

The Rightly Ordered Church:
Missional Prayers to a Missional God (1 Timothy 2:1-7)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on February 11, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ This week was the start of the Winter Olympics being hosted in South Korea. If you got a chance to watch the Opening Ceremony, you witnessed a snapshot of heaven. You caught a glimpse of Revelation 7. Revelation 7:9 describes in heaven, "*a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb*".
 - **Where else on earth do you see such a grand assembly of peoples, nations, and languages all standing together in unity with a common purpose?** Only once, every couple of years, do you have the literal world gathered together like this. It's beautiful. And it's only a shadow of a greater future reality.

- ❖ **Church, does that move you? Is your heart warmed by the image of the world coming together?** I'm not talking here about the Olympics. But about this eschatological vision of all the nations, all the tribes, all the peoples and languages of the earth worshiping before the throne of the Lamb. Scripture makes it clear that that is where all of history is headed. If you're a Christian, that will be your reality. You'll be part of that great multitude that no one can number. You'll be worshiping the Lamb of God with every nation and every tribe.
 - Does that move you? Does that excite you? If you're thinking, "Yes but probably not as much as it should", just know that you're in the same boat as most of us – and most churches. We know this future is coming and yet most of us don't feel the weight of it and it doesn't move us as much as it should.

- ❖ But that's why the Apostle Paul wrote what he did in 1 Timothy 2. **He tells us to make it a priority to have a global-minded vision when we gather to worship God.** He pushes back against our fleshly tendency to grow insular and self-absorbed with the concerns of our own tribe. Paul knows how easy it is for a body of believers to get so caught up with their own issues that they lose sight of the greater world around them.
 - So here in chapter 2 – which is all about how a church rightly orders its public worship – **Paul begins with an emphasis on praying these big, global, missional prayers for all kinds of people.** That's the emphasis of our passage.
 - If you look at v1, it begins with these words, "*First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made*". Now that term "*first of all*" doesn't mean chronologically first in a list of instructions. It means "*of first importance*". The most important thing for a church to do, when it gathers to worship, is to pray. **And I'm going to argue that Paul pictures churches praying big missional prayers to a big missional God.**

- ❖ In this series through 1 Timothy, we've noted that the key verse – that unlocks the purpose for Paul writing to his disciple Timothy – is chapter 3:15. Turn and see for yourself. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to put the fledging church into order. And he says he intends to return, but if he's delayed this letter provides instructions for how "*one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*"

- ❖ In chapter 1, we're told that false teachers have crept in and were diverting people's attention away from their outward mission as the church. Instead they were pouring so much time and energy inwardly debating endless genealogies and speculations. All the while, peoples of the world around them are lost and dying without Jesus. They haven't heard the truth.
 - And yet that's the very mission of the church. As Paul puts it, the church is to be a pillar of the truth. **And as we explained before, ancient pillars were intended to not just hold up a beautiful, ornate roof – but to hold it out, high in the sky, for all to see.** For lost travelers, still a long way off, to see their destination. To see where their true home lies whether they recognize it or not.

- ❖ That's our mission. To be a pillar of the truth – of the gospel of God's grace to save sinners (in spite of their sinfulness) because of the righteousness and self-sacrifice of his Son. Our job is to hold up and hold out that truth. **And the point of vv1-7 is that we hold it out *not just to some people – to just those conveniently around us or those we're comfortable with – but to all peoples, to every tribe and tongue.***
 - So as we go through this text, I want to explain what makes our prayers missional. We'll see five aspects: 1) the target of our missional prayers, 2) the plea within our missional prayers, 3) the heart prompting our missional prayers, 4) the burden behind our missional prayers, and 5) the end of our missional prayers.

The Target of our Missional Prayers

- ❖ Let's begin by looking at the target of our missional prayers. **When we gather as the church to pray, who should we be praying *for*? Who is our target?** That's the question in mind when we evaluate the prayer life of our church. When we examine our own prayers – the ones we make privately or publicly. The answer to that can be very convicting.
 - Now before we see Paul answer the question of who to be praying for, notice he mentions four kinds of prayers – supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings. But I don't think we gain much trying to parse them out.

