



Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-7<sup>1</sup>

Series: Living the Gospel

Title: Part 5 – Praying for the Progress of the Gospel

Date: January 17, 2010

Place: First Baptist Church, Olds, AB

There is an old cautionary tale about a lifesaving station.

*On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur stood a lifesaving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Many of those who were rescued and also others from the surrounding area wished to become associated with the station and to give their time, money, and effort for the support of its work. New boats were bought and new crews trained. The lifesaving station grew.*

*In time some of the crew became concerned that the station was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more commodious place should be provided as the first refuge of those snatched from the sea. The emergency cots were replaced with beds, and better furniture was purchased for the enlarged building. The station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely. Fewer members were now interested in leaving the plush station to go to sea on lifesaving missions. So they hired surrogates to do that work. However, they retained the lifesaving motif in the club's decorations, and a ceremonial lifeboat lay in the room where club initiations were held.*

*One dark stormy night a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and obviously from distant shores. The station was in chaos. The event was so traumatic that the people contracted for outbuildings to be constructed so future shipwrecks could be processed with less disruption.*

*Eventually a rift developed in the station. Most of the members wanted to discontinue the station's lifesaving activities as being unpleasant and a hindrance to their normal social life. Some insisted, however, that rescue was their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But the latter were ignored and told that if they wanted to keep lifesaving as their primary purpose, they could begin their own station down the coast, which they did. Over time those individuals fell prey to the same temptations as the first group, coming*

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission, All rights reserved.



*to care more about comforting one another than rescuing the perishing. After a while a few, remembering their real purpose, split off to establish yet another lifesaving station. And on and on it went. Today if you visit that seacoast, you will find a number of impressive lifesaving stations along the shore. Sadly, shipwrecks still occur in those waters, but most people are lost.<sup>1</sup>*

This is obviously a parable about the church. I called it a “cautionary tale” because its purpose is to warn us that we could end up being part of this never-ending drama unless...

How do we keep from becoming another “impressive lifesaving station along the shore”? The secret is found in Paul’s counsel to Timothy that I’m about to read for us this morning. As I read, I want you to take note of one particular word. It appears multiple times. It’s so small you might not notice it at all unless I point it out to you. It’s the word, “all.” Watch for it.

Here is God’s Word for us this morning, from Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, chapter two, verses one to seven:

**“<sup>1</sup> First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup> for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup> For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. <sup>7</sup> For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”**

Did you catch the repetition of “all”? It occurs six times in these seven verses. One of the occurrences is hidden in this translation by the word, “every.” In verse 2, “every way” translates the word for “all.” “All” is an expansive word. It is a word that embraces. It is a word that drives us beyond ourselves. It is word that is always calling us out. It’s a word that reflects God’s heart and God’s plan for us. And as the church of Jesus Christ, it’s a word we need to have impressed upon our hearts. “All.”

How do we keep ourselves from becoming an impressive but ineffective lifesaving station? We need to work the word “all” into our hearts and into our plans and we need to begin the process by working “all” into our prayer. Paul’s counsel to Timothy is that...

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from “The Life-Saving Station” by Theodore Wedel. As quoted in R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus : To Guard the Deposit.*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2000), 56.



***The church's prayers should concern all people<sup>2</sup>***

**“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, 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.” 1 Timothy 2:1-2**

Prayer was a priority that shaped the lives of Paul and the other apostles. Notice the priority and the urgency that Paul gives to prayer for the world. He wrote: “First of all, I urge...” that you pray! The priority of prayer in the lives of God’s servants is something of which we need to remind ourselves regularly. In Acts chapter 6, the apostles identified their ministry priorities and this is what they said...

**“we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” Acts 6:4**

Right along side the ministry of teaching and preaching came the ministry of prayer. And when the Lord directed Ananias to go and minister to the newly converted Paul in Damascus, the Lord said to Ananias...

**“look for a man of Tarsus named Saul, for behold, he is praying” Acts 9:11**

“For behold, he is praying...” Prayer was a sign to Ananias that Paul was a man who had a relationship with God.

Somehow, the prayer life of the people of Timothy’s church in the city of Ephesus had collapsed in on itself. Paul has just dealt at the end of the previous chapter with the fact that he had had to remove two of the church’s leaders because of their false teaching. We aren’t told exactly what their false teaching was, but the fact that Paul immediately launches into this teaching about expanding the prayer life of the Ephesian church suggests that the false teaching had something to do with praying for just a limited number of people. And that kind of “us four and no more” mentality can creep into our lives.

