

'Prayer that Pleases God'

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[0 : 00] Well, you've been sitting for a little while now, so why don't you take a moment to turn around or even stand up and turn around and ask one another what was the last thing you prayed about?

What was the last thing you prayed about? You've got 27 seconds. Go. All right, stop. That was 29 seconds.

So if your name is Anderson, that was easy because the last thing you prayed about was for the Bible readings. Like 40 seconds ago. But often what we prayed for, whatever it is that you mentioned, reveals what we're concerned about.

That is, our prayers reveal our concerns, don't they? I mean, you just pray for what concerns you. For example, a young Ginny who says, dear God, please put another holiday between Christmas and Easter.

There is nothing good in there now. So her concern? Holidays, of course. Or like young Jack, God, please give me patience because if you give me strength, I will just punch them in the face.

[1 : 35] Which I think is a good prayer to pray, right? You don't want to punch someone in the face. He's asking for patience. The point is, our prayers reveal our concerns. And at one level, we're to pray for everything that concerns us.

We see elsewhere in the Bible, for example, Philippians 4, do not be anxious about anything. But in every situation, whatever is concerning you, by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Or 1 Peter chapter 5, casts all your anxiety, all your concerns on God because he cares for you. We're to pray for all our concerns.

And so at one level, all prayer for all our concerns pleases God. Because that's what he tells us to do, right? But as Christians, what should concern us most?

What should we prioritize in our prayers? That is, what is it, what prayer is it that really pleases God? Now before we get to that, we need to remember what we saw last week because as we'll see, it's connected to this week.

[2 : 47] And so last week in chapter 1, we saw that the church is God's household, as the picture suggests there. And in God's household, there are house rules. And the first one we saw is that truth matters.

So much so that Timothy is to stop false teachers, remember, who seem to say that only those who follow food laws or believe certain myths or are adopted into certain families, like Enoch's family perhaps, could be saved from judgment and given life eternal.

But the truth is that the Old Testament law was not made to save us because we just can't keep it, can we? And like I said last week, remember this other law, not an Old Testament law, but a current law, wet paint don't touch.

As soon as you see that law, we want to touch it, don't we? And so the law just shows us that actually by nature, we are sinners who need a saviour.

And so we went on to see Paul's example, how he talked about actually we're saved by grace and faith in Christ. And so Paul talked about how the grace of the Lord was poured out on him abundantly.

[3 : 59] And this grace included Jesus coming in the world to save us, of whom he says he is the worst. But he was shown mercy to be an example for us here in Melbourne today, who would believe like Paul did in Jesus and not earn, but receive eternal life.

And so here is an example that we need to remember. Because it means if he is the worst of sinners, if he can be saved, then anyone can be saved.

And not just a select few who follow food laws or myths or in certain families. No, all people who believe in Jesus can be saved from judgment, which leads us to therefore pray for all people to be saved.

Point one, verse one. I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving be made for all people. And notice here in verse one, the priority that Paul places on this prayer. He uses words like urge and first of all. They're priority words, aren't they? And then he kind of heaps up different words for prayer, like petition, intercession and of course prayer itself.

[5 : 17] They all mean the same thing. Or to prioritize praying for all people. But pray what? Pray that all people would be nicer, that they would use less petrol so there'd be more for us.

You know, pray what exactly? Well, pray that they would believe and be saved. And how do we know this? Well, because of that connection I just pointed to.

Because what's the third word in verse one? It's the word then or therefore. Just as we saw last week, if Paul, he's just finished saying, if he, the worst of sinners, can be saved, then everyone who believes can be saved.

Therefore, pray for everyone. You see the connection? You see the logic? Now, obviously, we can't pray for each person in the world by name. We don't have time and we don't know all their names. But we can pray for people groups around the world, people where our mission partners work, for example. And we can also pray for those we do know by name. And so the question is, do we?

[6 : 24] Do we pray for parts of our world, like our university campuses, where some of our APS workers here in this congregation work? Or do we continue to pray for Spain, where Lauren is, or the Northern Territory, where the O'Keeffe's, whom we just met, are?

And do we also pray for those we know personally, even if they're anti-Christian? Sometimes I'm tempted to not pray for particular people who are not Christian because I think, oh, they'll never believe.

I'm not going to, you know, I'll spend my time praying for someone else. I don't know if you've ever thought that before. But if Paul, the worst of sinners can be saved, then anyone can be, can't they? And so pray for all people, including those in authority, verse 2. He goes on to say, if the clicker works, there we go.

Pray for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness. Now, I take it we're to pray for the salvation of those in authority because they are part of all people, aren't they?

