

**Becoming a Good News Messenger #2 – The Desire of God.****1 Tim. 2:1-4**

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When I was about 7 or 8 years old, I just about drowned. I went swimming with Greg and Nancy, my neighborhood friends. Nancy was a little older. Greg and I were the same age. We went to this community pool. I remember it was very busy in the pool. Lots of kids. I had taken some swimming lessons. But I could not yet fully swim. I remember being by the edge of the pool nearer the deeper end. So I couldn't touch the bottom and keep my head above water. By I wanted to try and see what it was like.

So I pushed away from the edge of the pool and began to tread water. At first it felt very cool to be swimming where the older kids swam. But my joy soon turned to horror. I began to tire from treading water. So I reached for the edge of the pool. But I had drifted out farther than I could reach. And I could not yet swim. So I began to panic. I treaded faster and tried to lunge for the side but it was still too far away. I began to sink deeper in the water after each lunge. So I couldn't call out because I was taking water into my mouth. This went on for what seem like an eternity. But it was 1 or maybe 2 minutes. I couldn't see my neighbors. I couldn't see the life guard. I was getting water in my eyes and then in my mouth.

Then suddenly my neighbor friends saw me. I thank the Lord for somehow directing their eyes onto me. They saw I was in trouble. They came rushing over and sat on the edge of the pool with one leg in the water. They both reached out to me and lay down. Then they pulled me in to safety. As soon as I got to the edge, I scrambled out of the water and lay at the edge of the pool. A lady noticed that I was in distress. She came over to help. She wondered if I wanted to leave. I said no I want to keep swimming but I need a life jacket. I remember going to the wall of the pool where there were life jackets. This lady and my two neighbor friends found me a life jacket. In those days you didn't have the clip on buckles. They just had strings that you had to tie together. So the lady helped tie the strings and I remember she had dark green nail polish on her finger nails. So I was kind of mesmerized by green finger nails.

But finally they were done and I had this life jacket on. I was very thankful to all of them. Then I went back in the water and began to float. And I could go in that same sport where I nearly drowned. But I felt safe and secure and was able to venture out even a little further with the security of that life jacket. And as you can tell, I have never forgotten that day or the efforts others made to rescue me.

There are a lot of people in our world who are on the verge of drowning. You know some of them. They're not drowning in water but they are drowning in their lives apart from God. They're drowning from their sin and the oppression they suffer from evil and the devil. They're flailing away trying to reach safety. They're trying to keep their heads above water. But they cannot rescue themselves. They need God's rescuing hand to pull them to safety. They sit beside you on the bus, in the office or in class. They play beside you on a team or work with you on a project. Some sit beside you. Some of them live with you or show up at family gatherings. They need to be rescued.

Does God care about them? You'll notice in my story that I never mentioned a life guard. It was so busy in the pool that day that the life guard never saw me or my need. Is God like that towards those we know who are drowning? Is He too busy with the big problems of the world that He might miss our loved one flailing away in the far corner of the pool?

That's what we're going to look at today; what does God feel towards those who are not saved? We continue our series on Becoming Good News Messengers and Living with this Mission in Mind. We talked about the good news two weeks ago from Isaiah 52. We learned it involves God's reign and return. It also involves God's rescuing work through His suffering servant Son. Last week we talked about a key action and attitude we must have towards lost people in our lives – Love. Our motivation as Good news messengers must come from our Love for God and Love for our neighbors. Today, we're going to discover another necessary action that we as Good News Messengers must do on behalf of those who are drowning. But first we will spend some time discovering God's heart for those who don't know Him.

This will come from a letter written by the Apostle Paul to his younger protégé Timothy. At the beginning of the letter we discover that Timothy had gone to the church at Ephesus. This once flourishing ancient Roman city also had a sizable Christian community. Timothy was sent there so he could "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." So it this church that had started to go off the rails. We think that some false teachers said you had to keep all the Jewish law if you became a Christian. It also seems they taught that salvation was only for people of Jewish descent.

So our passage today contains part of Paul's response to especially that latter issue – that salvation was only for certain people. Within this passage we will discover what God desires for those who are drowning all around us. We will learn why He desires what He desires. Then we will learn how we can be part of His work to fulfill this great desire. I pray

you will be encouraged today about God's desire for you and for drowning people all around us. So please find 1 Timothy 2:1-7. It's also found at the bottom of page 840 in the Bibles in front of you.

### **1 Timothy 2:1-7 (ESV)**

**2** 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 <sup>6</sup>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.

