

Prayers for governing authorities

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[0 : 00] As Martin said, we're reading from 1 Timothy chapter 2, and we're going to read the verses 1 to 7. First of all, then, I urge that supplication, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, 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 Saviour, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

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.

For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth, I'm not lying. A teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Well, g'day. To those who are visiting this morning who might not know me, I'm Adam. I'm one of the elders here at Grace.

[1 : 30] I'm filling in for Dave while he's on some annual leave. We're going to open God's Word together and reflect on prayer in just a moment. But what more fitting way can we begin that than to pray together?

So let's bow our heads. Dear Lord, our holy God, we just thank you that we can approach you and know that you hear our prayers.

We thank you that we have the righteousness in Christ, that you would consider us worthy to be heard. Lord, we ask this morning, as we look at your Word together, reveal yourself to us.

Show us more of you and grow our love for you, we pray, in our time together this morning. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. The famous wartime Prime Minister of the UK, Winston Churchill, once said that democracy is the worst form of government.

Except for all the others that have been tried. But he was on to something. There is a guaranteed messiness to democracy, isn't there? Conflict and disagreement is baked into the system itself.

[2 : 42] Leaders are able to stay and set a direction for a season, but soon their popularity falls and it's on to the next vision. Last year, more than half of the world's population voted in a national election.

This year, 2025, is set to be a year where politics and government is again centre stage. Locally, we've got another federal election coming up in the first half of the year.

Just this week gone, the Austrian President resigned, the Canadian Prime Minister resigned and suspended their parliament. And even though he's not yet inaugurated, Donald Trump starting a second term seems to pop up in my news feed every day.

You can't escape it. Like it or not, our modern kings and authorities do fill a lot of our attention. And they do have significant impacts on our day-to-day lives.

So now we come to our current series on big prayers for the new year. Today we're going to be thinking through that intersection between prayer and government.

[3 : 51] In some ways, this is quite an odd connection. Even the passage we're going to be digging into in Sir Timothy, praying for those in authority isn't the main point.

And perhaps that should be our main point for today. Running a bit of a risk of concluding before we've really begun, the influence of worldly governments will take up a big part of our time and attention living in this world.

But they are never the main point. Important, significant, with far-reaching impacts, sure. But they are merely a footnote in the eternal story that should capture our primary focus.

So with this in mind, how should we pray for kings and those in authority in 2025? What is our functional view of God's sovereignty when it comes to living in a democracy like Australia?

Who is in control here as our country seems to be turning away from our historic Christian truths? A society that unashamedly ignores God's revealed truth in his word when it comes to deciding what is and is not ethical.

[5 : 10] Well, let's turn to God's word and have a look. The book of Timothy is a short letter from the Apostle Paul to his British aide, Timothy, who's serving the church in Ephesus.

It's a letter of encouragement, a letter of advice of how to deal with the challenges facing the early church. The end of chapter 1, just prior to our passage for today, Paul has roused Timothy to fight the good fight and to live up to the prophecies that had previously been made about him as a leader of the church.

And Paul continues this strong, emotive language here. He's urging Timothy, as a matter of first priority, to prayer. Not just to be a man of prayer, but to lead the church to be praying big, bold prayers.

Petitions, intercessions, and thanksgiving for everyone. It's superlative. It's all-encompassing. It's a turn of phrase that, for me, takes a bit of a turn when we get to verse 2.

It jars with the thrust of that big anticipation. We now are praying for kings and those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all goodness, godliness, and holiness.

[6 : 19] The two parts to verse 2. Firstly, to pray for kings and those in authority, just doesn't seem to be the Australian way. And the ambition of verse 2 to live peaceful and quiet lives, well, tranquil lives seems all very plain and ordinary.

And if we're honest, a little bit boring, doesn't it? I can't think of a time when I've prayed for someone's good and praying for government has come to the top of the list.

At times, I've prayed for their relationships with their boss, but generally, in Australia, this isn't such an urgently felt need. We can tend to take the blessing that we've been given in good government for granted.

