

Pray for a Lost World

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[0 : 00] Amen. Well, I've got a good friend. He has sometimes asked me, do you have a sermon ready for when the Queen dies?

He is a historian. He has a big view of God's work in the world. Now, I am not a historian, and I didn't have a sermon ready for this occasion, but I didn't need to worry.

Because we are coming to the word of the living God, and our passage this evening could hardly be more fitting for a time of great transition in the halls of power in our nation.

For the first time in 70 years, our nation is mourning the death of our head of state, possibly our best-loved monarch in history, Queen Elizabeth II.

And it's a striking thing, really, isn't it? As you reflect on her life, that nobody grudged her her long reign, that nobody wished that it would come to an end.

[1 : 10] And yet, it has, and it had to. And that love, I think, is testament partly to her character, her faithfulness, her sense of duty that she would have said grew out of her love and faith in Christ Jesus.

I think it's worth us just reflecting the moment that we are standing in. Think of her service. She received her first prime minister at the age of 26, just days after the death of her own father.

And she was still smiling.

And no doubt, to the very end, she would have said with the servants in Jesus' parable, we have only done what was our duty. And surely she has heard the reply, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your master.

We stand at a great turning point, don't we? The loss of a well-loved Christian queen. And of course, the shock and the gravity of her passing is deepened because this week we gained not only a new king, but a new prime minister and a new government.

[2 : 34] And surely not in living memory has that all happened together. Think of it, the point at which we stand, a place where few have stood in our nation's history.

And so of any passage in scripture for God to have given us tonight to drink in together, these words could hardly be better for us to hear, could they? I urge then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people, for kings and those who are in authority.

How our leaders need our prayers. How our nation needs our prayers. And Paul, at the right of this letter, and God, the sovereign author of it, would have us understand more than that, how our world needs our prayers.

He wants us to see tonight that these things are linked inextricably together. Maybe we wonder, how does praying for our new king, Charles III and Liz Truss and her government and Nicola Sturgeon and her government.

What does that have to do with our mission as a church? What does that have to do with God saving souls? What does it have to do with the kingdom of God and the glory of Christ?

[3 : 52] Well, everything, says Paul. It has everything to do with that. Do you believe that? Because what are these few verses really saying to us?

You know, if we wrote down on the back of our service sheet what we thought these few seven verses are about, I suspect we quickly have quite a long list. What is it about?

Just have a little skim through again if you have it open. Well, it could be about prayer, couldn't it? Verse one, petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings.

It could be about our relationship to power, verse two, kings and those in authority. It could be about how we should live as Christians, couldn't it?

Verse two, peaceful and quiet lives, godliness and holiness. It could be about evangelism, verse four. God our Savior who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

[4 : 51] What are these verses about? Where does Paul start? He says, first of all, but actually it's not as simple, is it, for us to put our finger on what he's saying.

Well, the key for us tonight, what to take away from here, is seeing that Paul's instruction mixes all those things together. It's about all those things, but, but, it's not as if he's putting them all into a bowl and mixing them together as if he were kind of baking a cake with many ingredients.

If you mix together prayer and godliness and evangelism, then you'll be a healthy church. Notice it's more like he's kind of carefully stringing these thoughts together like beads on a bracelet or links on a chain.

It's the way that Paul puts all these things together that tells us what he wants the church to be, first of all. And in short, it is this, that the gospel would have free reign in the world and that we would be free to freely live for and speak for Christ where we live.

It's about the freedom of the gospel and the freedom of the church to spread the gospel in the world. So to get into that, firstly, then, our longer point, our much longer point for this evening is this, pray for our leaders so that we would be free to live and speak for Christ.

[6 : 23] Pray for our leaders so that we would be free to live and speak for Christ. Now, if you were, imagine yourself writing a letter to a church leader to help them to know how to lead a church, is that where you would start?

Probably not. But let's remind ourselves where Paul's coming from here. Paul's put his co-worker Timothy in charge of the church in Ephesus. The church is in trouble.

