**Directions for worship- pray for everyone** 16/6/24 dkm

Read: Ezekiel 18:19-32, 1Timothy 2

Text: 1Timothy 2:1-7

Psalms: 24:1-4, 75, 130, 134

The newspaper reported the sale of many church buildings around our country, most being solid brick heritage buildings. People are turning them into homes and restaurants. We know a church building is simply a building, and that the true church is actually the gathering of God’s people. But this selling of churches points to people no longer being interested in gathering for public worship. Some are concerned about graves in the yard of some of these churches. In the city, Christians are being forced to meet in warehouses in industrial areas.

We are reminded that the early church was forced to leave the synagogue and meet in a lecture hall (Acts 19:9). The church always met, and continues to meet, in public because all are welcome to come. We do not meet behind closed doors – although we may close the doors to stop people disturbing others by going in and out during the worship service.

Why do Christians meet for public worship? We don’t see Hindus or Buddhists meeting regularly for public worship- Muslims of course, adopted to the practice of Jews and Christians. The Bible tells of the first believers gathering to hear the apostles teaching and to have fellowship, as well as for prayer and for sharing in the sacraments (Acts 2:42). When they were kicked out of the temple, and then the synagogues, they started to meet on the first day of the week, the day Jesus was raised from the dead (1Cor 16:2). Weekly meeting for worship was, and is, essential for people who believe in Jesus Christ and are looking for his return (Heb 10:25).

What do Christians do when they meet together? Our worship is public so anyone can come, but many choose to imagine what we do. Some years ago, a young girl wanted to see inside our church because she had never been inside a church! In AD112 a Roman called Pliny reported to the Emperor on what Christians do when they meet for worship- it was his duty to arrest and execute Christians as enemies of the Emperor. He found them ‘reciting words’, probably singing or praying, and taking the sacrament. A Hindu friend thought the sacrament meant eating meat! One wonders what report would be written of some church services today; people singing onstage with loud music playing?

We have seen what they did after Pentecost, but we see a more settled order of worship and of organisation develop in the church under the teaching and authority of the apostles. The church at Ephesus was set up in the hall of Tyrannus. Paul led this assembly for two years, with many confessing and believing in Jesus Christ (Acts 19:9,10). It was some years later that Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, telling him to stay on in this church, preaching sound doctrine and commanding men teaching unsound or false doctrine to stop doing so (1:3). Here in chapter 2 the apostle expands on this command he gave to Timothy, instructing him on matters relating to public worship and leadership in the church. Our subheadings are: ‘Pray for all, especially leaders’, ‘Prayer is good and acceptable to God’, ‘Provision of a mediator’ and, ‘Preacher and apostle’.

**1.Pray for all, especially leaders**

In this personal yet open letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul urges that prayer be made for all men or all people without distinction. Prayer is an essential part of a believer’s life and worship. Although Paul does not specify public worship, this chapter is all about conduct in the house of God (2:15). Public prayer is focused on God, not on men drawing attention to themselves (Mat 6:5). In saying ‘first of all’, Paul is making prayer a priority when we gather for worship.

Paul uses four synonyms for the word ‘prayer’ (2:1). The first is ‘supplication’ or ‘petition’. We are to present our requests to God. These can be personal matters, but in public prayer we should be mindful of others with whom and for whom we are praying. Prayers of intercession are to be made; this word has the sense of ‘conversation’. We should consider the needs of others, like those who are sick or have other needs. We should be interceding for the spiritual needs of others, especially people who are not themselves praying because they are not believers. The Lord has answered many such prayers of intercession; maybe your salvation is an answer to the prayer of a faithful parent or relative or pastor. When the Lord answers prayer it is right to give him thanks. While we may not mention names in public prayer, it is right to be thinking of particular people, even yourself, when requests, intercession or thanksgiving is made.

Because the God to whom we are praying is the only true God, with ears to hear and power to answer our prayers, we are to pray for all people, people of all races and all religions all over the world. In ancient times each nation had its own god and the people prayed to this god. Moreover, Jews did not pray for Gentiles because they hated them. Paul’s thinking was different. He told believers to pray for everyone without distinction. Moreover, he urged prayer for kings and all in authority. The king or emperor at this time was the infamous tyrant Nero.

As believers we are to recognise all governing authorities as appointed by God, and pray for them (2:2, Rom 13:1). We pray that God in his sovereignty will overrule in the affairs of men. He has power over all rulers, raising them up and putting them down as he wills (Dan 2:21, Ps 75:7). Remember, Paul was writing with regard to the Roman Emperor and his governors, who had put Paul in prison more than once. But even in prison Paul prayed for these men and took every opportunity to tell them the gospel of Jesus Christ. We pray for our king, our prime minister, and members of parliament. It was once the practice of our church to write to the prime minister telling him of our prayers. I recall Tony Abbott sending a personal letter of reply when he was prime minister.

**2.Prayer is good and acceptable to God**

We do not write to the national leader or pray for him in order to gain political or financial favours, although we do want to live in peace and be able to provide for our families (2:2). We do want to be able to worship freely and not have civil authorities interfering in our worship. Christians from the time of the apostles, and in many nations still today, do not enjoy freedom of worship. But God in his mercy and power has been pleased to answer the prayers of his people and deliver them from oppressive regimes. No king or ruling authority is outside the sovereign rule of our God and Saviour, the only God and saviour (2:3); so prayer that recognises his sovereignty over all the nations is most acceptable to God.

