

PM 1 Timothy 2:1-6 Surprises from Paul

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[0 : 0 0] This is from Paul's first letter to Timothy, chapter 2. It's on page 1194 in the Pew Bibles. 1 Timothy chapter 2 and we'll read the first six verses together.

1 Timothy chapter 2 and we'll read the first six verses together.

1 Timothy chapter 3 and we'll read the first six verses together.

1 Timothy chapter 2. Well, if you have your Bibles, do please open them again at 1 Timothy chapter 2.

1 Timothy chapter 2. This is the first of three pastoral epistles that the Apostle Paul wrote, the other two of course being 2 Timothy and Titus.

[1 : 5 6] And something that I've realised about these three letters is that while 2 Timothy is very, very much about Timothy's own responsibilities as a pastor and elder, 1 Timothy and Titus are a little bit broader and focus more on the responsibilities of each individual congregation.

So there's a lot of practical application for all of us in these verses and indeed in 1 Timothy as a whole.

2 Timothy and Titus are a little bit habit. 2 Timothy and Titus are a little bit. I want to give the title I want to give to my message this evening is surprises from Paul.

Surprises from Paul. Because I believe that in these six verses there are five surprises from the Apostle Paul. I'm a great Doctor Who fan not of New Who as it's called which is becoming increasingly ludicrous and increasingly woke but the classic Doctor Who from the 60s and 70s and 80s and of course Doctor Who would travel through time and space in his TARDIS and I was thinking what would it be like if we were able to step into a TARDIS and go back to the first century and ask the Apostle Paul what he believed were the top priorities for every church for every Bible believing congregation would we think that he would say that the number one priority is preaching the Gospel would we think that he would say if there was one group of people that we should be praying for more than anyone else it would be those who preach the Gospel pastors and ministers missionaries, evangelists, Sunday school teachers youth workers all those that have a specific responsibility to preach the Gospel would that be the main focus of our prayers or Paul's feeling that that should be the main focus of our prayers and if we are to pray for those in political authority would we expect him to say that the main purpose the main aim for those prayers would be that such politicians would be saved would be converted would become Christians because surely wouldn't things be a whole lot better wouldn't the country be run far better if there were more and more Christians in government and if we were to ask the Apostle Paul what we could expect from the world around us from the society that we live in from the culture would we say that we should would we think he would say that we should expect nothing but persecution because after all in 2 Timothy he does say that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted if we were to ask him what the message of the gospel were to be would we expect him to say that the message is that God loves everyone and that is really the sum of the substance of the message of the gospel well as we look here at these verses we find actually we don't need a TARDIS to go back in time because we have recorded here exactly what the Apostle Paul did answer in relation to these five questions so let's look at these verses together to find five major surprises from the Apostle Paul the first surprise is the surprising priority for the church as I was saying earlier 2 Timothy is more focused on Timothy's particular priorities whereas 1 Timothy it is more for the church each congregation in general and what we find here is that it's not preaching the gospel that is the number one priority but prayer so prayer even more of a priority than preaching he says it there

I urge first of all then we often use that phrase first of all as in the list first, second, third but he's not really going through second, third whatever through the rest of this letter this phrase first of all really

means of first importance of primary importance that's what the phrase in the Greek means so everything that he says in these verses is of first importance so the first thing he says here is the top priority is prayer supplications prayers intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all people now that is a surprise because preaching the gospel is surely what the church is all about so why does Paul say that prayer is an even higher priority than preaching the gospel well I believe it's because Paul was a man who was utterly dependent upon God for everything in his life and he knew from his own ministry that in his own flesh there dwelt no good thing he knew from his experience that the flesh and the spirit battled against one another and he needed the Holy Spirit to work in and through him through the preaching of the gospel through his ministry to God's people for any anything of lasting spiritual good to be accomplished because let's remember that the work of the church the work of speaking the work of proclaiming the gospel speaking to other to people who yet have no faith about the Lord

[8 : 16] Jesus Christ it's not a mechanical thing it's not a formula that if they will just accept and believe X Y and Z then automatically they will become Christians not at all we have hearts that are in rebellion against God that need the work of the Holy Spirit to illuminate those hearts to renew those hearts to bring about the new birth and that is something that only God can do and therefore it is something we must be praying about for all that we seek to do that God will be at work in the hearts and lives of those that we seek to reach and indeed will be at work in all that we have to say and do because of course great wisdom is needed what to say what not to say how to say it how not to say it when to speak when to be silent all these things need wisdom that only God can bring and blessing on all that we seek to do must come from God indeed only comes from God and that is why prayer is the most important thing in terms of the work and life and work of every church so there is the surprising priority prayer not preaching preaching of course is vitally important but it's entirely possible to preach an utterly accurate faithful message from the Bible that just falls on deaf ears because there is nothing of God's