But when we think about praying for Lincoln and Leah in Myanmar, prayer for the political situation is never far from our prayers for their good, is it?

In our lives in Australia, we often don't have to worry too much about government. And when we do, we focus on politicians themselves rather than the authority or the roles their government departments hold over us.

[7 : 33] And we benefit from this compliance. It's great that our kids can ride their bikes down the street, that our road networks are affected and generally ordered, that if we call for help when our house is on fire or we're in an accident, someone will come and quickly.

But the most common way government measures how good things are going and how good it's doing is material wealth or the gross domestic product, GDP. How many more dollars have we made this year than last year?

In part, this is because it's relatively easy to measure. But this has become quite influential across all of Australia life. We've all bought into it. Very few things will capture the collective attention as quickly as a proposed change to our tax system or proposals around negative gearing.

The overwhelming majority of the commentary on our current government is in terms of how well it's doing to control the cost of living crisis. Government in Australia is won or lost on the management of the economy.

Wealth has become our key common value. Anything that gets between us and living a comfortable life will not be stood for and voted out. Paul here is encouraging Timothy to be very concerned with prosperity, but he's not interested in their material wealth.

[9 : 04] In verse 3, he expresses that God himself is pleased when government provides the opportunity for people to live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Not because it's great to live a comfortable life, because it is a means to which people can be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. Think of what it would mean to Lincoln and Leah to be able to preach the gospel openly.

We don't have a gospel freedom index. We can't measure that. But here in Australia, we have a real deep wealth. But because we can't measure it, we're prone to overlooking it.

And we do underuse it, don't we? We don't treasure that wealth as we ought. This is the wealth that Paul is wishing for all people.

The same all people back in verse 1 that were the motivation to pray for government in the first place. The logic of this passage is that we ought to pray for all people to know our holy God for who

he is.

[10:10] Remember back to Sam preaching last week, highlighting that the Lord's Prayer shows us that our biggest need is to know God for who he is as our holy God. So we pray for all those in authority, for the benefit of all the people under them, for freedom to live godly and holy lives, freedom to be saved, and to know the truth.

This freedom has been purchased for us at great cost. The ransom that Jesus paid was nothing less than his life. This vision of good government is one that enables individuals to live their lives before God.

It is not proposing enforced legalism or a theocracy, but rather it is pleasing to God for us to live lives in light of his truth, by conviction, conviction in our hearts and knowledge of his world and world.

We see this intent reflected across the Western world as governments that have been established under the influence of Christian scriptures do embrace individual freedoms.

But freedom is a double-edged sword. As a society, we have come to embrace freedom, not so we can pursue holiness, but for freedom's sake itself.

[11:27] It's become an idol. We have all seen freedom used to walk away from God's word. Both at an individual level and also at a societal level. This rightfully pains us to see God's truth ignored in his own world.

It's wrong. It is right to pray for our leadership that they might see the truth, to govern in a pattern that is fitting for living in God's world. Just as it is good to pray for an individual to turn to Christ and to submit to him as their Lord.

At the same time, we do well to remember that God is not constrained when government rejects his word. He is sovereign, king of kings and lord of lords. Think of Joseph's brother when they throw him into the well.

You meant it for evil, he will say when they reunite. But God meant it for good. That was the very means through which the nation of Israel was saved.

It's the very means through which Jesus was brought into this world. Think of how God used the ungodly Babylon to call the kingdom of Judah to account and carry them off into exile.

[12:48] We are left not so much with the question of what government will do, but what God will do through government. This is a real and tangible way that God interacts with his world to this day.

As Paul reminded the Romans in chapter 13, the authorities that exist are instituted by God. And this wasn't a new idea.

Paul hadn't come up with this relationship. He merely was updating it in light of who Christ is and our newfound relationship with God through him. But God's relationship to government in this world and the relationship of governments to his people has a long history.

We're going to do something a bit different now. Anne's going to come back up and we're going to read from Daniel chapter 9. So you might like to open to that and read along. This is a prayer from Daniel written in exile under the Babylonians 600 years before Paul's writing to Timothy.