John Stott, a British Bible scholar and pastor, tells of a sad experience of a church with a collapsed prayer life. He wrote...

*“Some years ago I attended public worship in a certain church. The pastor was absent on holiday, and a lay elder led the pastoral prayer. He prayed that the pastor might enjoy a good vacation (which was fine), and that two lady members of the congregation might be healed (which was also fine; we should pray for the*

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<sup>2</sup> I’ve borrowed the four major headings of the message from John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible speaks today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996)



sick). But that was all. The intercession can hardly have lasted thirty seconds. I came away saddened, sensing that this church worshipped a little village god of their own devising. There was no recognition of the needs of the world, and no attempt to embrace the world in prayer.<sup>3</sup>

John Stott is now retired from pastoral ministry, but the church he pastored for many years in London is called All Souls Langham Place. It's a church of Anglican communion. Hudson and I attended a service there just over a year ago and what struck me was that it is an exciting, cosmopolitan congregation that truly lives up to its name: "All Souls." There were people of many nations attending worship there. I sat beside a young woman from Switzerland who was working in London and had found the Lord through the ministry of All Souls. It is a church with a world-wide vision. It is the home of the *Christianity Explored* study that we use here in evangelism. And all of this life and vitality flows from the fact that that church has embraced Paul's vision that our prayer as a church is to embrace the world!

This morning we embraced the people of Haiti in prayer and thankfully, for us that is not something unusual. Sunday by Sunday, as our Deacons lead us in prayer, we're encouraged to reach out to the world. We've prayed for our political leaders; we've prayed for those in our community who encounter hardship and grief; we've prayed for those who are sick and in need of healing; we've prayed for those who are lost and in need of salvation. Nobody is beyond the range of our prayer.

As we pray Sunday by Sunday for the world, we're shaping our hearts to match that of our God and Father. As we grasp the immensity of God's heart for the world our hearts will also be expanded to include "all." Paul taught Timothy that...

### ***God's desire concerns all people***

He wrote...

**"This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." 1 Timothy 2:3-4**

Paul encouraged Timothy to lead the church in praying for their political leaders in particular. This was the age of the Roman emperor, Nero, and today we know him to have been a man of violent and selfish passions. I wonder what they prayed for? Notice that Paul linked their prayer for leaders with peaceful and

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<sup>3</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, Includes Study Guide: P. [215]-232., The Bible speaks today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 61.



quiet lives for believers. When you think about that intended result I think we naturally understand their prayer for their leaders to have focused on things like wisdom and insight. Those are the kinds of things that leaders need in order to make good decisions and I think those are good things for which to pray. We regularly pray that way for our leaders here and I want to affirm that. In fact, it's a Biblically founded way of praying for our leaders and our community. The Lord told his people to pray that way when they were in exile in Babylon. The prophet Jeremiah wrote...

**“But 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.”**  
**Jeremiah 29:7**

But if we bring into the mix what Paul says in verse 3, I think we get a slightly different prayer focus. Paul tells us that God “desires all people to be saved.” (1 Timothy 2:3)

In the light of that, I think Paul was also encouraging the church to pray for the salvation of its political leaders. I think he was encouraging them to pray that Emperor Nero would come to Christ and that the local leaders in Ephesus would come to Christ. I think their highest prayer priority was the salvation of the world through faith in Jesus Christ. That was their driving prayer passion because that is God's passion for the world.

What strikes me about this is how bold Paul was in prayer! Here was a small group of believers in Jesus in Ephesus and he was encouraging them to pray big prayers! Imagine, praying that Osama bin Laden or that the president of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, would become a believer in Jesus Christ! No one is outside of the range of prayer and our prayer for them should never be limited to “we hope they have a nice day!”

This passage has been a focus of study for Bible scholars for years and the essence of the discussion is how to relate Paul's declaration here that God “desires all people to be saved” with other passages where he teaches that God chooses people for salvation.

For example, Paul wrote to the believers in the city of Thessalonica...

**“But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved....” 2**  
**Thessalonian 2:13**

And to the people of Timothy's church in the city of Ephesus, Paul had already written that God...



**“chose us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will...”**  
**Ephesians 1:4-5**

And don't blame Paul for this tension. All he's doing is reflecting a tension that was present in Jesus' teaching, too. On the one hand, Jesus said...

**“And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”**  
**John 12:32**

And on the other hand, he affirmed to His Father that his ministry had been focused on...

**“the people whom you gave me out of the world.”** John 17:6

At one time, Jesus said to those who opposed him...

