

1 Timothy 2:1-8 Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time, ⁷ for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle -- I am speaking the truth in Christ and not lying -- a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. ⁸ I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Paul says in our text today. “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority.” For those of us who do exactly this regularly in our Sunday morning worship, Paul’s exhortation may not seem like a particularly challenging request at all. Most of us have grown up praying for our president, our Governor, and our legislators during the general prayer of the church. After all, in our country, even if we don’t love our rulers, we still recognize that they are generally decent people. But for those who first read this letter of Paul, the situation was quite different. Their ruler was the infamous Nero. If you are not familiar with him, Nero was, one of, if not the most anti-Christians rulers that ever lived. When the city of Rome burned, Nero blamed the Christians and the society turned against them. Nero then proceeded to feed Christians to the lions. Under his rule such great Christians as Peter and Paul were killed in Rome. And if all that isn’t bad enough, Nero enjoyed dipping the Christians in wax, and impaling them on poles around his palace, lighting them on fire, and yelling: “Now you truly are the light of the world.” To say the very least Christians under his rule were not able to live peaceful and quiet lives.

And yet Paul encourages prayer for such a leader as Nero. Why waste time in prayer over such an evil man? He had no regard for the true God. He persecuted the church without mercy. Indeed, Nero was evil. And while all of that is true, those same truths were the very reason that he was to be in the prayers of the Christians Paul wrote to in this letter. For God knows that the church is able to function best in when it is able to live in godliness and reverence peaceably and quietly. He knows that when a ruler is at least tolerant of Christianity, life for His people and His kingdom is much improved. No doubt, the Church can and usually does still grow under persecution by God’s grace. But, it is not the best situation for those being persecuted or for those that need to hear the Word of those being persecuted. It is best when rulers allow Christians to live quietly and peacefully practice and share their faith.

We know the benefits of such government in our country. We are free to gather for worship, free to share our beliefs with other, free to proclaim Christ. Christian ministries in this country enjoy the ability to peacefully and quietly carry out their work. And because of this freedom, at least in the past, most of our nation had been exposed to the Gospel.

But it is not the same in all countries today. There are many places where proclamation of Christ is simply not allowed, or at least heavily censored. And so, beyond praying for our leaders, we as Christians are called to pray for all rulers and kings in order that Christians throughout the world might be able to live peaceably and that the gospel might spread. In our lifetime, God has answered this type of prayer in large measure in the former Soviet Union. When I was born the Soviet Union was communist nation that did not allow any talk of God let alone Christ. But now, due to new governments and new rulers, we have active missionaries in most of the countries once in the Soviet Union sharing the gospel with relatively great freedom.

But there are still many places where this is not true. In certain countries, the hearing of the Gospel is severely limited. There are seven countries across the world where this is certainly the case. In China, Indonesia, Nigeria, North Korea, Pakistan, Sudan and Vietnam the gospel and its proclamation is thwarted by the rulers and kings of those countries. We as God's people need to remember the rulers of these countries in our prayers. We pray for these rulers in order that persecution in their countries might cease, that Christians might be able to live in peaceful and quiet ways, and that others might come to a knowledge of the truth and be saved. We pray for them in order that the truth might be told to all nations and to all people for whom Christ died.

I guarantee the more you learned about the modern day leaders of these seven countries, the less you would like them. You might just view some of them pretty close to how the first readers of this text viewed Nero. These leaders also are very evil. But that is why we need to pray. Because it is pleasing to God when Christians can live peacefully and quietly spread the message of Christ. For in that setting, the message of Christ is spread with greater ease. Yes, we stop this day to pray that God might provide rulers in these places also that would allow the spread of the truth of the Gospel. For where there are open doors, the truth can be told.

This day many churches join together in celebrating LWML Sunday. Allow me to oversimplify this organization's purpose for you today by saying that their purpose is to tell the truth about Jesus wherever God opens doors. When a need arises in some country, a door opens for witness to Jesus and the ladies of the LWML place their

treasures and their talents at the service of that need. They walk through the open door. Why? Because they believe what our text says. They believe that God desires that all would be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. And they believe that that happens as God's Word goes out. And so they are not ashamed of the Gospel but rather are excited about it and rejoice in its spread wherever God opens a door. And because of this belief much good has been done through the LWML.

And yet this Sunday is not so much about promoting the LWML as it is promoting what exists to promote, the love of Christ to a lost world. And be we members of this organization or not, we share this focus. We too know that our Lord wishes for all to be saved and we understand our vital role in that process. He wishes for us to play the role that He have given us the talents to accomplish,

As the great hymn "Hark the Voice of Jesus Crying" reminds,

If you cannot speak like angels,
If you cannot preach like Paul,
You can tell the love of Jesus,
You can say He died for all.
If you cannot rouse the wicked
With the Judgement's dread alarms,
You can lead the little children
To the Savior's waiting arms.

If you cannot be a watchman,
Standing high on Zion's wall,
Pointing out the path to heaven,
Offering life and peace to all,
With your prayers and with your bounties
You can do what God demands;
You can be like faithful Aaron,
Holding up the prophet's hands.

Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the souls of men are dying
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when He calleth,
"Here am I, send me, send me!"

Yes, we must recognize again that each of us are to be active in the mission of the church because God wishes all be to be saved. And particularly from the words of our text today, we are reminded to be active on our knees praying for the kings and rulers of the world in order that Christians in countries who are now persecuted may instead

be free to live peacefully and quietly share their faith with others. For, as rulers begin to act justly, doors will be opened and the Gospel will march in and save people that Jesus died for on the cross.

No doubt there have been many times in each of our lives when the rulers of countries in which our brothers and sisters suffer have received little or no prayer support from us. For these our failures, we fall to our knees in repentance before Jesus. But because He wishes none to be lost be that all would be saved, He forgives us again today for those sins. And having been forgiven we remain on our knees and fold our hands, recognizing that at times our most powerful role in God's mission is praying for rulers and kings in order that doors might be opened for the spread of the gospel. As we pray, souls will be saved, and our God will rejoice. Amen.