

OPERATION RESCUE
1 Tim. 2:3-6

Turn to 1 Tim. 2...

Faly (one of our former members, whom most of you know) has asked me to do some teaching out of 1 Timothy during our mission trip in Madagascar (leaving a week from Mon.), so I've been enjoying revisiting 1 Timothy. –

Like 1 Cor., it is also such a practical yet theological epistle – full of deep gospel truth with wide implications.

Stand, Read & Pray:

Read title...

We are going to focus on vv. 3-6, which is the incentive & motivation to the activities required in vv. 1-2 & v. 7. – Sandwiched in the middle of these great tasks God expects of us are these great encouragements.

v. 7 is all about Paul's apostolic duty, and by extension, about our Great Commission mandate: v. 7...

vv. 1-2, are about our duty to pray for the lost: v. 1...

v. 1b, on behalf of all men – Same phrase as used in vv. 4, 6 (an obvious theme in this passage). – I.e., 'All prayers of all types should be prayed for all people!'

+ What a contrast to the Jewish attitude toward Gentiles! – Paul is here telling the Ephesian church to STOP praying ONLY for themselves or their little 'clique'. – This was a selfish attitude which the Jewish false teachers (chp. 1) had been encouraging.

→Beloved, If WE won't pray for the lost and unreached, WHO will?! – It's *not God's job* to pray for them; He has enlisted US and given US the privilege of participating in His great salvation plan! –

It's *not the world's job* to pray for the lost – that's the last thing on their minds. – This task of praying for the lost has been entrusted to one group alone: the Christian Church.

→Do we believe that the lost are lost? – Do we believe they are on the broad road that leads to destruction? – Do we believe they are on the edge of a great cliff, sliding down toward the Abyss, in danger of slipping any moment into a Christless eternity of anguish in Hell?

AND do we believe that our prayers can make a difference? – Do we believe that a sovereign God works His eternal will through the fervent prayers of His people, that God actually changes things through prayer?! –

Do we believe that prayer connects our impotence to God's omnipotence, that prayer is the 'splicing of our limp wire with the thunderbolt of Heaven'? (Piper)

→ This is why we gather on Sun. PMs at end of the service for corporate prayer. – Tonight, praying for Greece...

BUT WHY is it that we often lack motivation to preach & pray for the lost? – Why do our hearts grow cold, our prayers go silent, and our feet become slow to spread the gospel?...

***THREE DIMENSIONS of God's great 'Operation Rescue', of His love for the world – to motivate our praying & witnessing:**

1. vv. 3-4, God the SAVIOUR for all

v. 3 – What higher motive or greater pleasure should motivate a Christian than this: knowing that my feeble prayers bring joy to heart of God!

NB, the language Paul uses here would've esp. perked Jewish ears. – B/c this phrase here in v. 3 was very reminiscent of the LXX language in Deut. re: acceptable sacrifices. – God wanted His people to only offer up "what is pleasing and good in the LORD's sight" (Deut. 6:18; 1:25,28; 13:19; 21:9). –

And now, as God's New Covt. people, the sacrifices we bring Him are our prayers (contra. the legalism & externalism of the false teachers, chp. 1)....

God loves all true prayer – but esp evangelistic prayers for the lost – whether for lost rulers & authorities (v. 2), or for any other lost people.

WHY do such prayers bring a smile to Heaven's throne?

B/c, v. 3c, God is by nature a "SAVIOUR". – He is a delivering, rescuing God who loves to salvage ruined lives and restore broken people! –

He is a Father who chases down His prodigals; He is a God who "seeks and saves that which was lost".

v. 4 – This is what it means for God to be "Saviour" (v. 3c). – This was implied back in 1:15...! – And look ahead to 4:10...

In Titus 2:11, Paul declares, "The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all men/people!" – I.e., God's grace in Jesus offers *Emergency Rescue Service* to any and every sinner who calls!

