

Praying for Rulers

God and Government

By Bob Vincent

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: 1 Timothy 2:1-8; Daniel 4
Preached on: Sunday, October 30, 2022

Robert Benn Vincent
80 Hickory Hill Drive
Boyce, LA 71409

Website: www.rbvincent.com
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/rbvincent

Lord, help me, in spite of the handicap that has been visited on me within the past week—something, Lord, that I didn't think I would ever experience again, as I had this 20 years ago, paralysis of the right side of my face. Please help me, Lord, help me to be clear, help me to be concise, help me in my weakness and frailty as an old man, in spite of that, by the anointing and power of the Holy Spirit, may your word come to us in life-changing power. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

Now we come to this passage of scripture today in 1 Timothy 2, because I think it sets out something that's very important.

Last Lord's Day, we looked at what happened to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego as they were cast into the fiery furnace, and amazingly the rules of Newtonian physics did not apply. They were not burned. The only thing that was burned were the ropes that held them fast (Daniel 3:25). The only people who were consumed in that furnace were the soldiers serving Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 3:22). And the response we saw both last week and the week before of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to Nebuchadnezzar, was not one of belligerence, defiance, railing accusation, shaking the fist; rather, it was a humble, respectful, declining to obey his wicked order, which would cause them to deny the Lord and to commit idolatry. So, they refused to obey, but they did it respectfully.

We want to reflect on this for a moment. If you'll look at verse 8 of 1 Timothy 2, you see something that is a very masculine thing, that's page 1,847. He says, "I want men everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." That's a masculine thing.

There are a couple of Greek words that refer to a man in Greek. This is the Greek word *andros* (anér, άνήρ, andrós, άνδρός), the other word would be *anthropos* (άνθρωπος, άνθρωπος). *Anthropos* refers to human beings

whether they are male or female. At this point, he's using the Greek word for a male. These are males.

"I want males everywhere to lift up holy hands in prayer, without anger or disputing." Now, I don't know about you, but my temptation as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, would not be to lift up holy hands but to lift up hands in anger and rage. "You old rascal! Who do you think you are to throw us into this fiery furnace?" It's more of a male trait to have anger and wrath and to be disputing.

Brothers in the Lord, not sisters, brothers in the Lord, we have to come to grips with something: In spite of our duty to protect our families, we have to not yield to a bitter spirit, an angry spirit. And that's what he's saying.

The one thing that we can do about politicians is, what? Not to lift up the fist but to lift up holy hands, that's the posture of prayer. Lift up holy hands without anger and without argument because, brothers in Christ, we can't change things. We can't change things by our actions. I learned a long time ago, when I did not know what to do, to rely on the "Reformed doctrine of procrastination." When you don't know, don't, just pray. Pray. Pray. Pray for wisdom. Pray for grace.

And so, we're thinking of this in light of Nebuchadnezzar and notice something else here, he says in verse 1, there on page 1,846, "I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone." Notice the last one: thanksgiving.

Are you grateful for the past two Presidents of the United States? Can you say, "Thank you, God, for Donald Trump"? Can you say, "Thank you, God, for Joe Biden"? Well, guess what? Look at what he says in verse 1, and I want you to understand this in light of Nebuchadnezzar, which we'll look at in a moment.

He says, "Be made for everyone," verse 2, "for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness." You know, when Paul wrote these words to Timothy, the Emperor Claudius had been murdered by his wife so that her boy, Nero, could be on the throne. Claudius was not a good ruler; he's the one who expelled the Jews from Rome (Acts 18:2), but he was a whole lot better than Nero. And I'm struck with it. Paul is telling Timothy, "You need to pray for Nero."

Pray for Nero. Notice one of the reasons to pray, he says, "that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

And I want to say that the second word, holiness, has to do with decorum and dignity, and so here's the deal, and you need to understand, think of the sadistic Roman emperors.

There was not a single, solitary, good Roman emperor, beginning with the very first one who was guilty of treason, Julius Caesar. He overthrew the Roman republic because power is a seductive thing. And so, in Nero's case, Nero delighted in humiliating people, and Paul is saying that we might lead quiet, tranquil, peaceful lives in all godliness and dignity, because Nero delighted to rob people of their dignity (*semnótēs*, *σεμνότης*). Those closest to him, he robbed of their dignity. And so, Paul is saying pray for that.

Listen, dear ones, I don't know what the future holds. I don't know what you and I will face, but we've got to face it through prayer. We've got to face it through prayer, and we have to pray for our leaders that we can continue to live a godly life without being thrown into the fiery furnace or the den of lions. And also, that we may be able to maintain dignity, because tyrants love to take away the dignity of the people they don't like, and so that's what he's saying here.

