

The Essential of Prayer

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Date: 01 March 2015

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[0 : 0 0] Let me draw your minds this evening to 1st Timothy chapter 2, the passage we read a short time ago, and looking especially at verses 1 to 8, or 1 to 7, the beginning of verse 8, also continues that same theme of prayer.

And tonight we're looking at the essential of prayer as we continue looking at some of the essentials that arise in the Bible. We've looked at most of them probably by now, but this essential of prayer is obviously clear in the Bible that prayer is an essential.

It's in the Bible in different ways explained to us that prayer is an essential. It's an essential because it belongs for one thing to the natural way in which a Christian operates.

As soon as a person is changed by God, then prayer enters meaningfully into that person's life, and indeed it's compared even to the breath in your body, that spiritually it's a kind of equivalent to that by which you actually live in your relationship with God and draw your spiritual energy and help from Him.

And in passages like this, also in the Bible, there are many of them, you'll find that there is an appeal to us to pray, which is of course God Himself stressing that because prayer is so important, indeed it's an essential, therefore there is an appeal to us to pray and to continue to pray and to persevere in prayer.

[1 : 3 4] So prayer is an essential, whatever we say about the nature of prayer, and there are many mysteries to prayer, the different components of prayer, we'll see some of them actually there in the first verse in a few moments, but whatever we say about the Bible's teaching on what prayer is, what we're looking at this evening especially is the need to make prayer an essential, and the need to continue to regard prayer as an essential.

And that's really why Paul is saying here at the beginning, first of all then, I urge that prayers, supplications, prayers and so on be made for all people.

When he says first of all there, he doesn't mean first in terms of time, it's first in terms of importance. What he's really saying is, this is something that you must give priority to.

This is something the church must give priority to. It's a first for all, a first of all issue that prayer is put at the top of our agenda.

That's why when you look at any church's strategy, and of course we need to have strategy to some degree, we need to have some things formulated as to where we're actually going to go forward as a church or as a congregation.

[2 : 5 1] In that sense, we need to try and look ahead and plan ahead and have a strategy for the gospel as we seek to serve God in the gospel. And whenever you see certain plans, if you see them of churches, and there are all of these activities, and then very far down the list there's a reference to prayer that's wrong.

Prayer should be the first thing that's put on the list. Prayer is first of all emphasized by the apostle in this passage in which he says to Timothy, as he's giving him further guidance near the end of Paul's own life for Timothy to continue the work that has been given him by God.

First of all, he says, this is what I urge. I urge that as a priority, as an essential, as an essential on top of your agenda, that prayer be attended to.

And that's not just for individual benefit. Prayer as an essential is important in your life and my life as an individual. We can't make much progress individually without prayer.

The less prayer we have in our lives, the less we ought to expect a progress in our lives spiritually. If we're to grow as we must as Christians, if we are to grow in an understanding of God's dealings with us, if we are to grow in our understanding of God's way of managing our lives, if we are indeed to grow in our knowledge of scripture, we have to grow in our habit, in our consistency in prayer.

[4 : 28] It's something that is essential in an individual point of view for our personal development, our personal growth as Christians. But as we'll see, the passage is actually dealing with it in a way that's wider than that.

It doesn't leave out the importance of prayer for our benefit personally, but what Paul is actually dealing with here actually is the gospel. He's dealing here with the gospel as something that needs to be set out before all human beings.

And its content as Jesus Christ the mediator is to be set out as something proclaimed to all human beings, as the church's primary business to preach and to declare and to live out that gospel.

Well, he's saying for the conditions to be there for that gospel to advance to the maximum, you need to pray. You need supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving.

And he mentions particularly for those in authority. And you see, this is Paul very logically going through these steps in the passage. He's saying, let it be that prayer be made for everybody, but especially kings and those who are in high positions.

[5 : 46] Why? So that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignifying. Why do we need that? Because this is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.

Why is it good and why is it pleasing in the sight of God our Savior? Because he will have all men to be saved. Paul's emphasis on prayer is in seeking the best possible conditions for the gospel to flourish.