Holy Spirit in that message and we need the unction of the Holy Spirit in the preaching and proclamation of God's word prayer so important because the work we're involved in is a spiritual work then the second surprise is a surprising focus remember we were thinking it might be those who preach the gospel those who teach God's word those who have a special responsibility to preach and teach that would be the group that Paul singles out most well surprise number two is that it's prime ministers and presidents not preachers it's the politicians that Paul is focusing on here as the special group that require our prayers so why is that well we know that Paul wrote this in maybe the rough in the mid 60s of the first century towards the end of his own life and ministry and so we know that what had happened in the book of Acts where we see Paul from chapter 16 onwards having engaged regularly with those in authority Paul had a lot of first hand experience of dealing with those in political authority we think of Felix we think of King Agrippa we think of Festus we think of Publius in Malta lots of individuals that he dealt with the magistrates in Philippi that he dealt with not just those in political positions but also those who were judges and I believe that it's because of that experience that Paul says here we really need to be praying for them because he knew from first hand experience that they have the ability to restrict his freedom by imprisoning him justly or unjustly usually unjustly in fact always unjustly in Paul's experience but they also have the ability in terms of applying the law correctly to facilitate Paul's freedom if he's been unjustly imprisoned he will be released if he's about to be flogged unjustly being aware of the law being aware of Paul's rights as a Roman citizen meant that he was able to avoid that terrible experience Paul as a Roman citizen had the right to appeal all the way to Caesar and we know that he exercised that right and that right was granted to him and that not only that basically meant that he had the opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome so from Paul's experience he realised that it was very important to pray for kings and all those in authority because of the great power that they had either to hinder or to help his freedom as one proclaiming and spreading the gospel now just one point to note there is that wherever Paul was he took the opportunity to preach the gospel we read in Philippians chapter 1 that even though he had been imprisoned he said that that imprisonment had worked out for good because of course he was able to preach to the other prisoners he was able to preach to the prison guards and he wouldn't have been able to reach those individuals had he not been in prison however as we'll see shortly it is if he had not been imprisoned he would have been able to reach anyone and everyone rather than just a few dozen perhaps or so a few dozen people in the prison but moving

on now to the third surprise and this is probably the greatest surprise and that is the surprising aim because remember we were thinking earlier that we would expect Paul to say that we pray for kings and all who are in high positions that they may come to know the Lord or worse to that effect but it doesn't say that does it it says that we we

[14:21] Christians may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way so this possibly the biggest surprise of all is that the surprising aim or the purpose of praying for those in authority is protecting our freedom not just procuring their conversion okay protecting our freedom not just procuring their conversion now of course it's right that we pray for politicians to become Christians but let's remember those first words first of all that this whole text this whole passage is speaking about the top priorities so I know this will probably be challenging everyone's thinking a bit but this is very much what the text is saying we pray for those in authority that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way now going back to

Paul's experience why was it that Paul said this rather than praying for their conversion well he hints at praying for their conversion in verse 4 where he says that God who desires all God our saviour who desires all people to be saved yes even the kings and those in authority and to come to the knowledge of the truth so he is broadly speaking saying that yes we we pray for everyone including the kings and those in authority that they may come to knowledge of the truth and be saved but let's not leapfrog and miss out the bit there that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way so let's think of Paul's experience with Felix and King Agrippa in particular we read in Acts 24 that Felix trembled but we don't find him trusting Christ we find that

King Agrippa is somewhat cynical by saying do you think you can make me a Christian in such a short space of time so Agrippa is cynical but not believing as far as we know but what we do find with all those in authority whether it's the magistrates at Philippi who realise when Paul's a Roman citizen that it was quite wrong for them to be having Samus to be imprisoned whether it is Paul about to be flogged and then he announces he's a Roman citizen and he isn't flogged because of that whether he's exercising the right to go to Rome to appeal to Caesar all those in authority respect the rule of law and respect Paul's rights as a Roman citizen so I think there's a great deal of realism here that although they didn't respond to the gospel they did respect