Now, notice something else he says in verse 3, "This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."

Now, I want to say something to you. Hold your hand there and turn back to 1 Corinthians 1, and let's see what we find here on page 1,773. 1 Corinthians 1:26.

"Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" (1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Now, I want you to think about that for a moment. By and large those who are true Christians are not the great and influential people of the world, and the reason for that is that God chose the lowly.

Now, how do you reconcile that with what we've just read in 1 Timothy 2 and in verse 4, that God wants all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth, page 1,846? Or how do you reconcile that, holding your hand there and turning over to 2 Timothy 2:10, where we read these words at the bottom of page 1,853:

"Therefore," Paul says, "I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory."

What's he saying? He's implying that if he doesn't endure everything for them, they won't be saved. Think about it for a moment. Paul says, "I, Paul, endure everything for the sake of the elect." There is an elect people, the people whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world to belong to his Son. He says, but notice here, that they too may obtain, they haven't yet obtained it, but through Paul's efforts, through your efforts, through my efforts, the elect will obtain it, obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Now turning back to 1 Timothy 2:4, page, 1,846. Think of it, if you have election and predestination and everything related to it all figured out, you don't have a clue. You know, the deep things of God have a sense of tension about them, a sense of paradox.

Answer this question: How could the Lord Jesus Christ be 100% God, as the New Testament teaches that he is; how could the Lord Jesus Christ be 100% human, as the New Testament teaches that he is, and yet be just 100%, just one person?

And how could he be one person, distinct from the Father, the person of the Father, and distinct from the person of the Holy Spirit, and yet one God? Now, if you can figure out the Trinity and you can figure out the Incarnation of Christ, so that you have no tension there, then you can figure out predestination, unconditional election, human responsibility, without being a fatalist.

I'm saying if we don't have some tension in our thinking when we come to these things of the sovereignty of God and our responsibility, we are following human logic rather than divine revelation.

Now, I'm going to throw a twist out to you this way. Why does he say this? Because the tendency is when you come to Nero, the tendency is to pray, "God, send him to hell."

Isn't that the tendency? Do you know what Nero did? Nero would take Christians, and he would sew them in animal skins, and he would have them

painted with pitch and tar, and then he would tie them on stakes and set them ablaze as he rode around in his gardens, with the lights that were illuminating him being Christians who were burning alive. Think of it.

Think of it. I don't know any leader of the 20th century who was that wicked. I mean, they all did terrible things, didn't they? But how depraved. How wicked. How base. So, when we come to Nero, who's in power when Paul wrote to Timothy, when we come to Nero, we're coming to somebody that the temptation is to say, "Lord, send him to hell. May he be burning in hell the way that he burned my father, the way that he burned my wife, the way that he burned my children alive, to illuminate his perverted, naked ride through his gardens."

Notice verse 5, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time." Now I want to reflect on that.

Did Christ die so as to secure the salvation of every single human being? And the answer to that is "No," because we know that hell is not empty, and we know that Christ did not die to secure the salvation of every single human being, but Christ did die for all men in a way that enables us to say to people, "Repent and believe the gospel—Christ died for your sins."

In other words, the death of Jesus is **sufficient** for all men and women and children everywhere, even though it isn't **efficient**, except for the elect. But I want you to understand is this great truth: When we approach people, what must we say when we approach people? We must say of even a Nero, "Christ died for your sins."

You know, Christ died for the whole world. The result of Adam's sin is our entire planet came under a curse, and Christ died so that the whole planet would come under a blessing. We have disease and death in our world with plants and animals because of Adam's sin. Christ died for grass and trees and the animals in the woods. He died to undo what Adam did, and he died in such a way that we can say to anyone we meet, "God loves you. Turn from your sins and believe in Christ."

And then he says in verse 7, "For this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles."

So, how do we approach—let's go back to Daniel 4—how do we approach a Nebuchadnezzar? And here's the answer, Daniel 4, and Nebuchadnezzar has this strange dream, page 1,376. He says in verse 4, Daniel 4:4: "I,

Nebuchadnezzar, was at home in my palace, contented and prosperous. I had a dream that made me afraid. As I was lying in my bed, the images and visions that passed through my mind terrified me.”

So, then he calls everybody together, “I want you to tell me, what does this dream mean? What does this dream mean?” And he told them this time, unlike chapter 2 where he refused to tell the people the dream, this time he told them the dream. But everybody is stammering and stuttering, everybody’s got Bell’s palsy on both sides of their face, everybody’s afraid to say until finally in verse 19, “Then Daniel (also called Belteshazzar) was greatly perplexed for a time.”