**“you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”** John 5:40

And at another time, he said...

**“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”** John 6:44

And we could go on, but I think you get the point. How do we relate God's sovereignty in saving people with human responsibility to respond to God's call to believe in Christ? So why is it that some people do not come to Christ? Is it that they will not or that they cannot? Jesus taught both. Paul taught both.

Let me introduce an unusual but very useful word to you at this point. You won't find the word in the Bible, but it's a word designed to help us handle this kind of problem. It's the word...

### ***Antinomy***

J.I. Packer defines an antinomy as...

**"an appearance of contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary"<sup>4</sup>**

The Bible affirms both God's sovereignty and human responsibility and I can tell you that we won't be able to resolve this tension in our lifetime, let alone in a

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<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, *Evangelism & the Sovereignty of God*, p. 18



single sermon. I appreciate the wise counsel of John Stott on approaching this question. He wrote...

*Wherever we look in Scripture we see this antinomy: divine sovereignty and human responsibility, universal offer and electing purpose, the all and the some, the cannot and the will not. The right response to this phenomenon is neither to seek a superficial harmonization (by manipulating some part of the evidence), nor to declare that Jesus and Paul contradicted themselves, but to affirm both parts of the antinomy as true, while humbly confessing that at present our little minds are unable to resolve it.<sup>5</sup>*

Our task is not to solve the puzzle; our task is to preach the Gospel. Some in Timothy's church seem to have already decided whom God would save and whom he would not save and so they restricted their preaching only to those they believed were among God's chosen ones. They might have limited their preaching only to the Jewish people with whom God had a long history or they might have had some other special criteria of their own invention. But Paul pushes them out into the world because God's Gospel is for all people and we don't know who will respond to it and who won't – that's God's business, not ours!

William Carey was a shoemaker and pastor in late-eighteenth century England. He was part of a group of Baptist churches known for their imbalanced emphasis on God's sovereignty at the expense of human responsibility.

At a ministers' meeting in 1786, Carey raised the question of whether it was the duty of all Christians to spread the Gospel throughout the world. An older pastor in the meeting is said to have retorted: **"Young man, sit down; when God pleases to convert the heathen, he will do it without your aid and mine."**<sup>6</sup>

Thankfully, Carey didn't let this man's imbalanced theology deter him. He had heard God's call to preach the Gospel to all people and so he went to India and today is credited with founding the modern missionary movement. There are literally millions of people today around the world who declare that "Jesus is Lord" because William Carey believed in a God who "desires all to be saved...."

We leave the resolution of antinomy of divine election and human responsibility to God's wisdom and we get on with proclaiming the message he gave us to declare about Jesus because, as Paul tells ...

### ***Christ's death concerns all people***

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<sup>5</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, Includes Study Guide: P. [215]-232., The Bible speaks today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 64.

<sup>6</sup>[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Carey\\_%28missionary%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Carey_%28missionary%29)



Paul wrote...

**“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.” 1 Timothy 2:5-6**

In William Carey’s day, world missions were endangered because of a false doctrine regarding God’s sovereignty. The old pastor told Carey that he didn’t need to go and preach the Gospel because the sovereign God would look after it without his help.

But today a different false doctrine is threatening world missions. Today, people are saying we don’t need to go and proclaim the Gospel of salvation because people are already saved by their faith in one god. Hear me carefully: people are saying that anyone who believes in god, whether you call him Allah or Jesus or Buddha or Vishnu, are saved because God saves people in many different ways under many different names. The message that many are hearing is that belief in god is what is crucial and god is defined differently in different cultures.

But that is not what Paul says. We need to remember that Paul was writing in a time when there were many gods being worshipped. Ephesus, the city in which Timothy’s church was located, was dedicated to the worship of the goddess Artemis, and many other gods and goddesses were also worshipped there. It was into that pluralistic environment that Paul brought the message of the one, true God who made his will known to the world in the life of Jesus and his message caused a riot in the city. He was accused by the rioters of...

**“saying that gods made with hands are not gods.” Acts 19:26**

His message was offensive to them; he was understood as overturning their ways and insulting their gods because he called people to faith in Jesus and away from the many gods.

Paul didn’t invent the idea that there is only one, true God. It is the message of the Bible from the beginning to the end. The prophet Isaiah, speaking on behalf of the LORD, proclaimed...