On and on we could go with Scripture after Scripture showing God's universal heart for humanity. – We reject any form of hyper-Calvinism that presents a God who only loves the elect or only offers salvation to those predestined. –

"For God so loved the WORLD," the entire world of lost humanity.

Matt. 5, Jesus taught that we are to love our enemies b/c God loves HIS enemies, "His sun rises on the evil and the good, He sends rain on the just and the unjust".

Mark 10, we saw that Jesus looked on the rich young ruler and "loved him," though we have no proof that he was elect or ever came to faith.

Ezek. 33:11 tells us that God "takes no delight in the death of the wicked". – The Son of God wept tears of compassion over rebellious Jerusalem, yearning to gather them the under His wings (Lk. 19:41-44). –

God is indiscriminate in His universal offer of divine mercy to ALL who will repent & believe the gospel.

God ALSO desires for all to be saved b/c He loves His own glory and hates sin and anything that violates His glory. – God's heart breaks over those who refuse to worship Him and who will spend eternity rebelling against Him.

v. 4b – To be saved = to stop believing Satan's lies of self-salvation and to start believing God's absolute TRUTH. – To be saved is not just an emotional or experiential event. – True salvation must necessarily also have an intellectual, cognitive aspect: v. 4b...

I.e., Conversion = coming to the 'full intellectual apprehension' of God's authoritative, saving revelation in Christ. – I.e., understanding and embracing the Gospel message now contained in Scripture, which is the embodiment of Truth.

Repeat point #1, "God as SAVIOUR for all"...

+ John Stott describes what happens when Christians lose sight of God as Saviour for all:

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)... But that was all. The intercession can hardly have lasted 30 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.

+ F.B. Meyer tells the story of attending a conference and having the great A.B. Simpson (founder of the Christian & Missionary Alliance) as his roommate. –

One morning, Meyer awoke and found Simpson weeping in prayer while he clutched a globe of the world. – Oh that we would love the world more like that, more as God Himself does.

2. v. 5, Christ the MEDIATOR for all

Speaking of vv. 5-6, J.I. Packer says it isn't too much to describe these verses as "the key, not merely to the NT, but to the whole Bible, for they crystallize into a phrase the sum and substance of its message."

v. 5a – Here is the theological basis for Paul's claim in v. 4....

We can be sure that God wants to save "all men" b/c there is surely *no other god* who will save them! – If people *need* saving, and they do!, and if people *want* saving, and they should!, then there is only one Saviour and one Truth that they must look to: the one true God of the universe! (cf. Isa. 43:10-13; 44:6; chp. 45; 46:9, etc.)

+ Missionaries speak of the great *relief* that pagan tribes express when they learn for the first time that there is only one God, NOT dozens of gods, that they must fear and appease!

Paul pulls here from Deut. 6, the famous Jewish Shema, their most fundamental conviction: *Shema (hear!), Israel, Adonai elohenu, Adonai echad.* – "Hear, O Israel, the LORD our God, the LORD is one." –

In these words, Israel confessed the very heart of their faith: monotheism. – B/c "the LORD is one", the singular and only true God, they denied that any other gods existed. – All the deities of their Canaanite neighbours were false & imaginary, nothing but dead idols, the creation of men's hands.

But Paul is now telling these false teachers at Ephesus: 'OK, you want to restrict salvation for only those who are Jewish, saying that God is not accessible to Gentiles? Then guess what: you are contradicting your own favourite doctrine of monotheism!' – Ouch!...

As Paul told the Romans in Rom. 3:29-30, "Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too, since there is only one God, who will justify the uncircumcised by faith and the circumcised through that same faith."

I.e., if there is only one true God for all people, then there must be universal access, by faith alone in Christ alone!

And here in 1 Tim. 2, what is that ONE way to God?...

v. 5b – Not only is there but ONE God, He has only appointed ONE Mediator who gives us access to Him. – This is where the other two great monotheistic religions, Judaism & Islam, will part ways with us:

This God who has a universal, inclusive heart for saving all humanity requires that mankind approach Him through a very exclusive, particular means: one mediator, the man, Christ Jesus. –

And just as the "one God" is not a God of restricted access for Jews only, so His "one mediator" is not for the Jews only (The better we understand this, the better we will pray for the lost.)