And the best possible conditions will be if those in positions of authority will themselves facilitate the gospel and not be against the gospel.

That's why we pray for those in authority, not just for their own personal development and for their own lives to know God, but so that as a people, as a society, the gospel will be given the most favorable possible conditions from the top downwards so that the kingdom of God will advance, so that the testimony that he mentions there in verse 6 and the preaching of the gospel especially will progress in a way that will advance the kingdom, the church of Christ.

So that's really the setting for this emphasis on prayer as an essential. But let's look at three things. First of all, prayers are to be for all people. Secondly, prayers are to be for all people for good reasons, for peace and quiet, and that itself is so that people may be saved.

[7 : 27] And thirdly, that the one God and the one mediator is for all people, which fits in with the emphasis that prayer is to be made for all people. So prayer is to be for all people.

Prayers are to be made for all people. It means all kinds of people. He's obviously dealing with the need for us to realize that all people need Christ, that all people need this message, that all people actually need what the gospel contains, and that there is no other hope for human beings in any other form of teaching, in any alternative to the gospel, for there is only one God and one mediator between God and man.

And who is he? He is the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul is not being in any way embarrassed by confining saviourhood to Jesus Christ.

He's closing out every rival to Christ. He's closing out every rival religion to the worship of Christ, to the one that worships God in Christ. But he's saying that he urges prayers, supplications to be made for all people, all kinds, all races, all levels in society, all kinds of backgrounds.

It doesn't matter where they've come from, what they're like, what their position in society is, what their family history is, what their behavior is, what they're doing with their lives.

[9 : 03] I, he says, urge that it be made for all people. And then he zooms in on those in authority for kings and for all who are in high positions.

And that's as we've said, so that the influence from the top as we pray to God, that God will himself answer our prayers and give us from the top, from those in authority, the leadership that's needed for the gospel to go forth in a way that flourishes.

And you see, he's not actually content with saying just that we must pray for those in authority, that we must pray for all people. He breaks it down into four different parts of prayer.

And he will just not leave us to be content with the idea that when we've just prayed in general for all people, or prayed in general, in a general way for kings and for all who are in high positions, that that's as far as we need to go.

No, he's saying, we have to actually supplicate God for them. We have to actually have prayers. We need intercessions. And we need thanksgivings. We need all the parts of prayer there that he mentions to be exercised as we pray for all people.

[10 : 24] Now, sometimes, I'm satisfied far too readily with that generality in prayer. Even in public prayer. Though we have to be careful in public prayer that we don't necessarily speak out the same kind of details as freely as you would before God in private.

Nevertheless, it's wrong to be simply general at all times, and so general that sometimes people don't even know who you're praying for or what you're praying about. Paul is saying, here is what I urge.

First of all, that supplications be made for all people. Now, supplication is an emphasis.

We can be somewhat too rigid in our distinguishing of these four parts because they are all ultimately parts of prayer or different aspects of prayer. But it's interesting and it's significant that he is making some distinction between these four parts.

And supplications, when you have it like this along with the other parts, is really an emphasis not just on pleading and making an appeal to God, but this is where it becomes really very specific.

[11 : 35] Supplication is where there's an emphasis on specific needs or very definite needs. Things that from time to time come to be seen in any society or in a congregation or in a community or in a family or individually even as well.

And Paul is saying here supplication really focuses on the more detailed aspect of need. And when we pray for those in authority, in other words, we don't just pray simply in general for those in authority.

We pray for our prime minister. We pray for the cabinet. We pray for those who help him. We pray for his advisors. We pray for those who are aspiring to such positions. And even if we don't mention them by name in public, we can mention them privately before God.

But as we said, even in public prayer, this is the church, this is Paul emphasizing for Timothy what he must ensure as the people that he ministers to come together to pray.

That he shows leadership in supplication for all people. It's a sign of the times, isn't it, when certain authorities try to dictate to us where and when we pray and who and for whom we pray or for whom we do not pray.

