

Introduction:

Are you worried about our nation and its future? That was a trick question. I am guessing the question I asked was actually different from the question you heard. Let me rephrase it. Are you worried about our kingdom and its future? Interestingly, with the advent of democracies, parliaments, congresses, Prime Ministers, and Presidents, we don't think in terms of kingdoms anymore. We think nations. However, with the exception that the term "kingdom" does imply the kind of government a nation has, "nation" and "kingdom" refer to the same thing. When I asked you if you are worried about our nation and its future, I wasn't talking about the United States of America. I was talking about the Kingdom of Heaven in Jesus Christ. Certainly, I understand most, if not all, of us in this room have a political citizenship within the United States of America. But more importantly, as Paul explains in **Philippians 3:20**, we have a better and greater citizenship in a better and greater nation: heaven.

So I will ask again. Are you worried about our nation and its future? Let's face it. Our society is becoming less and less friendly to the nation of Christ. American laws increasingly ignore biblical teaching. American people are decreasingly connected to Christianity. Be aware, in the two counties from which we draw members, 1.2 million people claimed to be nothing spiritually in 2010. This was an increase of half a million people who made that claim in 2000. In 2010, that was 71% of the population or almost two-thirds. In 2000, the "none" made up only 52% of our counties.<sup>1</sup> Are you worried about our nation, our kingdom, and its future?

With the above in mind, what do you think is the most important thing you can do this week? Let me narrow it down for you. What do you think is the most important thing you can do on Tuesday? May I shock you. The answer is not, "Vote." Oh, don't get me wrong. Voting is a great thing to do. But it is not the most important thing to do. The answer, brothers and sisters, is found in **1 Timothy 2:1-8** (p. 991). The most important thing you can do this Tuesday, this week, every week is Pray. Brothers and sisters, what we need to understand is: Our prayers accomplish more than our votes.

Discussion:

I. We are at war.

- A. Let's begin by understanding how serious what we face is. In **1 Timothy 1:18-19**, Paul charged Timothy to "wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience." We are at war. There is an enemy who is attacking. What we see around us is only the surface. Behind the scenes our kingdom is being attacked. It is always being attacked. And we do need to understand that in the end, every kingdom of earth ends up becoming a tool in the hand of our enemy.
- B. We are at war. So we need to be ready to wage war God's way.

II. First of all, then, pray

- A. This is what makes **1 Timothy 2:1-2** so much more powerful. Paul essentially commissions Timothy as a general in Christ's army to defend against all the attacks and strike out against the enemy. What do you expect Paul's first instruction to be? Recruit? Train? Spy? Infiltrate? Attack? No. It is Pray.
- B. Not only that, it isn't strictly to pray for "our side." It is to pray for kings and all who are in high positions. It is actually to pray for the enemy combatants. Think about this.
  - 1. Timothy was preaching and teaching the congregation in Ephesus. According to **Acts 19**, in the early years of the Ephesian church, a riot broke out against Christ's kingdom as those who turned the world upside down and discredited the Roman gods and goddesses. Demetrius had led his fellow craftsmen to speak out against Christianity, to discredit the Christians, and even in hopes to have them punished and persecuted. Yet, Paul says the Ephesian Christians should pray for all men. That means praying for men like Demetrius. He says to pray for people with authority. That means praying for men like the town clerk.
  - 2. Not only that but this letter to Timothy was likely written sometime around the first major Roman persecution against Christians following the fire in Rome in 64 AD. According to Tacitus, a great multitude of Christians were killed. Some were crucified in mockery of their savior. Some were sewed in the skins

<sup>1</sup> Demographic info taken from two websites: <http://www.city-data.com/county/religion/Hillsborough-County-FL.html>; <http://www.city-data.com/county/religion/Pasco-County-FL.html>

of animals and thrown to wild dogs. Some were nailed to stakes, covered in pitch, and burned alive to light a chariot race Nero hosted in his own gardens.<sup>2</sup> While this was in Rome, there is no doubt the Ephesian Christians knew of these horrific events. And, no doubt, these events surely impacted the treatment of Christians throughout the empire. Yet, Paul says to pray on behalf of kings and those in authority. That means praying on behalf of Nero and those who carried out such persecutions.

- C. Paul's instruction is not "take up arms and fight." Paul's instruction is not "get involved in politics and change public policy." Paul's instruction is not "argue with the neighbors about public policy and national, regional, or city laws." Paul's instruction was: Pray.
- D. Notice what the prayers are to be for. The prayers were not to lower taxes, raise benefits, change laws, or put different people in those positions. The prayer was in order that we might lead peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and dignity. The prayer was not that God might do that in any certain way, but to pray on behalf of all people, especially those in authority, that we might lead peaceful, godly, dignified lives. Leave it up to God to determine how to get that done.
- E. Please don't misunderstand. You should vote on Tuesday. God may accomplish this goal in America, in Florida, in Hillsboro and Pasco counties through our votes. But know this, our prayers accomplish more than our votes.

