

GODLY LIVING FOR A GRACIOUS GOD

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Tomorrow I will conduct the funeral of our oldest member, Cola Mae Allred, the mother of Jack Dorsey. Cola Mae turned 98 just a few weeks ago, and she lived a full and happy life. She was saved on the same day as Jack and also her husband in 1962. And in the very same revival her brother and his wife were saved. But how times have changed in the last 98 years! Today the population in America is over 300 million; in 1914 it was around 100 million. Today it cost you 45¢ to mail a first class letter, in 1914 it cost 2¢. The federal budget this year is 3.7 trillion dollars. In 1914 the government spent about \$750,000,000. And when you crunch the numbers you see that in 1914 it took our government a whole year to spend what we're now spending in less than two days. Today the federal minimum wage is \$7.25/hr. That's not much, but about 1930 Cola Mae went to work in a cotton mill for 10¢ an hour.

But though times have certainly changed in 98 years, there's one thing that has not changed about time. It is swiftly, relentlessly passing by each one of us almost faster than we can blink an eye. I hear Chuck Glover and J.D. Beck and Frank Burns tell stories about some of the crazy stuff they did as teenagers and they talk like it was yesterday. And the good old days, if they were good, seems like yesterday to all of us. But here's the point. Beloved, almost as quick as you can say "eternity" you will be there. And the moment before you step over that threshold, the only thing that will matter is how you stand with Jesus Christ. And if you are not certain about it, you won't be ready to go. I do not know how Queen Elizabeth I stood with Jesus, but the last words that she spoke before she stepped over the death's threshold were, "All my possessions for a moment of time".

If you are lost without Jesus as you board the train to eternity you'll feel just like the Queen. Whatever fame and fortune that you've accumulated on this earth will not matter one iota to you. For Jesus said, "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26). But even if you are a child of God, what was valuable to you in this world will be of absolutely no value to you anymore. The only thing that will matter is whether or not you will hear Jesus say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. (Matthew 25:21). This is why that G. Campbell Morgan wrote years ago, "Let the year be given to God in its every moment! The year is made up of minutes: let these be watched as having been dedicated to God! It is the in the sanctification of the small that hallowing of the large is secure". Beloved, every minute that we live is precious and is to be lived to the fullest for the glory of God!

It is for this reason that our study in the next several weeks is so crucial. We are studying from the book of 1 Timothy, which is a study of how to do church. How God intends for the body of Christ to carry on His work in this world. And the reason that this is so important to each one of us is that not one of us can succeed in our quest to live victoriously for Christ without each other. You and I need each other for two reasons. We need each other for encouragement in our own lives, for we all get down from time to time and need someone to take us by the hand and lift us up. And we need each other to encourage one another as we seek to do our part in the work that God has called His church to do. And we don't have one minute to lose. So today we are going to continue to see how God wants us to join together as His body and bring in His Kingdom.

Turn in your Bibles, please, to 1 Timothy 2:1-7. Last week we studied about the three overarching tasks of the church. We are to **exalt God's Word**. We are to boldly teach and preach the Word of God as the solution to all of the ills of mankind. And then we are to **exclaim God's grace**. We are to proclaim the abundant, free grace of God that saves the sinner and that restores the saint. And finally we learned that we are to **encounter God's enemies**. Paul said in 1:18 that as Christians we are to wage the good warfare, and that is because we are at war with a deadly enemy, Satan and all of the demons of hell. And we are to march out into combat with the life-changing gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and capture souls for Him that are perishing and dying. And beginning in chapter 2 we begin to see God's battle plan for waging this warfare.

Look at verse 1 again. Paul says that first of all supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for all men. Beloved, nothing is more critical to the work of the Lord than to begin with prayer. We've said this over and over, but this is exactly the reason that most of us find so little time to pray. Because the devil knows that the power of heaven is unleashed when God's people pray, and he hurls every temptation in the book at us to keep us from praying. As someone said years ago, "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest Christian on his knees".

But have you ever wondered just why God places such a high premium on prayer? After all, could God not save the lost without our prayers? Could God not heal our sicknesses, could he not rescue us from financial disaster, could He not mend our broken homes and our broken hearts? Teenagers, could He not send you the right husband or wife without your prayers? Most certainly He could. But if God did all of these things without prayer it would be the worst thing in the world for us. For still living in our corrupt human flesh, our hearts would be filled with pride and we would seek to rob God of all the glory that only He deserves. We would be strutting around just like Lucifer before his fall from heaven saying, "Look at my strength and

my wisdom that caused me to overcome my troubles”. Or, “Look at my diligence and my charisma that has caused God’s work to prosper through me”. And we would be setting ourselves up for a great fall. For God says, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18)