**“Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. By myself I have sworn; from my mouth has gone out in righteousness a word that shall not return: ‘To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance.’” Isa 45:22-23**

Several years ago I was listening to a panel discussion on CBC radio about the varieties of religious expression. Most of the panelists were of the opinion that there were many ways to know God and many paths of salvation. But one panelist held a different view. Brian Stiller, who was at that time the president of



the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, was asked his view on whether there were many ways of salvation and he said, “I would be less than a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ if I didn’t tell you what my Lord said about this question. He said...

**“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” John 14:6**

We worship a God who declares himself to be the one, true God and it is precisely because he is the one God that he sends a message out to the entire earth – come to me and be saved! As John Stott wrote: “Our **exclusive** faith (*there is one God, and no other*) leads necessarily to our **inclusive** mission (*the one God wants all men to be saved*).”<sup>7</sup> And the one, true God has provided all people with one way of salvation – “the man Christ Jesus.”

Paul compresses the uniqueness of Jesus as our way to God into a few, very well selected words

### **Jesus is a “man”**

The Christmas season we’ve just come through celebrates the amazing truth that God was born as a baby boy in Bethlehem. Jesus was a man, fully human in every way. As both God and man (cf John 1:1-14; Col 1:15-20) Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the mediator between God and mankind.

### **Jesus “gave himself as a ransom”**

Easter, which is just weeks away, celebrates the truth that the baby of Bethlehem grew to be a man who died on a cross just outside Jerusalem. The word translated “ransom” is actually a heightened form of the word that appears only here in the New Testament. Paul takes the normal word for ransom and he adds a prefix to it that makes it carry the sense of “a substitute-ransom.”<sup>8</sup> What Paul is drawing our attention to is that Jesus’ death on the cross was *for us*. He died in our place, taking our punishment for sin.

### **Jesus is the “one mediator between God and man”**

After his death for us, Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven. Today he sits at the right hand of God, praying constantly for us before his Father. His role as our mediator didn’t end with his death and resurrection. Right now, at this very moment, he is interceding on our behalf before God.

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<sup>7</sup>John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth : The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, Includes Study Guide: P. [215]-232., The Bible speaks today (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 67.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.



As Brian Stiller so graciously and clearly did that day on CBC radio, our task is to tell the world about Jesus because...

**“there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” Acts 4:12**

And that we are to proclaim this truth...

**“in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” Acts 1:8**

And we are to be busy declaring this truth until he comes again (Matthew 28:19-20)!

And that brings us to Paul’s final point to Timothy. Paul teaches us that...

***The church’s proclamation must concern all people***

**“For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.” 1 Timothy 2:7**

Paul was a “preacher ... apostle ... [and] a teacher” of the Gospel. He was all three but no one is all three today. Paul’s apostleship was unique in that he was personally commissioned by Jesus on the Damascus Road to carry the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles. His apostleship carried an authority that no one has today. As he reminded Timothy at the beginning of this letter, he was...

**“an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope” 1 Timothy 1:1**

But preachers and teachers of the Gospel abound today. Our task is the same as that of Paul. We are to take the message of Jesus to “the Gentiles.” The word translated as “Gentiles” can also be translated “nations.” It’s a word that describes everyone on the planet that can’t trace their ancestry back to Abraham. Eugene Petersen, in his unique and rather limited rendering of this passage, captures a fragment of Paul’s intention:

**“This and this only has been my appointed work: getting this news to those who have never heard of God....” 1 Timothy 2:7 (The Message)**

This isn’t only about getting the message out to people living in remote areas of the world – although it does include them! Whether it’s Mongolia or Montreal; Bolivia or Bowden; India or Olds, there are multitudes who have never heard the news of God.



Remember, this isn't the news about "god" (small "g"); lots of people have heard about those gods. We're talking about the news of the "one God" whose Son, Jesus Christ, gave himself to pay the ransom price for our sin. There are many who have never heard that news!

I began with a story about a lifesaving station. Let me end with a story about search and rescue.

Search and rescue personnel risk their lives in tumultuous seas, deep forests, remote mountains, and desert wastelands. Wherever they're needed they go. When called, they respond, because lives are in danger.

A Search and Rescue Team in Colorado puts it this way: "Millions of people visit the mountains of Larimer County, Colorado, each year. A few will become lost, stranded, or injured...some will die. Our objective is to find and rescue these lost or injured people before it is too late.... We are dedicated to saving lives."<sup>9</sup>

So are we! Let's keep at it! Let's pray.

- **Invitation to Prayer**
- **Final Song:** Before the Throne of God Above
- **Benediction**

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<sup>9</sup> © 2010 PreachingToday.com [www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article\\_print.html?id=25873](http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/article_print.html?id=25873)