### III. Growing the kingdom

- A. Another aspect of this that fascinates me is why Paul claimed this was good and pleasing. It is not because God desires to protect and preserve His people. It is not because God wants to make life easier for His citizens. It is because God wants all people everywhere to be saved (**1 Timothy 2:3-4**). In **1 Timothy 1:15**, Paul had said that Jesus came into the world to save sinners. In **1 Timothy 4:10**, Paul is going to write that God is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe. In between those two statements, He expresses God's great desire. He wants all people to be saved. And that is demonstrated by the fact that God came into the world in the person of "the man Christ Jesus" to be a mediator between Himself and us (**2:5**). Not only is He the mediator, but He was the ransom, giving Himself for all people (**2:6**).
- B. Why do we need to pray? In order to protect our little congregation that meets on Livingston Avenue? In order to protect the perhaps ten thousand in our counties that have been baptized for the remission of their sins? In order to protect the half million that claim to be some kind of Christian in these counties? No. We need to pray because God wants everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. We need to pray for the nearly 1.9 million residents of our counties that they can hear, know, believe the truth. We aren't praying to fill our building. We aren't praying to grow our congregation. We are praying because there are 1.9 million people who need to know the truth in order to be saved, and most of them don't.
- C. Brothers and sisters, here is what we most need to understand. It doesn't matter who is elected governor of Florida on Tuesday. That won't change one iota how far and wide the gospel gets spread in our counties. It won't matter who is elected to the Senate or House of Representatives. It won't matter whether Democrats or Republicans get a majority. It won't matter which amendments get added or edited in the Florida constitution. None of these things will get the gospel to anyone in our counties. So, please, get out and vote on Tuesday. God may work through you and your vote. But understand this, our prayers accomplish more than our votes.

### IV. Our prayers accomplish more than our votes.

- A. Sadly, we often view prayer as a last resort. It's what we do when we've tried all we can and failed. How many times do we hear people say, "Well, all we can do now is pray"? And when they say it, it is usually with that kind of resignation that says all we can do is hope or wish it would go our way. I know, of course, that our opponents, atheists and skeptics, laugh when they hear me say our prayers accomplish more than our votes. In fact, our opponents think that is why they will have a leg up on us because while they are busy working, we are busy praying. And they think what we are doing is useless. What concerns me, however, is the number of Christians hearing this that are afraid some people won't vote because of what I'm saying. What concerns me is the Christians who will say, "Prayer is all well and good. But prayer only goes so far. We need to mobilize Christians so they will vote, so they will get in government, so they will effect change in our cities, counties, nations, and world." I want to say the exact opposite. Yes, get out and vote. Sure, get involved in your community in order to effect change. But your work will only go so far. What we need to do is mobilize Christians so we will pray.

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<sup>2</sup> Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, v 1, "Apostolic Christianity: A.D. 1-100," Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, June 1978, p 389-390.

- B. Paul himself provides the example of how powerfully God works and why prayer is the most important thing we can do this Tuesday, this week, and every week.
1. In **1 Timothy 2:7**, Paul says he has been appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher. I don't know how many years I have just waltzed past that because I already knew about the conversion of Paul. But look back at **1 Timothy 1:12-14**. Paul had been a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.
  2. Think about that for a moment. At one time, Paul had been a reason Christians could not lead peaceful, quiet lives with godliness and dignity. In **Acts 9:1-2**, he had received letters from the High Priest so he could persecute Christians not only in Jerusalem, but all the way to Damascus. Paul and that High Priest were men with authority. They were keeping Christians from leading peaceful, quiet lives.
  3. But on the road to Damascus in **Acts 9**, without a vote cast by a single Christian, without a finger lifted by a single Christian (except Ananias who only went to teach Paul when God pushed him), without Christians working politically or militarily or in any other way, without Christians establishing protests, Paul went from being a blasphemer to a proclaimer, a persecutor sent by the Jewish High Priest to an apostle sent out by true High Priest, from an insolent opponent to a teacher in faith and truth. And according to **Acts 9:31**, after Paul's conversion, "the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up. And walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, it multiplied." ESV).
- C. Brothers and sisters, that is the power of God. That is power beyond what we can accomplish. That is a turn of events we could never plan or effect. But God can. God has done it before. He will do it again. Yes, He may work through your vote, so get out and vote on Tuesday. But understand this: Our prayers accomplish more than our votes. So, first of all, pray.

#### Conclusion:

Based on all this, Paul transitions into a new section of his letter saying, "I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger and quarreling" (**1 Timothy 2:8**, ESV). Certainly, the men in this place need to teach. We need to stand up for what is right. We need to defend the faith. We must proclaim the gospel. But first of all, we need to pray. We need to do it while being at peace with one another. But we need to understand our prayers accomplish more than our votes. In fact, our prayers accomplish far more than anything else we do. I wonder, if we truly believed that, would we spend more of our assemblies praying? We are at war. And this week, you should get out and vote. But your vote can only do so much. We need to understand our prayers accomplish more than our votes. First of all, then, pray.