[7 : 31] And so we are to pray for Putin to be saved and even for Donald Trump to be saved. Can you imagine the difference those two men alone becoming Christians would make to our world at the moment?

Yes, we can also pray that Putin might be removed from power so he stops the war in Ukraine. We can still pray those things. In fact, maybe that's one way they might become a Christian. Who knows? But if Paul, the worst of sinners, can be saved, then anyone can be.

And so we're to pray for even those in authority, that they would be saved. But we're also to pray that they might govern well. Why? Well, verse 2, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.

Now, this doesn't mean so that we can live a comfortable life, which is sometimes what we really want when we pray these prayers. You know, we pray that the government will govern well so that there will be a job for me when I finish uni.

Or we pray that the government will govern well so the interest rates would go down and I could actually be able to afford a house or something like that. That's often why we pray for our governments, isn't it? Because we hope it would mean a better life for us.

[8 : 49] And that's not necessarily wrong because we're to pray for all that concerns us. But that's not what Paul is getting at here. He is saying pray for those in authority, not so that we can have a comfortable life, but so that we can live an openly godly life.

A life that promotes the gospel and wins respect from outsiders so that they might talk to us and listen to us when we tell them about Jesus.

We see this in chapter 6, where Paul says that those who have masters are to treat them with respect so that God's name and our teaching, the gospel, may not be slandered.

Or from Titus chapter 2, he says to those not to steal from those who have masters, but to show that they can be fully trusted so that in every way they will make the teaching about God, our

saviour, attractive, you see.

Or even in 1 Thessalonians, where Paul uses the same phrase, quiet life. Why does he want us to live a quiet life? So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.

[10:08] Now it's assumed in these verses that people will know that we're Christians, otherwise they'll just think that we've been raised to have good manners, which I hope that's also true as well.

But we're to live godly lives that promote the gospel and win respect of outsiders that we might have an opportunity to share with them and so that they might be saved. You see, what's the best advertisement for the gospel?

It's Christians who live it out. What's the worst advertisement for the gospel? It's Christians who don't live it out. There's this quote from Mahatma Gandhi who apparently once said, if it weren't for Christians, I'd be a Christian.

That's a pretty stinging slap in the face, isn't it? If it weren't for Christians, I'd become a Christian. Apparently he'd seen Christians behaving so badly, he just said it's not worth becoming one.

On the other hand, I still remember in January last year, there was a YouTube interview between these two guys. Some of you might even listen to Joe Rogan's podcast. Joe Rogan, if you don't know, he's a commentator for the UFC.

[11:19] He's pretty well known amongst younger people. Wes Huff is a Christian historian. The video was viewed over 3.5 million times and there was comments afterward from non-Christians like this.

I'm not a Christian, but I do appreciate the historicity of Christianity and I find Wes to be an excellent representative of his faith. Great episode, thanks Joe and Wes. Another person said, I'm not even Christian nor religious, yet I've never anticipated an episode more than this.

Wes, you are a true gentleman and scholar. Thank you for showing that we can still kill with kindness. Notice both these non-Christians, what struck them was the behavior of Wes.

His comments and his demeanor, his attitude, the way he spoke. Wes was a great advertisement for the gospel, you see. The point is we're to pray for our government, not only that they might be saved and govern well for the good of people, but so that we can live openly Christian lives that might attract outsiders to hear the gospel and be saved.

Not so that we might simply live comfortable lives. Of course, we're still to be godly and live godly lives when the government doesn't govern well too, but it is harder to be openly Christian, isn't it?

[12:47] And so do we pray for our government and for that reason, that we can live openly godly lives that might lead people to salvation? Or is it simply so that we can live more comfortable lives that lead to our relaxation?

We're to pray for all people, including our governments, that more might be saved. And Paul now goes on to give us two big reasons, starting with God, who desires the salvation of all.

So point two, which will be a lot quicker. He goes on to say, verse three, This is good and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

This, in verse three, refers to verse one and two, right? Praying for all people to be saved, including the government, and so that we can live openly Christian lives that might lead to others being saved.

These prayers are good. And please God, it says. And why does it please God?

[13:57] Well, verse four, because God himself desires all people to be saved. As we heard in our first reading from Ezekiel, God says, Do I take pleasure in the death of the wicked?

And the answer is no. Rather, he is pleased, same word, pleased, when they turn from their wicked ways and live. God does not delight in judgment.

His desire is to see more people saved. Of course, the way to be saved, back in our passage in verse four, is by coming to a knowledge of the truth.

That is the truth of the gospel, the good news about Jesus. And so here's God's concern for all people, that they might hear the truth, the good news about Jesus, believe, and be saved.