We have found out there are wolves among the sheep, false shepherds, leading the sheep off the beaten track. And so Paul's written, Timothy, this letter. He says in chapter 3, so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

This is where Paul's coming from. The ship is dangerously out of kilter. It's rocking side to side. And Paul wants Timothy to know how to right the ship and set it back on course.

And so that letter we imagined writing to a church leader is exactly the letter that Paul is writing to Timothy. Chapter 1 has been his introduction. If you've not been here, if this is your first week, if you'd like to, you can catch up on our website on those sermons.

[7 : 44] And chapter 2, we're beginning the body of the letter. These are the beginning of his instructions. So what is Paul's first point? First of all, he says, and it is this, that God's love for the lost, his desire to save, demands witness, which flourishes in peace, which requires prayer.

Okay, that is the chain, the bracelet that he wants us to admire. He'll say it again, it's not straightforward. God's love for the lost and his desire to save demands our witness, which flourishes in peace, which requires our prayers.

And it's very, very simplest. If we were to just boil it right down to basics, what are we saying? We're saying this, that God's desire to save should bring us to our knees in prayer.

If you struggle to imagine yourself perhaps having a conversation with somebody who's not a Christian about Jesus, where do you begin? Well, Paul says, begin with praying.

Build up from the basics. Pray for all people. Pray that the Lord would give you an overflowing love for Christ, an opportunity for that love to overflow as you speak to somebody who doesn't as yet know him.

[9 : 05] Pray that he would open a door for the gospel in a conversation and that you would have the boldness to take that opportunity. Pray for the one or two people in your life who you think you could have that conversation with, that the Lord would give you the chance to do it and that they would respond.

He say that because that is where Paul begins, isn't it? God wants all people to be saved, verse 4, so pray, verse 1, for all people. Now, the language that he uses suggests that what he has in mind is corporate prayer.

Normally, what we'd read, isn't it, is simply pray or give thanks. Instead, it's more formal than that here. Petitions, prayers, intercessions, thanksgivings be made.

So these are perhaps prayers prayed by a gathered church like we are here on a Sunday in our services or on a Wednesday night at our prayer meetings. So he's saying, isn't he, if we have our finger on the pulse of God's heart as a church, if we understand that his desire is to save all kinds of people in the world that he has created, well, then we will pray as a church generously and widely and unreservedly for all kinds of people in his world to be saved by coming to know him.

Okay, we can take that home with us, can't we? We can take this home into our personal prayer lives. Please let us. But mainly, Paul is saying, as a church, do we have our finger on God's pulse?

[10 : 46] Does it show in the way that we pray? And it's interesting, isn't it? He puts this first of all. First of all. It suggests that maybe there's something going on in Ephesus which relates to this.

Maybe one of the bad fruits of the false teaching in Ephesus is a closed-mindedness perhaps as to who God might be interested in. Perhaps it implies the church had turned in on itself its own issues and interests rather than outwards to face and to reach a lost world.

Possibly that looked like a focus on Jewish Christians and their issues rather than the Gentile world which is just a way of saying everyone else. Paul has said, hasn't he, they hope that they will become teachers of the law.

But he contrasts himself with them in verse 7 by putting himself up as a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. There's something brewing in Ephesus, isn't there?

And it has to do with this. Have they understood God's desire to save all people? Now, that distinction, the Jewish issues and the Gentile world, helps us see that when Paul says all people, really he's talking here about all kinds of people rather than every single person.

[12 : 11] He's talking about kinds of people that are in the world, Jewish people or Gentile people. Not God's desire to save every single person. If that was God's will, then every single person would be saved.

And that is a mystery, isn't it? No, he's saying God has a heart to save people of every kind and from every nation. And so, he says, once we've got that clear again that God wants all kinds of people to be saved, well, we will begin to share God's heart by praying for every kind of person to know him.

And so, again, if you struggle to imagine yourself having a conversation with somebody who's not a Christian, about the Lord Jesus Christ, Paul would urge you to start by praying for the non-Christians in your life.