[12 : 57] It's not the same as it used to be even in terms of going into hospitals nowadays. Never used to be a problem to stand in the middle of a ward and pray along with somebody there but pray in a way that others heard it as well.

That's becoming problematic because some people have complained about that. They don't want to hear prayers. They don't want to have somebody coming in and praying with them.

Even if it's praying alongside someone else at a bed, they don't want to hear that. And certainly we don't want to get nurses and others and these wards into trouble but sometimes it's very tempting to say, well tough, these people need prayer and they're going to have prayer and we'll just assume that everybody's deaf.

Now we can go too far in that I'm not saying that we shouldn't be careful in that situation as well and respect authority when it's duly set out for us but here is Paul's emphasis and it's something that you and I must take to heart.

Prayer is to be made for all people even for those who don't want it. You have to pray for the most rank atheist in the world today in our country today in our neighborhoods today.

[14 : 14] You don't say to God well that person's an atheist and I know that he doesn't want me to pray for him so I'll just leave him out of my prayers. And when you find political leadership or any other leadership in our society that come out openly and say I'm not a believer I'm not a Christian I'm actually an atheist or I'm a secularist or I'm someone who just doesn't want anything to do with the Bible to feature in public life or in the life of any nation.

You pray for that person. You ask God to open that person's eyes. You pray for them specifically. You supplicate their specific need of enlightenment and of God giving them wisdom which even they don't want.

and then there's prayers which is a more general word. I urge that supplications prayers be made for all people and that's probably Paul saying there are always things almost at all times that we need.

We need wisdom we need guidance we need restraint we need the Holy Spirit to enable us to live in the kind of quality of life in spiritual terms that God requires.

There are always things that are needs with us at all times in terms of supplication there are needs that come from time to time things that come to light specific needs but there are also things that are there just constantly and you bring that before God as far as our people are concerned as far as those in authority are concerned and you pray for them in that sense as well.

[15 : 54] And then thirdly he uses the word intercessions. Mostly we understand intercessions to be praying on behalf of others and that includes people who as far as we know don't pray for themselves.

It would be a poor church leadership that didn't pray for people who didn't pray themselves or who confined their prayers only to who they know as the Lord's people who pray to God.

Here is Paul saying as a leader in the church Timothy you have to lead in this way as well. That's what we are responsible for. All of these men here in the Kirk session and in the diaconate as well but particularly in the eldership they are to be leaders in terms of supplications prayers intercessions for people and we as a people have to be interceding for people but you know this word has more than just praying on behalf of somebody even if they don't pray themselves it actually has in it the idea of praying with confidence coming before God not reluctantly or not doubtingly but with confidence and especially in relation to who God is as we pray to him as his children.

In other words it's very much in line with the emphasis that Jesus himself had when he taught his disciples to pray our father who is in heaven.

You pray to a father you pray to the father you pray to the one who is so willing to give and to care and to hear us and to answer us and that word intercession means that not only do we pray on behalf of others but we pray to one who is ready to listen we pray to one who is always assuring us that he loves to hear us pray that he admits us into his presence because he longs to hear our voice in prayer pleading for others interceding for them praying for them so that God will bless them and then there's thanksgivings supplications detail prayers more general constant need intercessions praying on behalf of others praying with confidence to a father and thanksgivings and it's challenging isn't it that the word thanksgivings is there along with for all people we are to pray with thanksgivings for all people how would you feel tonight if you're reading this in

[18 : 42] North Korea and amongst the all people is the all powerful leader the tyrant in North Korea well he's saying here to Christians I urge that you pray for all people and that you pray with supplications prayers intercessions and thanksgivings how do you thank God for a government that's tyrannical well you don't thank him for the tyranny you thank him for the privilege of knowing that you bring it to God that he's given you even by that something over which to pray earnestly something to draw you near to him something that may be in itself obnoxious distasteful grotesque horrible but you bring it to God and you thank him that you know you should pray for him that you know you should bring it to him that you know he listens to you when you cry to him so all of these things are there in prayer supplications prayers intercessions thanksgivings he says