- ❖ His main point is that these various kinds of prayer should "*be made for all people*". That's a little different than saying I want you to pray for *everyone* (which is what NIV84 says). **In other words, Paul's not focusing on praying for every particular person in the world.**
 - When I was younger in the faith, I would pray, "God, please save everyone in the world. Amen." And I thought this was ingenious because with one simple blanket prayer, I could cover 7 billion people in the matter of seconds. It's so efficient!

- ❖ Now there's nothing wrong with praying that, but here Paul was not urging us to pray blanket prayers for every single person in the world. **When he says to make prayers "*for all people*", he has in mind "*all kinds of people*".** We know this because he goes on in v2 to give a subcategory of the all people. One kind of people to pray for are "*kings and all who are in high position*".

- ❖ **He's instructing the church to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people.** He's telling the church in Ephesus, "Don't just pray for your family, for your tribe, for people you know – pray for people you don't know, especially those who rule over you. Don't just pray for fellow Ephesians – pray for those Corinthians in Corinth. Don't just pray for Jews – pray for Gentiles. Don't just pray for free persons – pray for slaves. Don't just pray for good people – pray for the wicked and immoral. Pray for all kinds of peoples in this world."
- ❖ Church, we should evaluate our own practice. **When we pray, especially together in service or in small group or at a prayer meeting, who are we praying for?** Are we only praying for ourselves? For people like us? For people we like? Do we pray for the salvation and flourishing of people who look different, talk different, and think different than us? Are we praying for the nations? For the global church and global ministries that we will never participate in or benefit from? Who are we targeting?
- ❖ Now I think it's interesting that Paul goes on to specify pray for "*kings and all who are in high position*". I'm sure he had in mind the Roman emperor and senate. **We can apply that today to any politician or legislator in position to make decisions or form public policies that affect the rest of us.**
- ❖ Now in the politically-charged environment we live in today, where our society is so sharply divided by partisan lines and deeply entrenched in political camps – **it feels strange for me to stand here and say that the Bible is commanding us to pray for President Trump.** For our legislative and judicial bodies. For our governor, Greg Abbott. For our mayor, Sylvester Turner. For our city council and our district school boards.
 - If you can't swallow the idea to praying for any of those leaders, just keep in mind that when Paul said "kings", he had in mind wicked rulers like Nero, who was in power at the time. History tells us that Nero made a sport out of feeding Christians to lions. **So don't say you can't pray for Trump if Paul could pray for Nero.**
- ❖ We need to adopt Paul's belief in God's providence over who's in office and who's in charge (cf. Rom. 13:1). He believed, whoever the emperor was, he was placed in a position of influence by divine providence. So he needs prayer.
 - **So if it's not already a habit in your prayer life, privately or publicly, then let's include prayers for those in high positions of governmental authority.** Not just Christian politicians. Not just ones we voted for or agree with. Pray for all of them.

The Plea Within our Missional Prayers

- ❖ So the target of our missional prayers is all kinds of people, particularly those in authority. That's *who* we should be praying for. Now let's consider *what* we should be praying for when we lift them up to God. Let's look at the plea within our missional prayers.
 - I'm going to argue that when Paul is telling the church to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds of people, his focus is on their salvation. **Why am I so sure the plea is for their salvation?** Because of what he says in vv3-4.