We live today in an age of immediate access, of 'instant availability' – to websites, bank accounts, cell phones, e-mails, shopping, etc. – It can all be done with the click of a mouse, a button (or beam) on a cell phone, or a swipe of the credit card.

So people expect it to be the same way with God. – 'Just 'log on', hit the space bar, and chat with God. Whichever faith works for you is fine, as long as you're sincere. You can get with God however you'd like.'

But then along comes biblical Christianity to stop us dead in our tracks. – 'No,' we are told, 'you cannot just come to God on our own terms. In fact, NO ONE is allowed direct access to God at all. Because of our sin, we dare not approach God by ourselves.'

+ At Mt. Sinai in Exod. 20, right after God gave the Ten Commandments, how did His people respond? – Here's what we read:

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

They saw their great sinfulness in light of God's great holiness. – And they were not misguided; they were dead right.

It is will only prove disastrous for any sinner to directly approach God's unshielded holiness.

This was why God raised up Moses to be the mediator between God and His people. – And this was why God promised that, after Moses, He would "raise up for them a prophet like Moses "from among their brothers" (Deut. 18). –

Indeed, the rest of the OT shows how God raised up prophets, priests, and kings to stand between the people and God. – God could only be approached on HIS terms, through HIS appointed mediator; otherwise, His people would be struck dead, as demonstrated through the tragic (& sudden) deaths of men like Nadab & Abihu & Uzzah.

~ R.C. Sproul says that life's greatest question should not be why there is suffering in the world. – That is a question that begins with man. – But if we begin with God, if we realise the holiness of God in contrast to the sinfulness of man, then we begin to see that life's greatest dilemma is not human suffering; the far greater mystery is why God has let us live. –

Why does God tolerate sinful man? – Why are we still alive & breathing? – Not why do we suffer, but why is God so merciful?...

The book of Job also shows us one man's desperate cry for a mediator: Job 9:32ff, *[God] is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us [an umpire, daysmen], to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more.*

Have you truly put yourself in Job's place?!...

WHO, WHO is it that can be our advocate, who can extend a *mighty* hand toward a holy God and a *merciful* hand toward sinners like us?...

+ Haven't you ever been at odds with someone, embroiled in terrible, ongoing conflict, with all the stress/tension and complications it brings with it? – Oh, if only you could find the perfect middle-man, a go-between – someone who could look objectively at the situation, who understands both sides of the conflict, and who can reconcile the two parties and bring peace (at last)?!...

Never has there been a more bitter, longstanding, seemingly impossible conflict than the one between God & man (a perfectly holy God and utterly sinful humanity)! –

From Gen. 3, the cry goes out, 'Adam, where are you?...' God longs to walk with man again in the cool of the day, as it had been in the Garden; God longs for us to turn from our idols and rediscover Him! –

Man longs for satisfaction and meaning that can only be found in his Maker. – But God and man are forever at odds....

Moses never succeeded in reconciling man to God. – Israel kept rebelling, kept God at arms length, chased after harlots instead... Neither Moses nor any other prophets nor the best priests nor the noblest kings,

NONE of them ever succeed in restoring man to God. – NO ONE could successfully mediate between God and man UNTIL, until:

"...when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem...!" – The one that prophets had foretold, that the sages for centuries had longed for. –

The one who would have to be fully human, the 'seed of the woman' to crush the serpent's head, of the royal line of David, born of a virgin. – But also the One who would have to be fully God, "Immanuel, God with us, Mighty God, everlasting Father".

→At last, the MEDIATOR came: v. 5...! – Christ is the only one perfectly qualified for this position; Heaven's officially appointed, authorised representative for both God and us. –

Fully God, and thus able to speak on God's behalf, and able to offer a sacrifice for sin that would be of infinite value, something no mere human could ever do. –

YET also *fully man*, not a mere phantom or an angel or a theophany; a flesh-and-blood, 100% human, and therefore able to represent estranged and fallen humanity, to suffer and die for sinners, in our place, as our substitute. –

~ Anselm, 'Our debt of sin was so great that, though man alone owed it, God alone could pay it.'