Whatever sphere they are in, in your work, in your studies, in your family, in your street, whoever they are, of whatever kind of person they are, or whoever God has brought across your path, pray for them, he says.

We don't even have to qualify that prayer, do we, with, if it is your will, verse four, because he tells us it is his will. God loves opening doors for the gospel in the lives of his servants.

[13 : 34] Personally, I've waited for years for some prayers to be answered, but I've never had to wait too long for this one to be answered. It's a dangerous prayer to pray because God loves to say yes to it.

He loves opening doors for the gospel. And so are you praying that prayer? That this very week that God would give you opportunity to speak to somebody about Christ who does not yet know him, and if you are not praying that prayer, well, why not?

Why not pray that prayer? We've just started turning Caleb's buggy seat around, I'm afraid this is going to get into some parenting jargon, okay?

Buggies have different settings, and do you know in the world of parenting and childcare what the setting is called when you turn the seat around so that the child faces forwards as you travel?

That setting is called world-facing. World-facing. And friends, that is how God, our Father, would have us travel through this world.

[14 : 44] He wants us world-facing, in a world-facing position. And one way, and a great way for us to stay world-facing as a church is how we pray when we are together.

It's as much about how we set the tone on the Sundays as about our personal prayer lives when we pray for all kinds of people that they might know the Lord. Lord. But then, it gets a little bit more complicated.

Okay, that's the simple version. If you take nothing else away, take that away. Okay? But now, Paul begins adding a few more beads to the string, doesn't he? Read with me again from verse 2.

He says, pray, verse 2, for kings and all those in authority that we might live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

That's a lot to think about, isn't it? And where do all those things fit into that picture of our desire for the world to know the Lord and to pray for that? Well, I've got a wee slide, I think, trying to map out that wee string.

[15 : 53] These are the elements and this is the order. Pray for authorities that we'd have peace to live in holiness, that we would please the Lord in our worship for he desires for all people to know him.

Now, we don't often put those things together or at least in that order. I think if we do put them together, we think of it a little bit more like this. I think we've got another slide.

Okay, so we maybe pray for our authorities for peace in our land and then new prayer, fresh page, we pray that we might be holy to please the Lord and that our lives would be a witness to the world.

But the link I think we often miss that Paul is putting back together for us is the link between peace and holiness. those two things link all those things together. He's saying pray for times of peace for the church and our land so that you can live godly lives without fear.

We want, don't we, to be able to worship and witness to Christ openly without having to decide whether to obey God or the laws of our land.

[17 : 10] We want, don't we, to live peaceful and quiet lives in godliness and holiness. But have we been praying for that? Brothers and sisters, have we been praying that in God's sovereign plan and his mercy that he would allow us to live in a time where living as a Christian is something that we can do under the law?

This is the missing link, isn't it, in much of our lives, in many of our prayers. We pray for our governments that we'd have peace in our land. We pray that our lives would be a clear witness to Christ, but have we prayed that our governments would allow our witness to thrive and be seen?

Or have we taken our freedom to worship and witness for granted? Now, I cannot say, but I suspect that the time that we are living in now is evidence that we have taken it for granted.

The last 150 years in this country have been one of the easiest times in history to be a Christian. The freedom and the privilege that the gospel and the church have been afforded under the law are almost unprecedented, but we are coming out of that time, and that freedom and privilege is ebbing away, and what have we done with it?

And what are we doing with it? I think we have a tendency, if anything, to complain about how hard it is to live as a Christian in our day and age, and it can be, but friends, now it is still legal to talk openly about our faith.

[18 : 52] Now it is still legal to talk about Christ in the workplace. Now it is still legal to open a Bible in a school. We have taken those things for granted.

Those things may not always be legal. You know, our brothers and sisters in some countries that Steve helped us to pray for earlier even, cry out, don't they, for the freedom that we have here to live openly as Christians without getting into trouble with the government.

You know, places like Qatar or Iran or Somalia or North Korea would love, wouldn't they, to be able to live peaceful and quiet lives in holiness and godliness as we do here.

but for them it is a painful choice between a peaceful and quiet life without Christ or a hard and difficult life of godliness and holiness.

