

“Prayers of Intercession and Thanksgiving”—1 Timothy 2:1-4

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Prayers of Intercession and Thanksgiving”, is 1 Timothy 2:1-4 → *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. 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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Throughout the history of our nation there have been proclamations by the Continental Congress, governors of states, and presidents of the United States calling everyone across the country to observe a day of national thanksgiving. In fact, from 1863 to the present there has been an unbroken series of presidential proclamations for the observance of Thanksgiving Day.

Interestingly, proclamations of the first 200 years are much different than the proclamations of the past 40 years. For example, in the

president's proclamation on November 20, 2015 he said, "Thanksgiving offers an opportunity for us to express our gratitude for the gifts we have and to show our appreciation for all we hold dear." The focus is on a "spirit of togetherness and thanksgiving . . . whether around dinner tables, in soup kitchens, or at home cheering on our favorite sports teams . . . we are all united in appreciation of the bounty of our Nation."

He does make reference to George Washington's proclamation made on October 3, 1789 saying, "President George Washington proclaimed the first Thanksgiving in our country's nascence, calling on the citizens of our fledgling democracy to place their faith in 'the providence of Almighty God,' and to be thankful for what is bequeathed to us." The only mention of God in his proclamation is within a quote from George Washington. A read of George Washington's proclamation clearly reveals the focus of our thanksgiving to be "Almighty God" while the focus of the 2015 proclamation is clearly on togetherness.

Even the attitude and perspective of this thanksgiving proclamation flows differently. While the 2015 proclamation talked about how "the inherent selflessness and common goodness of the American people endures," George Washington saw it as a day to "unite in most humbly offering our prayers and supplications to the great Lord and Ruler of Nations and beseech him to pardon our national and other transgressions." The proclamations went from a spirit of humility leading

to joy to a spirit of sharing because we're so good. The Continental Congress proclamation on November 1, 1777 even recommended, "That servile Labor, and such Recreation, as, though at other Times innocent, may be unbecoming the Purpose of this Appointment, be omitted on so solemn an Occasion" (i.e. Thanksgiving Day).

In keeping with the many commands given in Scriptures to God's people concerning perseverance in prayer, the apostle Paul urges us in verse 1 of our text to make *supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings . . . for all people*. While "keeping people in our prayers" may be a foregone conclusion, especially in the midst of sickness, danger and tragedy, notice whom he specifically mentions in verse 2 of our text: *for kings and all who are in high positions*. He's instructing Christians to pray for their governing authorities. When was the last time you prayed for your political leaders? Even thanking God for them all? Maybe instead of criticism, the Kyrie is your best "go to" in the midst of civil and political actions which are disturbing to your sanctified heart with the prayer, "Lord, have mercy."

The concept of praying for our leaders so *that we may lead . . . peaceful and quiet* lives is not foreign to many people either. People may constantly be praying for them so that they may lead us in such a way that we can enjoy our freedoms in America, of which we are thankful and do not want to take for granted. However, this is not the purpose for

praying for your governing authorities according to our text. Rather than the enjoyment of freedoms within which one gets to indulge in sinful, selfish, boisterous living, the Christian's prayer for governing authorities flows from a different purpose.

The Scriptures teach that the primary function of our governing authorities is to maintain civil obedience and make sure justice is served **according to the inspired Word of God**, the Bible (cf. Romans 13:1-6). In fact, Romans 13:6 says, *the authorities are **ministers of God**, attending to this very thing. Ministers of God?* When's the last time you spoke about your political leaders as *ministers of God*? I'm not sure I would come to such a conclusion from my exposure to our political leaders in any way. Exactly. One will not come to such a conclusion because it can only be realized by a heart which humbly submits to the Lord Jesus Christ and His teaching. It's a spiritual discernment, not a human conclusion as 1 Corinthians 2:13 says: *We impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.*

The Christian's prayer for governing authorities flows from a desire in the midst of a *peaceful and quiet life* to live *godly and dignified in every way*. Such prayers of intercession and thanksgiving serve the desire to live faithful to God's laws so that such *dignified* living will be a witness to the world of a governing authority *far above all rule and*

authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come (cf. Ephesians 1:21).

By our words and deeds we give witness to Jesus. We want a peaceful environment within which we can freely share the Gospel of Jesus Christ, *Who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords* (cf. 1 Timothy 6:15)! Now there's a true Thanksgiving Day proclamation, one which we want to happen everyday!

Verses 3-4 state that *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*. Thus, as governing authorities fulfill their proper function according to God's Holy Word they also serve the Gospel of forgiveness of sins in the atoning work of Jesus alone. They are actually providing the open expression of God's love and grace in Jesus to sinners so the Holy Spirit can bring them to faith in Christ. The primary freedom for which Christians give thanks is that which Jesus brings—freedom from the power of the devil, sin and death itself. As Jesus stated in John 8 → *Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin . . . so if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed*. The freedom of sins forgiven through faith in Jesus is *the truth* which *will truly set you free* for eternity (cf. John 8:32,34,36).

At the same time, it is important to recognize that prayers of intercessions and thanksgiving are not dependent upon the governing

authorities functioning according to God's Word. Paul urged such prayers for governing authorities in his day, some of whom were striving to persecute and even kill Christians. Prayers of intercession and thanksgiving are not prayed on the basis of circumstances but rather on the basis of the Person & Work of the King of glory, Jesus. They are prayed on the basis of a citizenship which transcends the political leadership of this world. Philippians 3:20-21 says: *Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body, by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself.*

In view of the mercies of God and in gratitude for His grace poured out upon you in Christ Jesus, I urge you to write down the names of individuals on a piece of paper, including the names of your governing authorities, and lift up prayers of thanks for them. Then, in view of God's unchangeable will for all people, I urge you to lift up prayers of intercession for each of those individuals, not only for their physical well-being but that they would recognize their many transgressions and trust in the atoning work of Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and eternal life. After all, *this is good, and . . . pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, Who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth in Christ Jesus, Who gave Himself as a ransom **for all*** (cf. 1 Timothy 2:6). Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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