- ❖ In vv1-2, he's telling the church to pray all kinds of prayers for all kinds people, and he says in v3 that, "*This is good*". What's good? This kind of praying is good and "*pleasing in the sight of God our Savior*". Why? Because in v4, he's the kind of God that "*desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*" **So by implication, the prayers being urged in v1 are particularly prayers for salvation – missional prayers pleading for the salvation of all kinds of lost people.**
- ❖ Now we should apply that by praying for the salvation of kings and those in high position, but more specifically, v2 goes on to say what we're to plead for when praying for these governmental authorities. Look at v2. Pray for these leaders, "*that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*"
 - Now what does that mean? Is Paul suggesting to pray with the hope that they'll govern in such a way as to make our lives easier and more comfortable? Are we just praying for good policies that strengthen the economy and secure our 401Ks?
- ❖ No, when Paul mentions "a peaceful and quiet life", most commentators believe he's referring to the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace). Remember, the Roman Empire was a conglomeration of many nations and tribes who shared long histories of conflict and war. But under Roman rule, a relative peace was established and enforced throughout the empire.
 - **And that *Pax Romana* providentially allowed for the advancement of the gospel throughout the empire.** Paul's missionary journeys would not have been so plentiful and expansive if not for this relative peace. **When the peace is disrupted – like in times of war, civil strife, or systematic persecution – the gospel's progress from city to city is often hindered.** So Paul says to pray for leaders to lead towards peace, so that Christians can live godly, dignified lives that bear strong witness to the gospel.
- ❖ Church, let's think about how we should pray for our leaders. **Let's pray for our leaders and their leadership to promote a kind of peace that permits the free advancement of the gospel.** Pray that our religious freedoms are protected. Pray that Christians can continue to speak and live out their biblical convictions without fear of legal repercussions. Pray that parents are respected as the primary authorities in the education of their own children, disciplining them with biblical teachings and values without government interference. Pray that we can continue to gather freely in the open to worship Jesus without threat of persecution.
 - These are privileges we enjoy now, but there is no guarantee for the future. And there are plenty of churches around the world who lack these freedoms and protections. **Pray for the global church, for the persecuted church.** You may have noticed that every week we include a bulletin insert from *Open Doors* highlighting the top 50 countries where its most dangerous to follow Jesus¹. This week it's Laos. Let's make a habit of using that weekly insert in your prayer life or your prayer time with family or small group. Pray for that country's leaders and for God to providentially guide them to rule in such a way that allows the gospel to spread more freely in their land.

¹ <https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/>

The Heart Prompting our Missional Prayers

- ❖ So we've covered the target and the plea of our missional prayers. Now let's consider the heart prompting our missional prayers. What's the motivation? What's prompting us to pray all kinds of prayers for the salvation of all kinds of lost people around the world?
 - The answer is the heart of God. **What prompts our missional prayers is the missional heart of God.** That's what Paul highlights in vv3-4. He shines a spotlight on God's heart for the lost. Look at v3 again. Why is this good? **Why is it good and pleasing to God when Christians pray big prayers with big concerns for big groups of people?** Look in v4. Because God our Savior, "*desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.*"
 - **So why should missional prayers be made for all people?** Because God desires all people to be saved. Because such prayers reflect his heart desires.

- ❖ Now this raises a theological difficulty. **If God desires all people to be saved, then is Paul suggesting that every single person in the world will eventually be saved?** We know he's pushing back against an insular, elitist mentality where we only care for certain people to be saved. But in reaction, did Paul fall victim to the opposite extreme of universalism – teaching that all will eventually be saved?

- ❖ No, we know Paul doesn't believe that all will be saved because elsewhere in the letter he says some will face judgment and destruction (cf. 3:6, 5:24, 6:9). And I don't think he's suggesting that God's desires could ever be thwarted by human self-will (cf. Job 42:2).
 - I think the best way to understand v4 is to interpret the words "*all people*" like we did back in v1. Just as prayer for all people didn't mean addressing every single person in the world but rather a prayer for *all kinds* of people in the world – **likewise Paul is referring to God's desire for all kinds of people in the world to be saved.**

- ❖ Think back to that Revelation 7 vision. Before the Lamb, there'll be a multitude so great no one can count that high, from every nation and every tribe. **And in a thousand tongues Jesus will be worshipped with the praise he's due from all kinds of saved people.**
 - Church, have we caught this global vision? Now I realize we're a Chinese immigrant church, and you might be wondering how you can harmonize praying these big, all-inclusive prayers for all kinds of people *while* simultaneously worshiping in a church identified specifically by one nation, one tribe. It seems inconsistent.