### **What does God desire? (2:4)**

Paul states it very clearly in verse 4. **God desires that all people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.**

What does it mean to be saved? It means to be rescued from slavery to sin and the unfiltered oppression of evil and the devil. It means to be ultimately saved from death and to be given a new resurrection body. It means to be forgiven for our sins and pronounced not guilty forever before God. This is part of the good news that we have to bring to the world.

What does it mean to come to a knowledge of the truth? It means to discover our need for salvation. It includes coming to understand that there is only one God and one mediator, the man Christ Jesus. When a person comes to this knowledge, they will hopefully cry out for this salvation that only comes through God. So just as I needed my friends to pull me to safety in the pool that day, people who are drowning spiritually need God to pull them to safety from a life apart from Him.

But before we ask our questions or raise objections to this, let us not miss God's desire. He desires *all people* to be saved. This emphasis on "all people" happens four times in this passage. Verse 1 – I urge that prayers be made *for all people*. Verse 2 – I urge prayer for kings and *all who are in high positions*. Verse 4 – God desires *all people* to be saved. Verse 5 – Christ Jesus gave himself as a ransom *for all*. This emphasis makes sense if the false teachers claimed that God only desired to save one particular race. Paul says that is not true. The Gospel is good news for all nations and all people.

This concern for all people is seen throughout this passage. In fact it shows up four times in this passage. We know not everyone is saved. Lots of people reject God up to and including their last breath. So we have to make sure that you know that no one thinks this verse means everyone is saved and comes to the knowledge of the truth. Verse 4 does not say "God ensures all people will be saved." That would be universalism which is a belief system that everyone

will be saved in the end no matter who you put your trust in. Paul is not saying that. He's talking about God's desire. What would God hope would happen? He desires that all would be saved.

Or we might immediately jump in with some qualifier or question about this verse with respect to election – not the federal election – but the sovereign election of God found in places like Ephesians 1 and Romans 9. There is this question and debate about what those passage mean. They talk about God choosing some for salvation. That is a debate and a serious question to sort out. But sometimes we overemphasize our questions and agendas to the point that we diminish the force of a verse in its context.

Paul is not addressing the question of election in this verse. Nor is he talking about universalism. He is likely responding to the teaching that God desires only some to be saved. No. God desires all people to be saved. There is a difference between having a desire and completely fulfilling that desire. I believe Paul reveals the heart of God here. He longs for all people to be saved. But the reality is His desire will only be partially fulfilled. Many will not be saved. They will turn away from God's outstretched hand and try to tread water and reach safety in their own efforts. The Bible teaches people are responsible for their own choices. So not everyone will be saved. But God desires that they are. There is still hope today for anyone you know who doesn't know Christ.

Think about the people in your life who are drowning spiritually. God desires that they will be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

**Question 2 - Why does God desire this? (2:5-6) Certainly, our of His love. There is only one way to be saved and God wants this knowledge to get out to all people.** Look at how each phrase emphasizes this starting in verse 5. "For there is one God." If there were many gods, there might be many ways to be saved. But since there is only one God, then people have to come to that one God. Then the second phrase of verse 5 – "And there is one mediator between God and men (or people), the man Jesus Christ." So this talks about the way people come to the one God. We need a mediator because God is holy and we are not. But notice there are not many mediators. There is one and only one mediator. He is the human Christ Jesus.

Then Paul shows how Christ Jesus served as a mediator. He did not just talk to God and the people in hopes of getting them to talk to one another. He gave his life as a ransom for all. Talking to each party would not be enough. He paid the ransom price to release us from the debt hanging over us. So God desires all people to be saved and come to a

knowledge of this truth. There is only one God and one mediator and one way to be forgiven. That was purchased by Jesus who gave His life as a ransom for our lives. If people don't get this knowledge, they will not come to the one God.

God desires this message to get out because it's the only way. God desires this because He loves and is by nature love and has a heart for all who need this salvation.

**How can we join God in fulfilling His desire for the unsaved people we know? Pray for all people.** Let's go back to verse 1. "First of all," or "above all else" I urge that prayers be made for all people. Paul instructs Timothy to place significant emphasis on praying for all people. He uses four different words to describe these prayers.

One is supplications or requests. These state the need. They admit the lack and ask God to attend to it. Two is prayers the general term for prayer or communication with God. Third is intercessions. This is the regular term for petition to a superior. It means to ask someone with power to act or intervene in someone else's situation to help them. Four is thanksgiving prayer. This involves expressing appreciation or gratitude to God.