And if this is God's concern for all people, then shouldn't it be our concern for all people? We're to pray for all, because God desires the salvation of all, so much so that Jesus died as a ransom for all.

[15:03] Point three, verse five and six. He goes on to say, for there's one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. Paul begins by saying there's one God over all, and that's true, regardless of whether people believe it or not.

Our world today often says, well, what's true for you is true for you, and what's true for me is true for me, as though there are no absolute truths. But there are, right? The world is round, regardless of whether people think it's flat, which they used to think, by the way.

And in fact, there's still a group online called the Flat Earthers, who still believe the world is flat.

Okay? But the absolute truth is that it's round, regardless of what they believe.

Well, so too, there is one true God, regardless of what people believe, whether there's lots of gods or no God. And if there is one true God, then all people will one day have to answer to him.

[16:11] And that doesn't bode well for us, since we have all sinned against him. You know, by not treating him all the time as the one true God, not honoring him all the time as the one true God.

But because he loves us deeply, he provided for us a mediator, a person to stand between God and us, to put things right between God and us.

The man, Christ Jesus, verse 5, where Christ is a title for king. And this King Jesus is the one mediator, not just because he's the only one who is both God and man, so he can perfectly stand between God and mankind, but also because he's the only one, verse 6, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

A ransom is the price you pay to purchase someone's freedom. Like back in 1193, the English King Richard I, also known as Richard the Lionheart, was returning from the misguided crusades, but he was captured by Leopold, Duke of Austria.

And the Duke demanded a ransom for Richard's release, and the price was 150,000 marks. And that is three tons worth of silver.

[17:29] Can you imagine that? Three tons worth of silver. Pretty big ransom price. But apparently the people of England so loved their king that they paid extra taxes, the nobles donated much of their fortunes, and after months and months, enough money was raised, and Richard was released.

Apparently this is where we get the expression, a king's ransom, from this episode in history. But in our passage, we don't pay the ransom for the king.

The king pays the ransom for us. And it's not three tons of silver. It's something much, much more precious. It's his own blood, isn't it? Jesus gave his own life as a ransom for our sin so that we can be freed from judgment for life eternal.

And because his life as God's son is of such infinite worth, it pays for infinite sin. It can pay for all our sins and all people's sins if we believe in him.

Because it's only by believing in Jesus that his ransom becomes effective for us. And so by way of application, if you're here tonight or listening online, just checking out Christianity, if you want to be freed from judgment and certain that when you face God, when you die on the last day, when you face God, that you'll be safe from judgment for life eternal, then believe in Jesus.

[19:08] And for us who already believe, the application is what we've already seen. Firstly, do we prioritize prayer for all people to be saved? Even for those impossible people we think will never believe.

For this is prayer that pleases God. I mean, it's the kind of big picture of the passage, right? The phrase all people kind of runs all the way through it.

So, pray for all people because God desires the salvation of all people. So much so Jesus died as a ransom for all people. You see the logic? And in case we still haven't got the point, Paul adds in verse 7 that he is a true and faithful teacher, not just of the Jews, but the Gentiles.

And in the ancient world, there are only Jews and Gentiles. And so if he's preaching the gospel to Jews and Gentiles, he's preaching it to how many people? All people.

Yeah. And so if this is God's concern, then it should be our concern, shouldn't it? And Christ's blood has already been shed, so why not make the most of it?

[20:15] And so when you get on the bus or the train or you look around your class at uni or the office at work, whether you're out shopping and seeing people around and you look around at them, why don't you just take a moment, even if you don't know these people, and shoot up a prayer that somehow they might be safe?

And perhaps pick two or three people you know, whether family, friends, colleagues, or neighbours who are not yet Christians, and perhaps even one you think will never believe, and pray for them each week.

Once a week, that you might have an opportunity or they might come to our carol service at the end of the year. Keep praying now, leading right up to Christmas, that somehow they might be safe. And the second application for us is to pray for the government, to govern well, yes, but also that we may live openly godly lives that win the respect of outsiders so that they might talk to us and listen to us about Jesus.

And third, make sure we then live those openly godly lives. I mean, there's no point praying for the freedom to live Christian lives and then not living them, you know, being a bad advertisement.

[21 : 41] No, no, no, pray that we would be a good advertisement for the gospel. Pray for all because God desires the salvation of all, so much so Jesus died as a ransom for all.

In fact, why don't we start now? Take a moment to think of one non-Christian that you know. Hold that person in your mind. We're going to sing and then Sharon's going to give us a chance to pray for their salvation.

So 10 seconds to think of one person and then we'll sing.