- ❖ **But I've always been an advocate for Chinese churches to maintain a clear vision to reach Chinese immigrants.** Our Chinese-speaking members have a missional advantage in preaching the gospel and discipling the great number of Chinese immigrants God is bringing to our city. There's still a missional need for Chinese churches in a city as diverse as Houston.
 - But I've argued, on more than one occasion, that English-speaking congregations of Chinese immigrant churches – that have grown to a level of maturity and stability like ours – **we have a biblical responsibility (and missional opportunity) to expand the Chinese church's gospel influence beyond our own tribe.**

- ❖ All of us in a Chinese church – whether you're on the Chinese or English side – should want to enlarge our hearts to desire the salvation of all kinds of lost people of all nations and tribes. That kind of heart should drive and shape our prayer lives.
 - **But I think an English-speaking congregation like ours has a responsibility to go beyond just praying for the salvation of all kinds of lost people – to actually doing something about it.** To intentionally build relationships with the various kinds of lost people that God has put in our lives. And to share the gospel with them in hope that they might come to a knowledge of the truth. And to welcome them into our lives and our community. And if that requires making changes to be more sensitive and hospitable to the needs and interests of these new people – so be it.
 - **Are we a church aimed at ourselves or at others?** Is our God merely a village deity that we serve – hoping that he'll ultimately serve our interests? Our is the God we worship a God of all peoples, tribes, and tongues?
- ❖ **Many of you are aware that your elders and pastors have been in a long process of vision casting for the future of this church.** And no matter what you think about the ideas we've been working on, you have to understand that this missional heart of God for all peoples is what's driving our vision. We can debate the details. We can tweak them. But we stand firm on this. **We need to have God's heart for all kinds of people to be save. And not just pray about it. We have a duty to do something about it.** To sit on our hands because change is too hard or uncomfortable is no excuse before a missional God like ours.

The Burden Behind our Missional Prayers

- ❖ As you can tell, this is a burden that I strongly feel. And I want you to feel it too. That leads us to our fourth point: The burden behind our missional prayers. Let me explain what burden I'm referring to. I'm talking about the burden we feel when we truly believe that there is no other Savior for the lost but Jesus.
 - If you're open to the possibility of there being other saviors, other religions out there that can save you, then the burden – the sense of urgency and responsibility for the nations – quickly vanishes. Perhaps they'll find another way to get to God.
- ❖ But Paul explains why this is foolish thinking. Look at **v5**, "*For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus*". He's saying that salvation is found in Christ alone. **But you need to understand that the exclusiveness of our gospel is the very thing that compels us on an inclusive mission to save all kinds of lost people.**
- ❖ **We want all peoples and all tribes to hear about Jesus because we believe there's only one God out there.** We don't believe in a pantheon of gods like the Greeks. To the pagans in Ephesus, their goddess was Artemis. They believed in the existence of other gods, but Artemis was the god of their city. She took care of them.
 - But what about those people in Corinth or Athens or Rome? Who's going to take care of them? Ephesians don't have to worry about them because they have their own city god to call out to. Let them turn to their own gods.