So can you imagine what might happen if we prayed for the unsaved people in our lives with the intensity described in verse 1? Paul says this is a major priority or above all else we do for them or with them. Offer supplication or request to God on their behalf. "Lord God you know that my friend, coworker, classmate, family member, teammate or partner does not know Christ. They desperately need you. I see that your desire is for all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. So I lift this need before you."

Then we pray for them. We ask God to watch over them. We ask God to guide them. But we also intercede on their behalf. We pray to God, who has the power to overcome the hardest heart, to intervene in their lives. We ask Him to send someone to reach our unsaved loved ones and deliver the knowledge of the truth to them. We thank God that He cares for them. He created them and knows them better than we do. God loves to be asked. It's not because He wants to show off His power to boost His ego. He has chosen that we have the privilege of being involved in some small way of His overall rescuing work.

But are we praying? How much time and energy do we devote to intercede for people who are drowning and trying to live without the knowledge of the truth? Paul Miller, who leads "See Jesus" ministry and has authored the book "A praying Life", leads a global discipline mission. He talks a lot about the lack of prayer among pastors and church leaders. He claims that 85% of Christians in a typical church do not have much of a prayer life. So, there's people all around us who

are drowning and 85% of us do not have much of a prayer life? Last week we talked about the motive of love driving our desire to become good news messengers. Such love will also lead us to fervent prayer for those yet unsaved.

Pray for all people. Then in verse 2 Paul instructs Timothy to lead the people in prayer for kings and all who are in high positions. Then the Father says this will lead to Christians being able to live quiet and peaceful lives. It kind of goes against the grain of taking risks for Christ and joining the advance of the kingdom of God. But maybe what Paul is doing here is remind the church in Ephesus that they need to pray even for the last people they would think need prayer. The king was powerful. People in high positions had power, authority and wealth. Sometimes they were the ones who made life miserable for Christians. So it would be natural to exclude them from our prayers.

But Paul instructs that even for these we must pray. Then he does talk about the rationale for such prayer. It may lead to a peaceful and quiet life. When a king does well or people in high positions do well, it can mean peace and quiet for the rest of society. When that happens, we can focus more on God's priorities than just trying to survive. Unless those authorities command us to disobey God, we must pray both for their salvation and wisdom for them in their positions. I take the last phrase "godly and dignified in every way," to refer to the way we live under these authorities. When we live like that, there is a much greater possibility of positive relationships between Christians and those in authority. That might lead to opportunities to proclaim the good news to them.

Then comes verse 3. "This is good and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior." What is good? Does he mean living godly and dignified lives is good? Or living peaceful and quiet lives is good? Or does he mean that praying for kings and all those in authority is good? I agree with those who think "this" does not refer back to verse 2 but to verse 1. "This" is the matter of first importance. It is what must be done for all. "I urge that prayers be made for all people." So when we pray for all people especially for them to come to a knowledge of the truth, this is good and pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.

So it's clear what God wants us to do from this passage. But as I was struggling with this message especially on Thursday this past week, something was missing in my own heart. I was not very excited about this message. "God desires all people to be saved, so pray for all people." I was thinking that's a pretty airy abstract Christian statement. What is missing Tom? Why are you lacking in passion about this? Then I think God revealed it to me. I sometimes and maybe often lack the same desire that God has.

God desires all people to be saved. But sometimes I don't if I'm honest. Some people annoy me. They block my way by driving too slow. They rub me the wrong way by their attitude or political views or religious views. I can slide into my self-focused life with little concern for others. We do need to look after ourselves. But remember last week when we looked at what Jesus said – Love your neighbor as yourself? We naturally look out for ourselves. We need help and a heart change to look out for others. So I and we need to pray constantly that God's desire becomes our desire that all people be saved.

God wants all the people in your and my life who don't know Christ to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. So we need to join Him in this desire and actively pray for them with supplication, prayer, intercession and thanksgiving. This is the call on the life of good news messengers.

If you are already saved, cherish again this great gift. God sent someone into your life to deliver this good news to you. Now you live in the security of God's life jacket around you. Then pray for loved ones or friends who don't know God. See and share this part of God's heart with them. If you are not yet saved, today you have heard the good news and the knowledge of the truth. Will you respond to it? Will you receive it? If you want to receive Christ, I want to encourage you to come forward after our service is over. You can meet with Jenny who will pray with you. Or you can pray with the person who is beside you.

To close today, I want to invite you to pray with someone beside you or around you. Maybe gather with one or two other people. Then ask God to give you His desire for all people to be saved. Then lift up some of those in your life who desperately need Him.

After a few minutes, I will close our time in prayer.