I will that they be made for all people particularly those in authority prayers are to be made for all people secondly prayers are to be made for all people for good reason for peace and quiet for godliness and for dignity he says that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life godly and dignified in every way because you see as he's really focusing on the gospel and the need for favorable conditions for the gospel you and I know very well that strife and contention and war and dissension and all of these things conflict whether it be in the church or outside of the church they don't make for favorable conditions for the gospel they actually militate against the advance of the gospel it puts people off the gospel you don't find many people tonight on front lines in eastern Ukraine busy thinking about how to spread the gospel they're too taken up with conflict with where the enemy is with are they going to be killed the next day conflict while god of course can change things even in the midst of conflict can change lives can convert people can advance his kingdom and spread the gospel even through persecution as it's obvious in the book of Acts yet what

Paul is concerned for is that we pray for peace for quiet for conditions in any people in any society that there will be calmness and peace calmness I think that word is indicative of personal inward calmness but also outwardly that we will have a peaceful life that we will have peace and not conflict violence one of the features of our age is not a friend to the gospel that's why Paul is saying pray for peace remember Jeremiah when the Lord was saying to Jeremiah in such a definite way that the people were going to be sent into exile in Babylon that they would be there for 70 years that they would not have the things that they had been given to enjoy by God in Jerusalem no temple no worship in the temple none of those good things that God had given them they were going to be deprived of them they were going to be taken away to

Babylon these things would be left behind and in fact they would be destroyed and in chapter 29 of the prophecy of Jeremiah and in verse 7 the Lord said this to them seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf for in its welfare you will find your welfare there he is you see he's seeing all of these people in Israel and Jerusalem Judah going to be captives to be really just under the dominance of the Babylonians taken away to their capital in Babylon and round about there to be treated virtually as slaves and you'll find Psalm 137 one of the Psalms where the complaint of the psalmist in his lament really says here they are taunting us they're saying to us sing us one of the songs of Zion how can we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land how can we be joyful in these conditions and there is Jeremiah said when you find yourselves in Babylon you pray for the peace of

Babylon you pray for the peace of that city pray for the welfare of that city pray for its well being why because in its peace in its well being your well being your welfare is situated your good your benefits will be by having peace and prosperity and well being in Babylon that's why Paul is saying to us here that we are to pray for peace and for quiet that we are to pray when we find things in the world such as the movements that you find in Eastern Europe and Russia where there seems to be a receding back in fact to something almost like prior to the Second World War where people in power begin to flex their muscles and threaten surrounding nations where you find Boko Haram in Nigeria and other places that are absolutely committed to the destruction of

[24 : 29] Christians and of churches and everything that has to do with the name of God and Western civilization and just wipe out everything that has anything to do with that where you have ISIS in their horrible ghastly way of progressing their own cause pray for peace and well being of the world pray for conditions in our own nation where the gospel will advance that's what he's saying pray for those in authority with that in view that they will see to it that proper peace and the interest of justice are served by whatever government it is for in that peace and in that quiet and in that godliness it's saying here be godly and dignified in every way you see that's that's really so much contrary to what you find happening when people go away from the bible when people throw out the teachings of the bible when people say openly that this is not really what any people or society should build their lives on or their future on what do you find do you find dignity is euthanasia dignified is abortion dignified is that the way to treat human beings unborn or old aged or terminally ill is that dignifying where's it come from it's come from a human heart it's come from human philosophies it's come from human beings who say we should be in charge of our own affairs pray that there be dignity that there be godliness that society will indeed be conditioned in such a way as to progress the gospel not be in enmity against it progress the message of