- ❖ **But for Christians that attitude is unacceptable. We believe there's only one God.** The so-called gods of this world are not gods. Now we don't deny their existence just to feel superior to others. **No, we make exclusive truth claims because we know their so-called gods can't save them. And that breaks our hearts.** We know there is only one God that everyone must call out to for salvation.
- ❖ **And this one God has sent only one mediator.** This is an important point to make because there are other monotheistic faiths that affirm one God. *So why believe in the Christian God? Why not the God of Islam? Or what if this one God gave us many paths to find him?*
 - Paul goes on to defend the uniqueness of the Christian God by explaining the uniqueness of the mediator that God has sent, *'the man Christ Jesus'*. In other words, only the Christian God can save because only he has sent a mediator like Jesus.
- ❖ **Now what's a mediator?** It's a go-between. Someone who helps two disputing parties come together. We need a mediator because the Bible says our sinfulness has created a barrier to God. It's created hostility. **So we need a mediator – someone who can equally represent both parties.** And this is where Jesus stands head and shoulders above all other mediators! Only Jesus is equally God and man. No other savior can make this claim. No one even tries.
- ❖ And how did he achieve this reconciliation? Paul says Christ Jesus *"who gave himself as a ransom for all"*. Now when we think of a ransom, we think of kidnapping. But in the first-century, ransom was used in relation to slavery. People sold themselves into slavery in order to pay off a debt, and the amount needed to pay that debt was the ransom price.
 - The Bible says due to the guilt of our sin, we owe a great debt to God. And if it's not paid for in this life, then we'll suffer for it in the next. **But our debt is so large that we can't pay it off in this life, and even if we were to suffer for a million years in the next, it wouldn't make a dent.** That's why our punishment is called eternal.
- ❖ But because God loves the world, because he desires the salvation of all kinds of people, he designed a way for our debt to be paid for in this life. **He sent his Son as a mediator to offer his life as the ransom price on our behalf, to fully pay our debt and set us free.**
 - I hope you see that our Gospel is exclusive in the sense that we affirm there is only one true God and he has sent only one mediator. But our gospel is totally inclusive in the sense that anyone can receive Jesus as their mediator. Salvation in Christ is not reserved for people of a particular kind of person.
 - **No one group of people is more deserving of salvation than another.** Salvation is a free gift, and it's received by renouncing your sin and turning to Jesus in faith. That's an invitation open to anyone!
- ❖ The world thinks that believing in an exclusive gospel will make you arrogant and elitist. But it does just the opposite. It actually gives you a universal concern for all lost people. **Because you believe salvation is exclusively found in Christ, that compels you to pray inclusively for all kinds of people different than yourself to come to know Jesus.**

The End of our Missional Prayers

- ❖ So we've talked about the target, the plea, the heart, and the burden of our missional prayers. Let's conclude by considering the end of our missional prayers. By *end*, I mean the ultimate goal. The chief end. Which once we reach, it'll be the end of needing to pray these prayers.
 - **So what is the chief end? Well it's nothing less than taking the truth of the gospel to all the nations.** To all the peoples, all the tribes of the earth. And once that end is met – once the nations hear the gospel – it's end of our mission.
 - All of this is alluded to in v7. Look there, “*For this [to give a testimony about Christ] I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles (lit. nations) in faith and truth.*”

- ❖ Paul's point is that he was appointed on a unique mission to the Gentiles – to all the non-Jewish peoples of the world, which the Bible calls the nations. And all of us Gentile Christians are the product of Paul's apostleship. We're living proof that he wasn't lying in his testimony. That his mission truly was of God.

- ❖ **Church, this apostolic mission to the nations is still not complete.** There are 7,035 unreached people groups out there today. That amounts to 3.14 billion people in the world who are condemned to an eternal hell without Jesus. 3.14 billion people who don't have self-propagating churches around them that are able to reach their own people with the gospel. They still need outside assistance. That would mean us, the church. That would mean you, the individual follower of Jesus.
 - Now most of these unreached peoples live halfway across the globe and some of you are being called by God to pack your things and go. But in a city like ours there are unreached peoples halfway across town. All of us have an active part to play.

- ❖ Brothers and sisters, we have the awesome privilege of carrying on Paul's global, all-time, all-nations, all-inclusive gospel mission. **It'll require our time, our resources, our courage, our sacrifice, maybe – for some – even our lives.** But our Lord is worthy of such committed devotion because he's worthy of such global praise.