And that could soon be our choice but it's not quite yet. And so friends, the challenge of this prayer and this urging of Paul's is this, what are we doing with our freedom?

[19 : 56] Do we cherish it? Do we plan to use the freedom that we have in the next 10 years to live as openly for Christ as we can and speak as freely of him as we can?

Or do we plan to simply live quiet and peaceful lives and work hard and rest easy and come to church?

One book I read this week reminds us this was not a prayer to live a quiet middle class life free from stress. I wonder have we sometimes confused those things a quiet life and a godly life?

Is that what Paul's saying? Work for a peaceful retirement? Christianity is not as convenient as that is it? We know that you know that I know that for a long time in this country peace and quiet and godliness and holiness and witness have coexisted.

but if we think that they must or always will we are wrong. We have been allowed to live distinctively Christian lives on the right side of the law for a long time but that window of opportunity is closing but but Paul says it doesn't have to close completely because what is he urging us to do in response verse 2 pray for kings and all those in authority literally in order that we may live peaceful quiet lives in godliness and holiness.

[21 : 29] Let's remind ourselves Paul wasn't writing this in a time when Christians were very free when he wrote this letter he was either on his way out of prison or going back into prison or in prison for sharing the gospel.

So the fact that he wants the church to pray that that would all change in his lifetime should put gunpowder in our prayers. These are not empty prayers they are prayers that God will use to shape the lives of our children and their children.

If we want for future generations in this country to be able to live freely for Christ then we will pray for our leaders. If we want for the people who are lost and don't know Christ in our world today to have the opportunity to know him and hear of him we will pray for our leaders.

To put it really simply Paul saying God wants all kinds of people to be saved and hear the gospel so pray for King Charles and pray for Liz Truss and pray for Nicola Sturgeon.

It's possible isn't it we will find it easier to pray for one of those people than the others but here's one way we can know whether our priorities are right. Can we pray for all of them in the interests of the gospel and of Christ?

[22 : 50] We don't think like that do we? We don't add that equation up in our minds but that is what Paul is saying pray for our king our governments our MPs our MSPs our counsellors so that we would have the freedom to live Christian lives so that we can point others to Christ because God our Saviour wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

So do you see the logic here? I'll say it again what I said at the beginning God's love for the lost and desire to save demands our witness which flourishes in peace which requires our prayers.

The one challenge of this to us today I think is that we live in such an individualistic age that it's easy for us to forget the place that authorities have in God's world that he gives kings and rulers and governments and that is part of life in his world and if we as a church are not praying for those who God has put over us well who do we think is praying for them?

These are the people who make our laws and set the tone in our country and so they have power don't they either to free up our witness or clamp down on it and so Paul is not asking us whether we agree with or like those who are in authority he is asking whether we share God's heart for a lost world because if we love him and we love those who do not as yet know him then we will pray for those in authority that they will let the church shine and us point people to him and so let me say this at the turn of a new age okay with a new king a new government a new prime minister let this be a new age in the church of dedication to praying for them let us friends pray for those who are in leadership over us let us resolve as a church not to let them go unprayed for by Christians in this land okay let me urge you with Paul as he does to put them in your prayer diaries or how about this okay this was a bit of a brain explosion