Paul's rights ok and that's there recorded for us in the book of Acts so I believe that Paul is being realistic here and he he says this himself actually he acknowledges just the reality of responses to the gospel we find this in 1 Corinthians I knew that I should have looked this up beforehand but it's somewhere in 1 Corinthians 1 or 2 where he says that there were not many of noble birth that not many in high positions that respond to the gospel there we go I found it there verse Corinthians 1 verse 26 for consider your calling brothers not many of you were wise according to worldly standards not many were powerful not many were of noble birth but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise

God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong Paul found that in his own experience he would preach the gospel to those in authority but generally although they might have been a bit convicted whether their wealth and their power their prestige was just more important to them whatever the reason was they rejected by and large the gospel so Paul I think is being realistic here he says yes we pray for the conversion but actually the most important thing to pray for is that as with me they would respect the rule of law they would respect my rights as a Roman citizen and accordingly let you live a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way and that is very much what we at the Christian Institute are very keen for Christians to think biblically about our relationship with those in government as I was mentioning in my prayer we tend understandably and correctly in many ways to have a very negative view of government whether it's here in

[19:50] Scotland or whether it's Westminster government but we are to pray for politicians we are to pray for them in a way pray for them that they would act in such a way through passing laws through public policy through their overall attitude to Christians that they would act in such a way that we are able to lead peaceful and quiet lives godly and dignified in every way and this is something that Paul speaks about in Romans as well where he says that yes in God's economy God works as theologians would say in the realm of common grace as well as in saving grace and part of that realm of common grace is for there to be good government for there to be good public order in society Romans 13 is the classic chapter on that so we read in for example Romans 13 verse 3 for rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad would you have no fear of the one who is in authority then do what is good and you will receive his approval for he is

God's servant even though he's almost certainly not a Christian for he is God's servant for your good so that is why God puts those in political authority in positions of authority is to be good to do good for Christians even though historically vast vast majority of those in authority whether it be Nero as it was in Paul's day right over the next 2000 years or so to our day it's always been the exception not the rule that there be Christians in government yet we have seen throughout human history that those in authority have acted in such a way that is an answer to this prayer that we have enjoyed so much freedom as Christians in our own lifetime and going back many many generations freedom to assemble freedom to worship freedom to live out our faith freedom to proclaim the gospel there is no law yet against proclaiming the gospel freely whether it be publicly offline as we might say or online as well although with this online safety bill there are real threats to the freedom of

Christians and churches to proclaim the gospel online and just especially as we've got good numbers this evening that went with us this morning I've got a whole lot of free literature and the table at the back please do take it and do plan to come to are you from Capron Ray can I ask no nope well I know there's lots of young folks at Capron Ray but we'll get a chance to chat with you afterwards hopefully but we're going to be having a public meeting as I was saying this morning as part of a national tour covering the whole of Scotland in the autumn we're going to be at the priest Baptist church centre on Monday the 10th of October half past seven at the priest Baptist church centre where I'll be speaking with one of my colleagues in a lot more detail about some of the most important issues that are facing us as a nation within the political realm so back to the passage so this

I believe is why Paul is stressing the aim of praying for those in authority is that they would act in such a way that they would be protecting our freedoms as well as we pray for them to procure their conversions and this I suspect that Paul himself knew that this would perhaps be a surprise to Timothy and indeed to those in Ephesus where Timothy was probably pastor of a number of house churches there it may have come as a surprise and this is maybe why he says this is good it's obvious that prayer is good but praying for Christians to live in a way that we are free to live peaceful and quiet lives he may have thought that Timothy would have found this a surprise and that may have been why he said this is good and he goes on to explain why it is a good thing and that's our fourth point which is a surprising truth which is that peace is preferable to persecution this is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our

Saviour who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth so let's work that back starting at the back and moving at the end and moving backwards if it's God's desire for everyone to come to the knowledge of the truth how can they come to the knowledge of the truth unless they have access to that truth access to hear it access to read it in our much more literate culture than in the first century but whatever means to have access to the truth well there needs to be freedom for Christians to make the truth of the gospel available just give you an example of how that works the huge contrast that is between North Korea and South Korea in terms of the size of the church there are hardly any Christians in North Korea because it's almost impossible for the gospel message to be proclaimed you get caught with the