Jesus Christ not increasingly hostile to it so that's why he's saying pray for all people for good reasons because he's now going on to say that not only peace and quiet but for people to be saved now notice the logical way in which the passage develops this is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our savior and it's interesting immediately he doesn't just speak about God he describes him as God our savior this is good not just is it good in itself to pray in this way and to pray for all people in this way but it's also pleasing in the sight of God because God is the savior because this is about the salvation of people this is about conditions that will bring people to be saved that will come under the influence of the gospel for he says there is who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth in fact you can see that that's something that follows on from chapter 1 verse 15 this saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost why did Jesus become human why did this Jesus become a man because he is the savior and because he came to save to save sinners to save the likes of you and me and this is Paul saying because this is the case because this is the substance of the gospel because this is the message that people need to hear in every society pray to the God who is the savior pray for conditions by which this message of the gospel will actually go forth in power and in haste you know there are parts of our own nation tonight that don't hear the gospel there are large sections of our society who have never heard a proper gospel message and thousands and thousands of homes where there is no bible at all where there is nothing to do with the christian gospel where there is everything else but that virtually and we have to pray for conditions that will facilitate the gospel that the gospel will come and make its way into people's homes and people's lives and into areas of our society that tonight are in spiritual darkness there are great problems in our society poverty addictions other problems of a similar kind because problem is a spiritual one it's not being over simplistic people will say you christians always say that you always come back and say the problem is something to do with the bible the problem is human nature human nature as it is in itself the problem is the wickedness of the human heart the rebellion of the human heart the resistance of the human heart against god and against god's authority and against everything that is to do with authority that comes from a higher source than man himself that's why our prayers have to be prayers fitted in so detailed so wide so general for the gospel and for the gospel's sake because god will have all he desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth now obviously that does not mean that every single person will ultimately be saved nowhere is the bible universalistic to that extent people do believe in universalism that everybody will somehow or other end up being saved whatever kind of life they've lived in this life that's not true to the bible at all otherwise there would be no hell but there is hell and people will spend eternity in hell sad though that is and why will they spend eternity in hell because they haven't accepted god and his authority and his salvation and god is one whose interest is in all people to be saved all kinds of people god is committed to saving his people but his people come from all kinds of backgrounds all kinds of races all kinds of experiences all kinds of upbringings you saw that even this morning with Lydia she was a well to do business woman she came to be saved the lord opened her heart who's the next one spoken about a slave girl who's possessed with a demon who was bringing material gain to those that used her and abused her in the world who's the next one a Philippian jailer somebody in the employment of the Romans who was charged with looking after a jail a prison and would actually do so in a pretty determined fashion and he was converted just like Lydia was very different kinds of people and yet that's God's way he brings from all kinds of people those that he saves he will have all people to be saved he desires that all come to be saved does that mean you and me in this building tonight yes of course it does and if we end up not saved the one thing you and I will never be able to say is that it was God's fault that simply wasn't and can't be because he desires all to be saved now I know there's a difficult theology in that that is difficult to balance that with the whole issue of predestination and election leave that to God only God knows all about that it's not for us to try and figure it out so that once having figured it out then we'll come and say okay then I have to be saved because I now understand this issue of predestination and election and all of that what God is saying to you is repent and believe the gospel turn to

Christ give your life to him open your heart to him welcome him commit yourself to him fully maybe then you can start if you like to study predestination once you're inside the safety zone once you're actually inside the security that is in Christ that's when to start studying predestination not before what Paul is saying here is what you and I must really take to heart that God desires all people to be saved that God's heart in Jesus Christ is extended to us to all people and that the gospel calls every single kind of person and individual to salvation in Christ that's why we pray as Paul is saying we pray for the gospel to advance and you notice here that he's equating salvation with what he also calls the knowledge of the truth he desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth that's what we saw this morning with Lydia she came to the knowledge of the truth when she came to give heed to the word that was preached by Paul and when she then came to give herself over to that word to that teaching to that

[34 : 56] Christ so prayers are to be made for all people for good reason for peace and quiet and for people to be saved thirdly the one God and the one mediator is for all people 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 you know yourselves how readily you hear the words spoken by these militant Islamic forces Allah what Akbar Allah alone is God or Allah is great Allah is not God not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ Allah is not Savior Allah is not God our Savior Paul has no hesitation no sense of embarrassment in closing out in his own day every other rival to