It's a prayer about government and the lot of God's chosen people in exile. Listen carefully as it's read. I want you to reflect on how big do you see God in today's political landscape?

[14:02] How presumptive ought we to be as we're praying for government in 2025? So from Daniel 9 the first 19 verses In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus Bises sent Amid who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans in the first year of his reign I, Daniel perceived in the books the number of years that according to the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet must pass before the end of the desolations of Jerusalem namely 70 years.

Then I turned my face to the Lord God seeking him by prayer and pleased for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession saying O Lord the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled turning aside from your commandments and rules we have not listened to your servants the prophets who spoke in your name to our Lord our kings our princes and our fathers and to all people of the land to you O Lord belongs righteousness but to us open shame as at this day to the men of Judah to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to all Israel those who are near and those who are far away in all the lands to which you have driven them because of the treachery that they have committed against you to us

O Lord belongs open shame to our kings to our princes and to our fathers because we have sinned against you to the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by walking in his laws which he set before us by his servants the prophets all Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside refusing to obey your voice and the curse and oath that are written in the law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out upon us because we have sinned against him he has confirmed his word which he spoke against us and against our rulers who ruled us by bringing upon us a great calamity for under the whole heaven there has not been done anything like what has been done against Jerusalem as it is written in the law of Moses all this calamity has come upon us yet we have not entreated the favour of the Lord our God turning from our iniquities and gaining insight by your truth therefore the Lord has kept ready the calamity and has brought it upon us for the Lord our God is righteous in all the works that he has done and we have not obeyed his voice and now

O Lord our God who brought your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand and have made a name for yourself as at this day we have sinned we have done wickedly O Lord according to all your righteous acts let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem your holy hill because for our sins and for the iniquities of our fathers Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us now therefore O our God listen to the prayer of your servant and to his pleas for mercy and for your own sake O Lord make your face to shine upon your sanctuary which is desolate

O my God incline your ear and hear open your eyes and see our desolations and the city that is called by your name for we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness but because of your great mercy O Lord hear O Lord forgive O Lord pay attention and act delay not for your own sake O my God because your city and your people are called by your name Amen

Thanks Anne There's no indication that Daniel was officially qualified or had been set apart to take upon himself this ministry of intercession

[20 : 16] He didn't belong to a priestly family or lineage wasn't in an ordinary sense commissioned as a prophet He's praying here as a man who loves God and who is familiar with his word A man who's familiar through his word for God's intent for this world As such Daniel's prayer stands as a modern of genuine heartfelt intercession A response to the revealed truth of God It was characterised by humility confession self-denial with the ultimate glory to glorify God Daniel is aligning with God's purpose but it is a prayer of great requests with great assurance It's also not like a one and done type of prayer It's probably a conglomerate of multiple prayers made by Daniel over days months years praying persistently on his own behalf and on behalf of God's people beseeching God to act

God to remain faithful to the promises he had made for the sake of God's name not for the people Daniel wrestles with the real brokenness of the world he sees God's people It's a stark contrast to the glorious promises from our holy God He lays this disconnect before God and he pleads for his mercy He pleads for God to build his kingdom to glorify his name He recognises the shortcomings of Israel both of the people and their rulers In verse 8 We and our kings our princes and our ancestors are covered with shame Lord because we have sinned against you I can't explain the exact balance of how God used Daniel's prayers in his plan for salvation but when you read on through the rest of the story he certainly did The walls of

Jerusalem are soon to be rebuilt Daniel in later chapters also writes the prophecy of the son of man a powerful image of triumph of a mediator between Israel and the ancient of days The title the son of man was also Jesus' most common way to refer to himself during his worldly ministry claiming that prophecy as one of his own I doubt Daniel had in mind that the son of man would be born in a manger in Bethlehem but we can now see that that was indeed God's plan the self-same plan which Daniel was praying here urging God to bring to fruition and faithfulness his promises which God was pleased to do at the apportioned time and in the apportioned way indeed when God's own son became a man and entered the world the Jewish nation restored from exile would once again be under the dominion of an external authority in the form of the