Nebuchadnezzar has called him in verse 18: “Tell me about this. What does it mean?” And his thoughts terrified him. Think about what Daniel is about to say to Nebuchadnezzar. He’s terrified because he knows what Nebuchadnezzar did to his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He didn’t want to tell him bad news.

You know, during the Vietnam war people were afraid to tell Lyndon Johnson the truth. How do we know that? Because his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, wrote about it and said it, that everybody was afraid to tell Lyndon Johnson the truth. Wow!

When a man is in power, and has enormous power over you, people are afraid to tell him the truth.

You know that Joe Stalin, who had studied to be a Georgian Orthodox priest, would have parties, and you didn’t want to be a dinner guest at Joe Stalin’s parties because almost always someone who would be eating at the dinner table with you would be shot afterwards.

So, it’s very tough to tell somebody in power the truth, and so listen to what Daniel says in that verse there, in the second statement there in that verse. He says, “My lord, if only the dream applied to your enemies and its meaning to your adversaries!” And he explains about the tree. He said, “You are the tree and you’ve been blessed by God to rule over all these nations and even the birds and the animals, they found shelter in you. But you’re going to,” what?

He says in verse 23, “You, O king, saw a messenger,” a watcher, “a holy one, coming down from heaven and saying, ‘Cut down the tree and destroy it, but leave the stump, bound with iron and bronze.’” He goes on and interprets it. He says, “You’re going to be removed from power. You’re going to end up having insanity, believing you’re an animal. You’re going to

be out grazing in the grass, eating grass, and your back is going to be baptized,” the Greek word that’s in the Septuagint (Aramaic: tseba, תְּצַבָּע; Greek: βάπτω, βάπτω; Daniel 4:15[12], 23[20], 25[22], 33[30]; 5:21), “baptized with the dew of heaven, soaked with the dew of heaven, and seven seasons are going to pass over you.”

And he says something else. I want you to see something that in verse 17, going back, Daniel leaves out. Look at what he leaves out.

Nebuchadnezzar said, “The decision is announced by messengers, the holy ones declare the verdict, so that the living may know that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes and sets over them the lowliest of men.” I said two weeks ago that the Aramaic word—this is part of the Aramaic section of the Old Testament—the Aramaic word there is *shephel*, (Aramaic: shefal, שִׁפְלָא: “wretched, humble, lazy”), the lowliest, low-life, lazy good-for-nothing. That’s what Nebuchadnezzar heard the watcher say. He sets over it the lowliest, laziest good-for-nothing people.

Now, notice how Daniel words it, beginning in verse 24. “This is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree the Most High has issued against my lord the king: You will be driven away,” verse 25, “from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”

Notice what Daniel conveniently omits: “That you’re a bum! You’re a lazy good-for-nothing! You are a low-life, *shephel*! And God put you in power.” You see, that’s what we should never be surprised at when it comes to government leaders and politicians: Very often it’s the low-lives that rise to the top.

And he says, he explains further, and he gives him an admonition, verse 27: “Therefore, O king, be pleased to accept my advice: Renounce your sins by doing what is right, and your wickedness by being kind to the oppressed. It may be that then your prosperity will continue.”

Nebuchadnezzar had a warning from God. He had a gentle prophet explain to him the meaning of the dream and warning him and urging him: “Repent. Repent by sowing kindness to the poor and oppressed.”

Verse 28, “All this happened to King Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later, as the king was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, he said,

‘Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’”

Do you know, do you have designer clothes on? Anybody have designer clothes? Do you know that Nebuchadnezzar had designer bricks? Do you know that, that when Nebuchadnezzar built his palace, when he did the great remodeling program on Babylon, he made sure the bricks showed who the builder was: Nebuchadnezzar. Designer bricks of all things! We know that from archaeology. Designer bricks. He’s proud. He’s puffed up. Aren’t most people that achieve high office proud and puffed up?

And notice verse 31: “The words were still on his lips when a voice came from heaven, ‘This is what is decreed for you, King Nebuchadnezzar: Your royal authority has been taken from you. You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.’”

Verse 33: “Immediately what had been said about Nebuchadnezzar was fulfilled.”

Think of the dignity. You know, pomp and circumstance are what leaders want. They want special clothes for themselves. They want special titles. They want crowns and this and all kinds of stuff. Why? Because the pomp and circumstance make them very impressive to stupid people. You’ve got to remember this, whether it’s King Charles III, or B. R. Hughes, or Bob Vincent, we put our pants on one leg at a time. And when we are left to ourselves, we can go into whatever happens here.

And so, notice how it’s said here that, “He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle.”

Do you know that King George III, the one of the American War for Independence fame, evidently had quite a mental issue, and what did they do? What does the royal family do when His Highness is not all there? They make sure that he is hidden away, still in power, but hidden away.

