

Intro:

Two weeks ago we looked at the first duty of the local church as revealed in 1 Timothy.

What was the first duty of the Christian minister (1 Tim 1)?

- Watching for and correcting the error of false teachers [a major undertaking in today's world – because of the multitude of false teachers and teachings and the almost universal availability of them.

What was the first duty for the local church (1 Tim 2.1)?

- Evangelistic prayer

Now you will recall that I called it evangelistic prayer because of the context of our passage. We took a digression last week to look at the manner of life we ought to be developing as Christians: godliness and dignity, two terms found at the end of 1 Tim 2.2.

Today we are going to go back to the context of these prayers that are enjoined upon God's people. I want to show you how we know that these prayers are indeed intended to be evangelistic.

But even more importantly, I want to emphasize that these prayers can be literally answered because God is going to reveal something to us about His desires in providing salvation for men.

It isn't that God wants us to pray for the salvation of men who can't be saved. On the contrary, it is possible for any man to be saved, and that is the point of the prayers we are called to pray.

The statement I just made is a controversial statement in theological circles.

There is a particular interpretation of Scripture that emphasizes one aspect of the doctrine of salvation over other aspects of the Scriptural doctrine.

- It rightly sees that not all men will be saved.
- It rightly sees that those men who are saved are chosen by God 'from the foundation of the world' — it is no surprise to God who will actually be saved.
- It rightly sees that those who are chosen by God are predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son. This is gospel truth.
- But...
 - This interpretation fails to see that God is both willing to save any man and salvation is possible for every man *if* they will hear and believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So today I want to preach on the subject:

God Desires All to be Saved

Read 1 Tim 2.1-8, text 3-4

Proposition: Gird up your loins to pray for the lost because God is willing and able to save them.

I. Evangelistic prayers please God (3)

A. The sentence that is vv. 3-4 refers to the prayers enjoined in vv. 1-2 ('this')

1. I urge that prayers be made for all men (1)
2. I urge especially that prayers be made for kings and rulers (2)

B. These prayers are good and acceptable to God

1. The word 'good' means not only morally good but attractive, pleasant, pleasing
2. The word 'acceptable' means 'welcome'

a. Verb form used in Acts 21.17

^{KJV} **Ac 21.17** And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

b. There is a hint of something that is pleasing to God as an acceptable sacrifice in this word

^{KJV} **Phil 4.18** But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things *which were sent* from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

^{KJV} **1 Pt 2.5** Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

^{KJV} **1 Ti 5.4** But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

C. The content of these prayers are related to the will of God expressed in v. 4

1. Lit., ‘the One who all men is willing to be saved’
2. That is, the prayers relate to salvation – they are evangelistic prayers

“If there were no provision made for their salvation, or if he was unwilling that they should be saved, it could not be agreeable to him that we should offer prayer for them.”¹

“Many prayers are unacceptable to God, but not this one.”²

Evangelistic prayers please God and are a true Christian ministry that is acceptable in God’s sight.

II. Universal salvation is the desire of God (4a)

A. The will of God – decretive or desired?

1. The controversial word in this verse is the word ‘will’
2. There is a sense of God’s will where once it is expressed it is *fait accompli*, done

One of the best expressions of this is found in Ecclesiastes:

^{KJV} **Eccl 3.14** I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth *it*, that *men* should fear before him.

3. But we know that not all men will be saved – universal salvation willed by God cannot be *universalism* (the idea that all men *will* be saved, regardless of their faith in Christ or not)

“If there is one thing certain about this verse, it is that it does not teach universalism. Jesus Himself said that some people will go to Hell.”³

¹ Albert Barnes, “1 Timothy” in *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 130.

² John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*, 2:734 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985).

³ Charles Ray, *The books of First and Second Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, p. 225, footnote 33 from p. 45.

4. The modern versions are correct to clarify the translation by using the word 'desires' [NAU, ESV] or 'wants' [NIV]

When God *decrees* something, it *will* happen.

Although God *desires* some things to happen, he *allows* them to not happen.

B. God's desire for all men is salvation

1. The use of the word 'all' in the passage

- a. 2.1
- b. 2.3
- c. 2.6

2. The testimony of other passages

^{KJV} **Ezek 33.9** Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it; if he do not turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul.

^{KJV} **Jn 3.16** For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

^{KJV} **2 Pt 3.9** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

^{KJV} **1 Ti 4.10** For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

This truth provides the foundation and motivation for evangelistic praying.

Why would you pray for someone who could not be saved?

It is true that many will not be saved, including many for whom we will labour in prayer. But the possibility of their salvation gives heart and motivation to our prayers.

III. Limited application is the plan of God (4b)

A. From God's perspective, salvation is entirely the work of God

1. Man cannot save himself
2. Man must *be saved* by God

Our passage emphasizes this truth by the expression of the God-ward side of His will in salvation: "Who will have all men to **be saved**"

- Passive voice
- Action is performed on the subject (all men) not by the subject

B. From man's perspective, salvation will not happen to those who will not come to the knowledge of the truth

1. God desires all men to come
 - a. Active voice
 - b. Action is performed by the subject (all men)
2. God allows men to express their will in salvation

"So God wills that all men should be saved. It would be in accordance with his benevolent nature. He has made ample provision for it. He uses all proper means to secure their salvation. He uses *no* positive means to prevent it, and if they are *not* saved it will be their own fault."⁴

Was it God's will for the children of Israel to wander in the wilderness for forty years? No, but they wandered just the same. Why did they wander? Because they *would not* believe God. God *would* but they *would not*.

In the same way, God is willing to save, but most are not willing to be saved. Most are not even willing to *hear* that they can be saved.

⁴ Albert Barnes, "1 Timothy" in *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 130.

Conclusion:

I entitled this message *God Desires All to be Saved*. This is the truth, according to our passage.

But this truth is given to us for a reason. And that is why I gave you this proposition:

Proposition: Gird up your loins to pray for the lost because God is willing and able to save them.

One commentator put it this way:

“Even those who will not allow you to speak to them about God, cannot prevent you speaking to God about them.”⁵

That commentator went on to give two examples.

- A young man, a teenager, who resisted the entreaties of his godly parents, was at home reading gospel tracts one Sunday afternoon.
His parents were away, ministering in another town.
His mother was moved to pray for him that afternoon – and Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China was saved.
He came to Christ (active)
Christ saved him (passive)
But his mother prayed.
- Another young man – living a dissolute life, far from God, has left his home. He despairs and is ready to commit suicide.
His mother, many miles away, is moved to get out of bed and pray for her son.
Instead of suicide, Dr. R. A. Torrey, the successor to D. L. Moody, is born again as his mother prayed.
He came to Christ (active)
Christ saved him (passive)
But his mother prayed.

God desires all men to be saved.

Who are you praying for?

⁵ King, p. 46, quoted in Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible*, 1 Ti 2:3 (Galaxie Software, 2003; 2003).