[25 : 27] Bible in public you get caught trying to witness to someone you'll be put in jail no religious liberty at all in that country but in South Korea there's been lots and lots of religious liberty for a very long time and they have some of the largest churches in the world they have one of the highest percentages of evangelicals of any developed country in the world so there's a clear correlation between governing authority religious liberty and gospel opportunity and this is what Paul says we are to pray for and that yes while if we as we're thinking this morning if we are those that profess to know Christ but either compromise our faith losing our saltiness or conceal our faith hide it like hiding a light under a bow then yes we'll probably manage to avoid persecution all our days but when the day of judgment comes what will the Lord say to us will he consider will the verdict on our lives be your life was useless because you lost your saltiness will he say your life was pointless because you hid your light all the time the light you professed to have in your lives so everyone who as Paul says in 2 Timothy everyone who wants to live a

God's life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted so we will at various stages no doubt suffer for our faith but Paul is saying here it's not the default position it's not something that will always happen all the time we are to pray for those in authority so that they will act in a way that we do have peace to get on with living for Christ in a way that is unhindered by the state and have maximum freedom to

make the gospel known because if there's maximum opportunity for people to hear about Christ then they have the opportunity to come to knowledge of the truth and so be saved which is God's great desire for humanity but to finish with the last surprise here which is a surprising message now it's more of a surprising message for the world hopefully it shouldn't be such a surprise for us as Christians but in our own day and generation this is something that is a surprising message because it is something that sadly the popular view of Christianity that the media would have would be simply that God loves everyone and therefore well how can a God of love in that way condemn anyone surely everyone will be saved surely God will be merciful to absolutely everyone well that's not what Paul says here he says that there is one God and there is a holy God a God that we need to have a mediator to approach as we were thinking in our opening prayer there is one God and there is one mediator between God and that shows that someone has to be a go-between between us and God how can sinful humanity ever be in fellowship with a holy and a pure and a righteous God well there is one mediator one saviour and that mediator that saviour is Jesus Christ the man Christ Jesus and what this is saying is that Jesus is the only way this is like John 14 6

Acts 4 12 these are key verses that show that Jesus is the only way to God and that is becoming an increasingly unpopular message and in our own day and generation of multi-faith multi-religion where the view of so many in society is all roads lead to God if he exists at all and who do you think you are saying that your religion your faith is somehow the only right one surely we live in a tolerant world a tolerant society where God accepts all faiths all religions but the surprise is the unchanging nature of the Christian faith one God one mediator and saviour and one means of salvation the one way in which we can be saved is there in verse 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all what that means is that whoever we are whatever age and stage whatever background whatever period in history we live whatever country we're from there is only one way in which our sins can be forgiven and that is through the death of the

Lord Jesus Christ that ransom that was paid for all who would avail themselves of it all those who would come to faith in Christ without distinction it doesn't matter who you are this evening Jesus Christ has died for sinners and if you see yourself as a sinner tonight in need of salvation in need of forgiveness then the cross is there Jesus death is there for you to avail yourself of his blood shed for sinful humanity that one ransom for all and then really wrapping it all up there is the one truth for all one God one mediator and saviour one ransom payment and one truth for all the truth of the gospel he says here that this great message the testimony given at the proper time we can go into verse 7 for this

[31 : 45] I was appointed preacher and an apostle I am telling the truth I am not lying a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth because we live in a day and generation don't we where it's called the post truth generation where people think there is no such thing as absolute truth the thing is there is there is absolutely an absolute truth and that is that each one of us needs to address the fact that we are sinful human beings in need of forgiveness from our creator God that if we are and we will face him on the last day will we face him as our judge or will we face him as our saviour the one who died for our sins the Lord Jesus Christ will welcome us into glory if we have put our faith and our hope and our trust in him well let us pray together our gracious

God and loving heavenly father how we thank you for the unchanging truth of the gospel we thank you that there is only one mediator between you and us your beloved son the man Christ Jesus the one who has lived that perfect life that we could not live that has died that sacrificial death that we could never endure and we thank you that he has taken on himself our sin and he gives to us his righteousness if we will simply stretch out the hand of faith to receive it and we thank you so much for the simplicity of the gospel this one true message for all of humanity for all time and we do pray that you would help us to be faithful in supporting those whose responsibility it is to proclaim it we pray that we as an opportunity to witness lord would have the words to say to point people to the saviour and we pray lord that we would above all be people of prayer praying for the work of the gospel praying for those in authority that they might act in such a way that we are able to lead those peaceful and quiet lives godly and dignified in every way and so we do ask for that to be the case in this our day and generation for the glory of the lord jesus christ and in his name amen