Jesus Christ whether it be the emperor of Rome or somebody else that's got such significance in society as to be in that sort of position or whether it's some great Greek philosopher from the past whose teachings many people would still be following in Paul's day no he says there is one God and one mediator between God and man the man Christ Jesus in other words this is why we pray because there is only one savior that is a savior for all human beings who want to be saved if we want to be saved and this is how we come to be saved we don't get saved through any other medium we don't get saved through any other system of belief there is only one what does a mediator do a mediator comes to stand between people or parties that are divided he comes to represent each side equally and he comes to mediate to make peace to bring them together that's who

Jesus is he is God so he can represent God's side of the issue he is the man Christ Jesus he's human so he fully represents the human side of the issue he stands as Moses did when you read in Exodus chapter 20 Moses there presented as a mediator between the people and God you remember what the people said when they heard the voice and the trumpet on the mountain of Sinai when they heard this and when the mountain itself shook because God had come down and it was on fire it was an awesome sight and what they said was don't let God speak to us you speak to us but don't let's hear the voice of God or we'll die that's what you would have said there too and me and that's where Moses comes to be someone who prefigures or is a representation of Christ for us indeed Moses is the greatest type representation of Christ in the whole of the Old

Testament you can think that through yourselves but that's a fact and there he is standing between the people and God he goes up to God he speaks to God he goes into the darkness where God is he goes into the presence of God he brings back from God a message to the people he brings back the law he brings back words from God to the people he brings the people's needs back to God he's the mediator that's what Christ is and he's the only mediator between God and human beings the man Christ Jesus it's not saying that God that Jesus is not God when he says the man Christ Jesus what he's saying is that God the Savior is as human as the humans he saves he is as fully human as you and I without ceasing to be

God that's why he is unique that's why he's the only mediator and you see not only that but he gives brings us to the very heart of the issue who gave himself a ransom for all he's still saying the all in other words when you think of any type of human being of whatever background whatever race whatever level in society whether the lowest or the highest when you think of what they need as far as eternity is concerned it's all already in Christ all already in Christ and nowhere else because he gave himself a ransom for all doesn't matter what kind of human being I am the ransom that Jesus is the cost of redemption that he paid is absolutely what I need wherever I've come from whatever I am whatever level

[40 : 16] I've reached in society even if I'm the king or the queen I need this ransom as much as the lowest subject in my kingdom because this Jesus is the same towards everybody he is the savior and that's what he says here which is the testimony given at the proper time and then he adds to that his reference for I Paul was made an apostle and a preacher what he says there is that this is to be proclaimed and for all time there seems to be a reference to the time that has now arrived with the coming of Christ the new testament time the new testament age what Paul is saying is it is time the time has come this is the age that for centuries people were waiting for this is the age now of the gospel that's why we pray we pray with prayers with supplications with intercessions with thanksgiving for all people for this is good but it is pleasing especially to

God seeing God is the savior who indeed desires that all people should be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth for there is one God and one mediated between God and men the man Christ Jesus how privileged we are tonight that God has placed us under the gospel that we have access to Jesus Christ freely that we are included in this all people who need Christ and to whom Christ is offered that we are amongst this all people the death of Christ being designed to meet our need the ransom sufficient to cover all our deaths yes we're amongst the all people but we also have to be amongst the all who accept him who trust in him who have given ourselves to him let's pray

Lord our God teach us we pray to pray in the way in which the apostle brought before Timothy and which we now have in your word and help us Lord to give all due attention to supplications and prayers and intercessions and thanksgivings enable us Lord to develop in our practice of prayer so that we will apply ourselves to these issues that your word specifies for us because thankful that we are privileged to be able to pray and to pray even for those who don't pray for themselves to pray for those in authority and power we do pray that you would send conditions for which the gospel indeed might flourish and in which we would see many people coming to know you remove we pray from the hearts of our people hostility and the antipathy and the resistance to your word and to all that they associate with divine authority

Lord we ask that you would help us to communicate by our lives that these things are valuable to ourselves go before us now bless us in the fellowship bless to us what we will have for our bodily needs there and make us thankful too for these in Jesus name amen