In 1988 I was in Europe studying and visited a friend in Germany. This friend offered to take me across the Berlin Wall and into West Berlin, but it did not work out. Then in 1989 the Belin Wall was torn down. The government of East Germany, a cruel and persecuting communist government, was gone, almost overnight. There was no war, and no diplomatic deal- the government just collapsed. Why? Because of prayer! Prayer brought down the Berlin Wall. In a church in Leipzig, a Reformation church, people gathered to read the Bible and pray for peace. As this group grew, the communist authorities began to investigate and threatened to close it down. But the people kept gathering to pray. ‘On October 9, 1989, some 2000 individuals crowded into the church to pray for peace, and another 10,000 gathered outside’. And soon the Berlon Wall came down’. I was recently praying every day for the Lord to overrule in the Indian elections and stop the authorities from persecuting God’s people. The prime minister was returned but without an overall majority. India is the most populous nation in the world but has a very small proportion of Christians.

Speaking of India, we think of William Carey, the so-called father of modern missions, who went to India in 1793. His work, and that of many other missionaries resulted the growth of the church in India, growth that continues today. But Carey was discouraged by some in his church in England. They said to him, ‘Young man sit down. If God wants to convert the heathen he will do so without your help or ours’. Did these people include Indians in their prayers for everyone, as commanded by the apostle? Carey certainly did! His prayers led him to go and preach the gospel to people in this vast nation, people loved by God according to John 3:16.

Paul tells Timothy that God our Saviour ‘desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth’ (2:4). Idolatry is a lie, because there are no other Gods. Jesus is the truth, the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). That God ‘desires all men to be saved’ does not mean that all men will be saved. The doctrine of divine election is not opposed by God’s desire for all to be saved. The Bible does not teach universalism, the idea that everyone will be saved in the end. God is not willing that any should perish (2Peter 3:9), but clearly some refuse to repent, which is according to the sovereign and secret will of almighty God. We operate according to God’s revealed will, so preach the gospel to everyone and pray for everyone to be saved.

**3.Promise of a Mediator**

Speaking of people being saved, Paul explains the need of a mediator between God and man- or rather declares that there is one Mediator, the man Christ Jesus (2:5). We need a mediator because our sin cuts us off from God, the only true and holy God. Peace with God is our first and greatest need. And there is only one man in all the world who can make peace with God on our behalf. The world is currently looking for a man to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians, between Jew and Arab. Jesus made such peace two thousand years ago through his death on the cross, peace between Jew and Gentile (Eph 2:14). We pray for such peace. We give thanks for the peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ and pray that all people would know this peace.

God himself made peace with us through his only begotten Son, Jesus of Nazareth. In his own Son, God became a man in order to redeem us from this situation of being cut off from God. We need someone to represent us before God because our sin prevents us from appearing before him ourselves. Jesus was without sin so he, and he alone, could appear before God. He did so, offering his own blood for the forgiveness of our sin and making peace with God for us (Heb 9:12, Rom 5:1).

Paul speaks of Jesus giving himself a ransom for us, ‘a ransom for all, to be testified in due time’ (2:6). The gospel is about God saving us from sin and death. Paul pictures this as being ransomed from slavery to sin and death, slavery to Satan. Jesus himself spoke of ‘giving his life a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45). We are all born in sin and commit sin; we are all slaves to sin. For a slave to be set free someone must pay the ransom price. This is what Jesus did on the cross for you who are saved from sin and now have everlasting life. Your own blood is ‘sinful blood’ so will not do. Only the ‘sinless blood’ of Jesus is acceptable as a ransom. This is the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (1:14). Jesus paid the price, the full price, to set us free, and he now lives to intercede for us.

All this was planned by God and revealed at the proper time (2:6). In the fullness of time ‘God sent his Son, born of a woman’ (Gal 3:4). God has appointed a day and hour for everything, but I still urge you not to delay in repenting of your sin and believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. God desires all men to be saved but to be saved you must repent and believe. ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12).

**4.Preacher and apostle**

Paul comes back to his salvation and appointment by the Lord to preach the gospel to the whole world; Jew and Gentile was the way mankind was divided at that time, although he also refers to male and female, as well as slave and free (Gal 3:28). Male and female continues to divide our society, along with race and religion and a host of other things. But this gospel that we preach is for all to hear, and believe unto salvation.

Paul was the most unlikely of coverts (1:13). People opposed him as they did Jesus, and they continue to oppose preachers of the gospel today. Paul briefly defends himself at times, and he does so in verse 7. He assures Timothy and all reading this letter that he is not a fraud, that he speaks the truth with Christ as his witness. The most militant of Jews was called to preach to Gentiles, calling them to believe in Jesus Christ and grow in their knowledge of the truth.

Justification by grace through faith is followed by sanctification, by growing in knowledge of the truth. Preacher, teacher, and apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul was given authority to give directions to the church with regard to worship and conduct. We do not have apostles today, but we do have the authority of the Bible. This authority extends to every church around the world, so let no one say we have our own rules regarding worship. There is only one church because there is only one Lord, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.