Beloved, hear the word of the Lord! Jesus said, without Me you can do NOTHING (John 15:5). Zero. But He also said, “With God all things are possible to him who believes” (Mark 9:23). And the moment we get ahold of truth of the priority of prayer, and start getting ahold of God in prayer, we will start seeing God do things we’ve never seen before. And beloved, He is longing for us to prove Him in this matter. Jesus said, “Ask and you shall receive” (Matthew 7:7). And He goes on to say in the same passage, “If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to our children, how much more will our Father Who is in Heaven give good things to those who ask Him!” (Matthew 7:11). And God says in James 4:2, “You have not because you ask not”. And beloved, that’s why we are asking all of you who will to pray ten minutes each day for revival. That’s why we are having a special men’s and women’s prayer meeting for revival on March 28th as you’ve read in your bulletin. That’s why a few of our men meet every Sunday morning at 9:20 in our prayer room on the lower floor of this building to pray, and any of you men are invited. This is why someone is in the prayer room right now praying for this service. Because we know that without the anointing of God through prayer, all of our effort is in vain.

It must have been in about 1987 that I was relaxing in the living room of our apartment in Berlin, NH when I looked up to a really funny sight. Anna Katherine was probably not yet two years old, but there she came from the hallway, waddling toward me, clutching in front of her with all of her might a two liter soft drink bottle. It was almost as big as she was. She didn’t say a word, but I knew what she wanted. She wanted daddy to pour her some Coke. And you know what happened, don’t you? She brought a big request to the one who could give her an answer, and she got what she wanted! Oh, may we bring big requests to our great God!

But I want us to notice another essential element to God’s battle plan for the church. Not only must we begin with prayer, but we must follow through with a holy life. Look again at verse 2. We know what the word “godliness” means. It means that we reflect the life of God. It means that when people look at us they get an idea of what God is like. Paul says in Ephesians 5:1, “Be imitators of God, as dear children”. Now, that’s a tall order for the believer, but it is not an option. The word “imitate” is an imperative verb. It is a command. And that is what the Thessalonians did. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 1:6 that they were followers of him and the Lord, and “followers” is same Greek word as imitator. And to further show you how

important this is to God, when you continue to read in 1 Timothy you'll find the word "godliness" over and over, a total of nine more times.

Not that long ago I clipped a short poem out of one of our devotional books that reads like this: "Help me to walk so close to Thee that those who know me best can see, I live as godly as I pray, and Christ is real from day to day". Beloved, all of us are godly in our prayer closet. But the rubber meets the road when we leave the closet and step out into our homes with our families, where there Jesus says, "Imitate Me". Imitate My righteousness, love, patience, and forgiveness with all of your family. I heard a statement on one of our Christian radio stations this week that every married couple in America needs to hear, Christian or not. And the statement was this, "Every good marriage is made up of two people who are good forgivers". I couldn't agree more. And every good home is made up of moms and dads and brothers and sisters who are good forgivers, and who are thoughtful and helpful and kind – and as Paul says in verse 2, who live in all godliness.

But our godliness must not stop in our homes. We must imitate Christ when we leave our homes and go to work and go to school. Beloved, I do hope that every one of you who are registered to vote will exercise your privilege and responsibility to vote this Tuesday. We need to do all that we can do in the political arena to help restore our country to the godly heritage given to us by our founding fathers. We need to vote only for candidates that stand for the moral values of God as we find them in God's Word, who believe that marriage is a holy union between a man and a woman only, and who will assure us they will never vote cast a positive vote for abortion, and who we know will never support legalized gambling. But beloved, the hope for America is not in politics! Our only hope is in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. And the only way Jesus will change America is when Jesus begins to live His life in the midst of those who need to know Him, where they can see Jesus and hear Him and experience His godliness and His love.

But when will that happen? It will certainly happen at His Second Coming, when every eye shall see Him, and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him (Revelation 1:7). But it could also happen today if those of us who know Him would imitate Him everywhere we go in all that we do and say. Perhaps the greatest example of this in Scripture is found in Acts 4. The Pharisees had called Peter and John in on the carpet for healing a lame man and for preaching Christ afterward, where 2000 men were saved. And they asked Peter and John, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" And Peter responded to them beginning in verse 8. Listen to what he said "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel, ⁹If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; ¹⁰Be it known

unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole. ¹¹This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. ¹²Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Now notice what Luke writes in verse 13. These cold, hard-hearted Pharisees, these Christ-haters, had to admit that He was indeed alive, because of the conduct of His disciples. They knew that the only way they could have such boldness was to have been with Jesus. Beloved, may I say to you that 2000 years later it is still this way. An unbelieving world will still marvel and know that God is real because of the conduct of God’s spirit-filled children. Listen to Daniel 12:3; “And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever”.

But we must not miss the reason for the boldness of Peter and John, the reason that they shone as the brightest stars against the blackness of the midnight sky. It was because they had been with Jesus! Beloved, that’s where your strength for living comes from. It doesn’t come from watching the talk shows and getting the advice of self-proclaimed religious gurus and pop psychologists. Your strength and my strength comes as you receive it from the Lord Jesus Christ, Who said, “If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink” (John. 7:37), and Who said, “He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). Beloved, it is not hard, it is not rocket science. To be like Jesus, we must spend time with Jesus.

