

Title: “The Power of Prayer”

Chris Ryan

1 Timothy 2:1-7

9/18/2022

Service Readings: Amos 8:4–7, 1 Timothy 2:1-15, Luke 16:1-15

Do we have that same passion for Jesus that Jesus has for us? Do we recognize that his compassion, his love for us drove him to the cross? If so, then we should find that we have the same compassion for those who are perishing without Jesus. And we should be driven to pray for them, constantly, that they might be reached with the message of Jesus: that there is a mediator who gave himself as a ransom for their sins.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Someone once offered advice for those planning on traveling to Las Vegas. They said that if you are looking for breakfast in the morning, you are not doing Las Vegas right! For them, there is an expected way of *living* when in that city. To take it one step further, there is a right way and a wrong way to live. In our Epistle today, we find Timothy working at a church in Ephesus and Paul instructing him, guiding him, and advising him. He is telling Timothy what to expect from himself and also what to expect from the congregation. There is a certain way that the congregation must live and it is Timothy’s job to guide and encourage his members to adopt that way. But there is also a certain way that Timothy must live, as a *reflection* of both Jesus and the newfound Christian church. And if Timothy is “doing it wrong” then he should expect the congregation to follow him in his error. And so, Timothy must get it right. He must understand how he is to model the Christian life for others so that they follow his lead and conform to this new way of living.

The entire letter is in this same vein. This includes sections on appropriate conduct in worship gatherings, the qualifications of elders and deacons, and the proper order of church discipline. Paul advises Timothy on these practical matters in a way that should help the young pastor emphasize a purity that is characteristic of Christian leaders and the congregations they oversee.

Our passage starts in chapter two so we are early in Paul’s instructions, but we have missed some of the introductions and foundational statements that he has made. They are important as we set the context of today’s passage so I would like to quickly summarize what we skipped over. The letter opens with Paul reminding him that he was to stay and guard the local church against people that were teaching a different doctrine. Paul then warns him with the following:

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.

Wow! Poor Timothy. This is his first call, just out of Seminary, and he has to deal with all this? What is Paul thinking by giving him charge of this church? The very next sentence starts chapter 2 and is

what we read this morning. I'd like to re-read that last sentence again and then move directly into our section of the letter, now that you have this context. So, Paul tells Timothy:

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.

² 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.

Paul warns Timothy about these two people and the judgement that he has handed to them but then, in his next breath he tells Timothy that he should pray for *all people*, even Hymenaeus and Alexander! These are the people whom Paul has handed over to Satan! Clearly Paul can't be suggesting that through prayer we can offer intercession for them and for all people who have turned away from God, right?

Spoiler alert: wrong. That is exactly what he is teaching. Timothy is to pray for all people – every single person. He is not to discriminate against anyone, he is not to withhold his intercessions for anyone, as he offers his petitions to God. His prayers are to be prayers of joy for those who have turned to God, but he is also to offer prayers for those who have turned away. Timothy is to pray earnestly that they would turn back to him.

This is the power of prayer that I'd like to focus on this morning. So often when we talk about prayer, we rightly frame it as a way to align ourselves to God's will. We petition our Father with our wants but we also pray that we would desire his will instead of our own. And this is good and proper, and there is nothing wrong with it, *but we can also*, at times, view the power of prayer as evangelistic. We have the ear of the creator of the universe. He intently listens to our pleas and he responds to each and every one. We ask for healing, we ask for direction, we ask for help, and he always responds. So we can expect the same response as we ask for the conversion and repentance of those who are lost. What a powerful way God provides us for being laborers in his field.

This is not a unique idea from Paul, for even *Jesus* modeled this type of prayer while he was here on earth as he prayed that all would acknowledge him as the Son of God, the one that the prophets foretold. He brought the kingdom of God wherever he went and his desire was, and still is, that all would repent and be included in that kingdom. And so, at the end of Matthew when he instructs the apostles to make disciples of all nations, he expects the apostles to do so through all of the gifts they have been given: teaching, proclaiming, forgiving, baptizing, and prayer.

Jesus modeled this type of prayer even on the cross as he prayed that the Father would forgive those who were actively persecuting him. For him, no person is too far gone, too far lost in sin to be unworthy of his prayer or of ours. A pastor once said, "maybe you cannot speak to the person about God; but you can always speak to God about that person" and so that is the challenge from today's message. We should look to Jesus' petition and recognize that even in his darkest hour, his desire was salvation for all. And although we cannot bear the *transgressions* of the world, we can pray for the *transgressors* of the world. We can look upon what Jesus did as inspiration for that which we are to do.

This call to action is not one of Law; whether or not we pray for the lost won't directly affect our salvation. I say "directly" because just like Paul instructs Timothy, and this person advised me, there is a right way to live a life in response to what has been offered us. In the case of Las Vegas, well, let's just say this person is advocating the wrong response to a visit to that area. But Paul? He has it right. He is not *commanding* that Timothy pray for all but reminding him of what the blessings that Jesus offers. If Timothy *really* understands this, *really* believes this, then how can he *not* want everyone to understand, believe, and receive it? Or, maybe another way of stating it might be this: "If Timothy is *not* compelled to pray for everyone, especially the lost, then he is not doing the Christian thing right" for to call yourself a Christian is to state that you are so grateful for all that Jesus has done for you that nothing can stop you from sharing him with others. To call yourself a Christian is to state that your entire life is focused on pursuing him, knowing him, and not being able to keep the relationship secret with *anyone*.

And this is true for us as well. Do we have that same passion for Jesus that Jesus has for us? Do we recognize that his compassion, his love for us drove him to the cross? If so, then we should find that we have the same compassion for those who are perishing without Jesus. And we should be driven to pray for them, constantly, that they might be reached with the message of Jesus: that there is a mediator who gave himself as a ransom for their sins.

But what if you do not have that same passion and do not feel compelled to pray for everyone? What then? As I stated earlier, this call to action is not one of Law and it won't affect your salvation. But it could be used as a way of reflection for yourself. And maybe the answer is to spend more time with God - in his Word and in prayer - and ask that he pour into you the passion that he himself has for his creation and to help remind you of the passion that he has for you. And besides, even if we have that same passion and even if we already feel compelled to pray that everyone be saved, we could all probably benefit from more time in his Word and prayer, right? So, for me, I stand reinvigorated this morning in my desire to learn more about Jesus, to spend more time with him in his Word and in prayer, and I hope you do too.

Please pray with me.

Father, show us how to pray in such a way that people's eyes are opened so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the grip of Satan to the freedom of God. Touch our hearts so that it longs for the salvation of every person in every nation on earth. Help us be faithful to pray for all of the men, women and children you place upon our hearts and give us a burden to seek You on their behalf.

Amen.