Roman Empire prayer that's not the script that Daniel would have written nor if we're honest is the script we would write yet as Paul outlines in verse 6 of the letter to Timothy it was the proper time it was the proper way this has implications for our prayers we need to pray with an earnest humility we cannot see the detail of God's future plans Daniel always remembered his place as he prayed in verse 18 of Daniel 9 we do not make requests of you because we are righteous he prays but

because of your great mercy Lord listen Lord forgive Lord hear and act for your sake my God do not delay because your city and your people bear your name in Jesus Christ all the promises to Abraham to Noah to Moses even back to Adam are fulfilled we can have relationship with God again assured salvation how much greater is God's mercy than merely a restoration of the walls of around Jerusalem or the integrity of national Israel it was a much bigger prayer than Daniel realized it's interesting that Daniel doesn't pray for a leader to lead Israel back to the promised land in the vein of Moses or a new king like David rather he implores God to act to restore his own reputation it's another whisper of Christ where God himself was a sacrifice that pays the ransom's price in his prayer Daniel partners with God himself as through the rebuilt gates of Jerusalem it is through the rebuilt gates of

[25 : 35] Jerusalem that Jesus will ride a donkey to the cheers of the crowd on Palm Sunday the restoration Daniel longs for is part of the means through which the free offer of salvation will be open to all first to the Jews but then to the Gentiles too for there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind the man Christ Jesus who gave himself up as a ransom for all people we'll to pause for a minute here for there's something quite profound we're in danger of skipping God was pleased to use the prayers of a prison of the Babylonian Empire as part of his plan for your salvation when God entreats us to prayer to pray for our world and all those he created in his image to pray for his will to be done on earth as it is in heaven to pray for those in authority we are being commanded to participate in the reality of this universe beyond our comprehension it is truly a privilege that we so quickly lose sight of don't we

Paul got a glimpse of this and was urgent in his command to pray and pray big but even as we have this bigger vision for God's purpose in our prayers we need to hold on to that large perspective like Daniel we need to align our prayers with God's plan it is God's world to rule he has raised up every ruler and authority that we encounter his plan is far greater than we can understand but we do know where he is heading one day soon Jesus will return on that day every knee will bend every tongue confess that he is Lord we as his people ought to desire a world shaped by this truth freedom to live our lives that reflect this truth and the courage to do so Paul wraps up the letter to Timothy with another enthusiastic encouragement in verse 14 of chapter 6 he charges Timothy to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which God will bring about in his own time

God the blessed only ruler the king of kings and lord of lords who alone is immortal and who lives in an approachable light whom no one has seen or can see to him be honour and might forever amen that is the proper setting for all of our prayers that is also the setting for our experiences of government we're not going to be able to place each and every action of authority with detail in God's timeline but that's okay because God can I find it personally too easy to lose sight of this truth I need to keep in the word reminding myself I need you to keep reminding me we need to be encouraging each other that the day is coming

Christ will soon return and all the chaos of our broken world will be put to its ultimate right we can pray with confidence because we have a God who is working in all things for the good of those who love him and we can take deep confidence from his past faithfulness as we look towards his future faithfulness even in times of uncertainty and change let's pray dear heavenly father our great God we thank you that you are beyond us we thank you for your faithfulness to your promises in spite of our fallenness and we thank you for your son Jesus in whom we have complete confidence that the difficulties of each day are in your hand Lord you've seen them you've decreed them and they will not fort your plan they will not fort our salvation we will be with you again and soon hasten that day we pray and Lord we do pray for those in authority we pray for the government of Australia as we approach an election that the priorities and debates that are had might focus on principles from your word

Lord that there might be a true seeking after your ways more broadly Lord we pray for the government in Myanmar and the upheaval there we pray for stability for the return of order we pray for our brothers and sisters Lincoln and Leah and their ministry amongst the turmoil lest their work we ask open the door for them to preach and open many hearts to turn them to your ways in Jesus name we pray Amen