Perhaps none of you knew Mark Keating. Mark grew up on a farm outside of Reform and graduated from Pickens County High School three years after Janice. He was just a country kid, but a smart kid, and wound up being the valedictorian of his class. But Mark was born with no silver spoon in his mouth; he just did the best with what God gave him. And Mark did well. He became a doctor, and for 26 years had a family practice in Jasper until he died just a few weeks ago at the age of 58. I asked Janice about Mark as I was looking up his obituary in the Tuscaloosa News and she said, “He was always a nice, quiet person”. And then I found his obit. and read almost the same thing. Listen to part of it: “His calm and humble demeanor endeared him to both his staff and his patients. His favorite phrase, “Here to serve”, beautifully describes his daily walk in both his professional and personal life”. What a testimony! Mark was an active Methodist, and everyone around was impacted by his life of humility and service, in his church, in his practice, and in his community. And God would have you to make such an impact, just like Mark Keating, and Peter and John.

So we have seen that the first priority for the church's waging the good warfare is prayer, and it is followed closely by living a godly life. And Paul sums up this strategy in verse 8. Look at with me, please. Paul says, "Pray, and pray with holy hands lifted up", that is, pray from a life of godliness.

But now I want us to see the bottom line for our warfare. The grand purpose of it all; look again at verses 3-4. Beloved, the end result of all we do as a church should be the salvation of sinners, to bring those who are in darkness just like we once were to the only true Light and only giver of eternal life, our Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to what John MacArthur says concerning this:

"That Paul begins his teachings on church order with this topic sheds light on the primary focus for the church. If the primary aim of the church were fellowship, knowledge of the Word, or the holiness of the saints, all those goals could perfectly be accomplished by taking us to heaven. The central function of the church on earth is to reach the lost".

Beloved, I do pray that we all believe that. And I do pray that we believe that it is our responsibility to reach all the lost. Do you know what most believers tend to do? Most Christians in every church? We tend to target the lost that are just like us. We want to win people to Jesus and we want our church to grow, but we want to win folks just like us. Because we are most comfortable around people who are just like us. But what did Jesus say in verse 4? "Who desires all men to be saved."

So what does this mean? It means we will do whatever it takes to win to Christ every single sinner in Fosters and Ralph that we can, like we will be doing in our revival, and the Horse Whisperer outreach in May, and our VBS, and our children's camp. And it means we will be willing to get out of our comfort zones to do it. It means that we will seek to win the poor man to Jesus just as quickly as the rich man, even though we know that he may never be a big tither. It means we will seek to win the African-American and the Hispanic man as quickly as the white man. We will seek to win them to Christ and if they are saved we will welcome them into our church if they choose to come. But we will not stop with seeking sinners in Fosters and Ralph. We will seek to win them in Vermont in July, and we will seek to win them to the uttermost parts of the earth in the days ahead. For God desires that all men be saved; and we will go wherever we can to win them.

C.T. Studd was a missionary in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, serving in China, India, and Africa. Listen to his words and catch his heartbeat concerning winning the lost to Jesus.

Some want to live within the sound
Of church or chapel bell.
I want to run a rescue shop
Within a yard of hell.

But I want you to notice something very critical that we must remember as we go to a world without Jesus. Notice what Paul says that they must do in order to be saved in verse 4 “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth”. They must understand the truth of the gospel. They must understand that there is only one God, not many, and that there is only one way to Him, through Jesus Christ, His Son. Verse 5 – “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus...”

Beloved, please hear me! It is scary, some of the things I read about the beliefs of those who claim to be Christians. If the surveys are right many are now saying that Jesus Christ is not the only way to heaven. That He is a good way, but not the only way. Don't believe it for a minute! If there is another way to Heaven other than faith in the death of Jesus Christ as payment for our sins then God is the most unloving Father ever, to allow His Son to die the most horrible death in history. But He died because He is the only way. And we must never waiver from this precious truth – God's Son has died so that I might live”. And when you hear someone deny that Jesus is the only way of salvation, as His child you must stand up and speak up in order that that blinded one might come to the knowledge of the truth.

Are you waging the good warfare? Is prayer a true priority in your life, is your time alone with God something that you cherish and guard with all of your heart? And even though you'll never be perfect, can you say that you are sincerely striving to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ day by day? Beloved, this is our starting place in being the church God has called us to be.

You may say today, “I can't wage the good warfare. I've got too much sin in my life right now to be trying to help anyone else”. Or, “I'm so far away from God I've got to get closer before I help anyone else”. Or, “My need is not to wage the good warfare for Jesus. I'm not saved, and today I want Jesus to save me more than anything else”.