~ R.C. Sproul, “The glory of the gospel is this: the One from whom we need to be saved is the One who has saved us.”

→Contra. all the other mediators that people seek today: sangomas; ancestors; good works; churches; spiritual leaders, gurus, politicians, etc.!...

+ Typical view of worship leaders & ‘praise & worship’ in churches – to ‘lead you into God’s presence’?? – Only Christ can do that! – Repeat: v. 5...

The book of Hebrews relishes this role of Jesus as our Mediator. – The writer rejoices in how Jesus is now a “better mediator” of a “better covenant” based on “better sacrifices” and a “better priesthood” and “better promises” that will last forever! –

And we have come, no longer to Mt. Sinai, with all its fire and darkness and fear. –

But, through Christ, “you have come to Mt. Zion,” God’s heavenly city, full of grace and forgiveness and cleansing!

*Let us love and sing and wonder,
Let us praise the Saviour’s name!
He has hushed the law’s loud thunder,
He has quenched Mt. Sinai’s flame.
He has washed us with His blood;
He has brought us nigh to God. (J. Newton)*

Now, we’ve heard ALL this good news, but we still haven’t unpacked HOW it is that Christ finally achieves what no other mediators could ever achieve? – HOW does Christ clean up dirty sinners and make them fit for the King’s courts?

NB, Christ’s method of mediation is unlike any other arbitration that has ever occurred. – He does not reunite the two warring parties by mere dialogue or mutual compromise. – NO out-of-court settlements will bring peace either. –

Christ did not just facilitate or advise or empower. – The only way for Christ to succeed in His once-for-all mediation was to give HIMSELF!

As Paul often declares, it is Christ who “loved me and gave Himself up for me” (Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2). –

As 1 Pet. 3:18 puts it, “For Christ died for sins once and for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God!”

3. v. 6, Christ the RANSOM for all

+ She was what psychologists call a ‘cutter’. – One pastor describes meeting this girl for the first time when her Mom brought her in for counselling. – She had been in the emergency room 4x that year already. – 3x she had cut herself so deeply that stitches were required. – Once she had taken a bottle of pills, survived, and then was

put in a psychiatric ward for teens. – Now back at home, she had again tried cutting herself.

She sat in front of the pastor wearing her oversized turtle neck with extra long sleeves, to try and hide her scars. – She said that cutting relieved tension somehow. – She said that cleaning up from the bloody wounds distracted her from the other problems. – She then lifted up her sleeves and showed him the scars.

The pastor was heartbroken and silent at first. – But then he realised what a profound gospel opportunity this was. – He agreed with her that it does take blood to solve problems. – Indeed, cutting & injury, in fact even death, is required to take away our sin. – But only Christ's blood and Christ's atoning death on the cross would suffice.

God's Spirit began to soften this young woman's heart and show her the true condition of her heart and her guilt before a holy God. – That day she broke, and bowed the knee to Christ and cried out to Him to save her through His blood, not her own. (From C.J. Mahaney, *Living the Cross-Centred Life*)

She sang with a new zeal, "What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus. O precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus."

v. 6a – Voluntary self-sacrifice was the only way for God and man to be reconciled. – We as sinners had to have a God-man representative who would also become our *substitute*, the atoning sacrifice for our sins. –

In these words we hear the echo of Christ's words in Mk. 10:45, "For the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

~ Stott, "Divine love triumphed over divine wrath by divine self-sacrifice."

WHY was a ransom needed?

Aren't we 'free' men and women already, born inherently good, as society tells us? – Not quite:

Rom. 3, 6-8, 'We are all under sin – slaves to sin and unrighteousness, violators of God's holy law; captives to "the law of sin & death'.

Gal. 3, "...the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin..."

