No language necessary! They couldn't even talk yet! Why? Because that is how we're born. That's what we know. We are born knowing how to covet, steal and murder – and there you had it, right here in our own church nursery. We are slaves to that behavior. You see, we are not "godly" by ourselves. Like kids in the nursery, we consistently walk contrary to God's character. We do not serve the glory of God. We live to ourselves and are often unkind and unforgiving. We can be malicious, cruel violent and selfish. We are not righteous, beneficent and forgiving. We are *not* good people, and he finds us guilty. And all those who are guilty before him, since he IS a righteous and holy God who cannot lie, he finds us guilty and places under his wrath and his curse and the sentence he gives for murder is death. The penalty is death. That is the cost – the wages – of sin.

And yet we are not just under the curse of sin, we are under its power – almost as if we are under the power of Satan. We are children of wrath. Jesus says, "Whoever commits a sin is a slave of sin."⁴ If you've broken the law in one place, you've broken the whole thing... and you can't release yourself!

And so the mediator – the one who brings us back into union with God – not only mediates, but turns to you and to me, and frees us by paying the ransom. And what is the price for sin?

"In the day that you eat of the tree you shall surely die." The wages of sin was always death. And therefore it should not surprise you that the price that must be paid is the price of one's life. Nothing less. A holy and truly righteous God would be just playing with this notion of sin if he would accept any price less than that. This is why in Matthew 20, when Jesus speaks of this rescue, he says the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."⁵ Jesus says, I will pay the ransom, and it will be me. The price will not be corruptible things like silver or gold. It had to be something incorruptible. His very own blood and life. That is the only price good enough, acceptable enough, pure enough, intense enough to satisfy the justice of God and set you free – a blood of atonement. Not bulls, not goats but he goes to God in this mediation, this rescue, and lays down his own life for you and for me.

We have to end. But we're going to the table now. And this table makes no sense without this idea of a blood ransom. There are those today that don't like this idea of penal substitution. It is repugnant to them. They want to reduce the idea of redemption down to the mere deliverance of a person with no thought of a payment to God. And the reason for this is that no one wants to deal with, think about or consider the wrath of God. And if there is no wrath, then no ransom needs to be paid. They do not like the idea of God as a judge. You see, some people want to be Christians and yet they still want to be the judge themselves. Oh, we need rescue from ourselves. Deliverance, yes! But our sin is so pervasive that we can't see it while we're doing it!

But sin HAS left a crimson stain, and he's washed it white as snow.

Let's pray.

⁴ John 8:34

⁵ Matthew 20:28