I had earlier okay don't know what you'll think of it but maybe maybe what about this for the next hundred days set a reminder in your phone at two minutes past two to pray first Timothy two two for kings and those who are in authority that we may live as God has called us do in short whatever helps you to pray this prayer and we as a church when we gather we'll pray this prayer regularly too because this is good says Paul and it pleases God our saviour and it pleases him when we pray for the gospel to have that free reign because through the gospel God in Christ has set us free this is our second and shorter point I'm sure you'll be pleased to know tonight since God in Christ has set us free this is the great motive for that prayer isn't it if you just look with me at verses five and six where he says there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all people there is only one God says Paul that's just day one kind of introduction to Christianity isn't it but what's he saying do we know if he is the one and only God well he is the God of everything the God of kings and beggars the God of church and state the God of all people and there is but one mediator only one who possibly can stand between who can lay a hand on God and a hand on us whether we are seated on thrones or in the dust whether we are dressed in rags or in riches there is but one way for us to come to God the man Christ Jesus and notice that Paul tells us how he can bring us to God because verse six he gave himself as a ransom for all people now how does this work imagine for a minute a hostage situation somebody has been taken captive a letter has been sent and somebody asks how much do they want okay what's the ransom that they are demanding the ransom is the price paid isn't it for the captive to be set free for the hostage to be sent back and so God gets that note now is he going to pay for us to be released we were held in slavery by sin and death and Paul is saying to set us free from that a price needed to be paid a ransom was set and God paid it verse six

[28 : 02] Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for all people he paid the ransom with his own life you think about who normally gets a ransom note surely the rich and the wealthy because people know that they will pay to get their loved ones back well who did God pay to set free and win back the rich and the wealthy know all kinds of people people of every tribe and language and people and nation from the highest to the lowest he gave himself as a ransom to set all sorts of people free and so tonight it does not matter who you are and it does not matter where you come from there is nothing that can disqualify you from being set free by Jesus from being rescued by him he gave himself as a ransom for every kind of person that there is gave himself to save people just like you just like you and so if you're not sure where you stand tonight know that there is a ransom from sin this is what God wants says Paul he wants to save all kinds of people that is why

Christ came anyone of any kind can come to him and be saved and surely that is why it pleases God when we pray as a church for the freedom to offer that gospel to the world that is why we want that peace isn't it so that everyone can hear that good news it's the freedom and the freeness of the offer of the gospel that is the motive for the freedom of the church we don't want to be free do we for our own comfort and security for our own benefit but for the benefit of the lost world that we live in so there is no one on earth that it would be wrong for you to share the gospel with it is good and pleases God when we do so God gives a wide open door and yet he would remind us wouldn't he that there is only one door and it is a narrow door we can all come to God says Paul but we can only come to God through Jesus one God and one mediator

I heard it put once like this that anyone can walk the path of eternal life with God but you can only get onto that path through one gate and that gate is not an inch bigger or an inch smaller than the man Christ Jesus anyone can enter the kingdom of God but only through him and that's not me saying that or the church saying that Jesus says that I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me he said and so friend if you have not done so and if you are not yet walking that path know that there is a gate and a way onto it and to God and know that it is Jesus Christ and walk through him tonight and take hold of him by faith and be saved that is what God wants that is what God wants there is nothing stopping you and friends if you do love Jesus well then pray that nothing would stop you ever holding out that offer and pray that nothing would ever stop our church from holding out that offer and pray that nothing would ever stop people in this nation and in our world hearing that offer pray for all people the kings and those in authority that the gospel would reign and be free let's pray for that together now let's pray gracious heavenly father how we thank you that in your great love and kindness and mercy that you gave your son the

Lord Jesus to be the ransom from our slavery to sin our father we each were destined for death and hell for the rightful punishment that we deserve for our sin but you gave your son that we might never be punished we thank you that he gave himself as the ransom and that the price has been paid and that we are set free in him and so our father we long for that for those whom we love we long for that for those here tonight who have not taken hold of that wonderful life that is in Christ father in light of that we pray as Paul urges us for our king Charles the third father how we pray as we have prayed that you would grant him the wisdom and integrity and humility that he so needs to lead and father more than that that these qualities would flow from a heart that is transformed by grace that he himself would personally know

Christ his Lord and Savior and walk with him father we pray for Liz Truss as she takes on the great responsibilities that lie before her father how we pray that under her government your church would be free and we would live freely for Christ father how we pray that you would thwart the plans of those who would make it hard for us to live for ye father we pray likewise for Nicola Sturgeon and her government and pray Lord that in Scotland that the gospel would be allowed to shine and that your church would continue to be able to hold out the gospel to a lost world father we pray this not for our own sake but for the sake of those who as yet do not know ye and we pray this in Jesus name amen