Eph. 2, from birth, we are 'dead in our trespasses and sins, following the ways of this world, led on a leash by the ruler of the kingdom of the air...gratifying the cravings of the flesh, following its desires and thoughts...by nature, objects of God's wrath.'

Heb. 2, we were 'held in slavery by the fear of death'....

+ We've all heard the stories of kidnapers who hold a hostage for ransom: the pictures of hostages on TV; their loved ones back at home, waiting in agony; the outrageous demands from the captors; the failed attempts at negotiation, etc. –

But when we consider our lost condition before conversion: NEVER has there been a more desperate hostage, held by more vicious kidnapers, demanding a more costly ransom!

~ G. Thomas: *Men may boast of their liberty but it is a liberty within chains, and they can only do what their master sin tells them. "Don't go to church! Don't read the Bible! Don't pray! Don't think of your soul! Don't consider death! Dismiss Christ from your mind! Never ask what must I do to be saved!"*

All men obey sin, their master. To purchase their freedom a ransom must be paid. What a price that must be, if it is for a company of people more than any man can number, as multitudinous as the grains of sand on the seashore.

YET that is the very price God has paid, at the cost of His own dear Son! - "Christ gave Himself" as the only sufficient payment for our release from captivity. –

FOR WHOM is Christ a ransom?

v. 6b – "all men," as used already in vv. 1, 4, and we would expect this phrase to have the same meaning here = i.e. for all humanity. – The same God who commands us to pray for everyone (v. 1), b/c He wants everyone to be saved (v. 4), is the God who has provided a ransom payment for everyone (v. 5).

NOT that Hell has frozen over and everyone will go to heaven and no one will ever face God's wrath because Jesus took God's punishment for everyone. – Clearly the Bible does not teach universalism. – Otherwise, why pray (vv. 1-2) and why preach (v. 7) to the lost?!...

WHAT THEN does v. 6 mean, "a ransom for all men"?

Christ's "ransom" is sufficient for the world and offered to the world, to any sinner who will ever believe! – No sinner will ever be turned away from the fountain of Christ's cleansing blood!

~ One preacher explains: *To whom can this ransom be offered? To every single person in the world. I can go to anyone and say to them, "I have good news for you. I have a ransom for your sin. I have a Saviour for you. I have a Shepherd who will watch over you and take you to the eternal pastures around the throne of God and the rivers of the waters of life.*

This is all for you - a Redeemer, a Teacher, a King, a Husband, a Friend. You may know him now as your God and Lord. He is for you and for all men to receive, and as many as receive him he will give the right to be called the sons of God.

v. 6b – We all love to hear a moving testimony of God's work in someone's life. – But NO other testimony compares to this one:

the testimony of Calvary itself and the suffering Saviour that bled there in our place!

In God's perfect timing, "in the fullness of time" (Gal. 4), "at the right time, while we were still helpless, Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5). – God's ancient program of redemption came to its climax at Golgotha.

NB, WHAT did this "testimony" of Christ's "ransom for all men" mean for Timothy & the Ephesian church? – It meant that God's season of mercy toward ALL MEN had arrived. – So they should not fail to pray for "everyone", irrespective of ethnicity.

→Paul is saying that to NOT pray for "all men" is to treat the death of Christ with contempt. – To not pray as inclusively as God wants us to pray is to slight the cross and to run counter to God's own purposes! – To become prejudiced (or discriminate) in our prayers is to distort the gospel!

~ Listen to the early church father, Chrysostom: "Was Christ then a ransom for the Heathen? Undoubtedly Christ died even for the Heathen; and you cannot bear to pray for them?"

CONCL. – Repeat three points...

→For the saved: If this won't motivate us, nothing will! – What could fire up our praying & witnessing more than this?!...

→For the lost: Do you see your need? – HOW will you respond to such a Saviour, such a Mediator, such a Ransom? – There is no other hope for you. – Christ alone can meet your greatest need. – 'Why will you die? Why will you die? Why stay alienated from God when there is a Mediator?'...

PRAY