So, he’s protected and grazing by himself. Look at it: “He was driven away from people and ate grass like cattle. His body was drenched with the dew of heaven until his hair grew like the feathers of an eagle and his nails like the claws of a bird.” Wow! How are the mighty fallen! What a picture! What a picture when God allows a human being to suffer the consequences of his own pride, because your sanity and my sanity are held in the hands of God,

and he can take your sanity or my sanity away in a moment of time. And he can do that for Joe Biden, Kamala Harris, the governor of Texas. He can do it in a moment of time. He can do it to Vladimir Putin or to Mr. Zelenskyy. He can do it to anyone anytime.

Now notice what happens in verse 34: “At the end of that time, I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my sanity was restored. Then I praised the Most High; I honored and glorified him who lives forever.”

Look at what his confession is: “His dominion is an eternal dominion; his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’”

Verse 36: “At the same time that my sanity was restored, my honor and splendor were returned to me for the glory of my kingdom. My advisers and nobles sought me out, and I was restored to my throne and became even greater than before.”

Look at verse 37. I think this is a confession of a born-again man: “Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and glorify the King of heaven, because everything he does is right, and all his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.”

Think about this with me if you will. Think about it. When you meet a person, how do you look at that person? I believe that 1 Timothy 2:1-7 are designed to teach us that when we approach people, we should assume they are elect.

Is everyone elect? Oh no, that’s very plain that they’re not, but God wants us to think of everybody we meet as elect. He wants us even to think of Donald Trump or even of Joe Biden as elect. Why?

How will you pray, how will you pray, if you think that they are reprobated to hell? You’re not going to pray for them.

“I want the men in every place to lift up holy hands without wrath or doubting” (1 Timothy 2:8). I want you to pray for Joe Biden today. I want you to pray for the election. Why? Because your dignity and your peace depend on who’s in power.

There’s another question, there’s another issue, and the most important thing is this: No matter what somebody’s done to you, no matter how they’ve hurt

you, no matter how they've caused you to go bankrupt, or what have you, you need to look at them as if they are elect.

What is our stance as we view our neighbors, as we meet them, as we look at political leaders, where we might want to pull out our AR15 and shoot the TV? What is our approach?

Instead of anger and wrath and rage, we need to lift up holy hands without anger and wrath, without dispute and doubt. We need to view those politicians, including Vladimir Putin and Joe Biden, including Zelenskyy and Donald Trump, we need to view Chairman Xi, we need to view them as God's elect.

Of course, according to 1 Corinthians 1, not many of them are, but what is the stance that we're to have to people? That's what 1st Timothy's about, it's a charitable disposition to other people, and it's taking the worst tyrants in history and saying, "Nebuchadnezzar—are you kidding me—Nebuchadnezzar, I think I'll meet in heaven. You mean that tyrant, that wicked man, that evil man, that man who sentenced Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to the fiery furnace, you mean, Bob, you believe that you will meet him in heaven?"

Yes, I do. Look at that confession of faith. And what I want to say to you: Never underestimate the power of prayer. Your prayers change the world, because your prayers can change the heart of the most wicked person on earth.

View that person with the judgment of charity. View that person as elect **by a judgment of charity** and pray for that person. The Lord knows, world leaders need our prayers, because there isn't a world leader who's been in power very long who doesn't have innocent blood on his hands.

What do they do with that innocent blood? Most people's tendency is to harden their hearts and to pretend they haven't sinned. "Oh, everybody does it." And that's what David did, of course, when he had Bathsheba's husband murdered. He said, "The sword devours this one and that one. Don't let it bother you" (2 Samuel 11:25).

Politicians need to face their bloody hands, covered with innocent human blood—and here is the great beauty as we think about the Reformation, October 31, 1517, that "one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Timothy 2:5)—he welcomes everybody. Pray for people. Pray with an attitude of love.

And yet one last word I have. In the Psalms we have what are called imprecatory Psalms, curse Psalms.

How should we sing those Psalms between the first coming and second coming of Christ?

Do you know how you sing them? You sing them the way Jesus would sing them. How did Jesus sing those Psalms? As Jesus was dying, he says, “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

Now is this great time of opportunity, where all men everywhere may be saved, including tyrants and despots. So, when you sing the imprecatory Psalms, sing them as a Christian, because the time will come when the Lord returns that we will sing them with greater ferocity and vengeance than anyone in the Old Testament ever sang them.

How do you face the people you don't like? Face them with a humble heart and realize that God will do absolutely anything to bring the proud down, so that they will seek his face and be spared the eternal torment of hell.

May we pray.

Lord, we pray that you would take this message with all of the handicap in speech, we pray that you will take it, and you will use it in our lives. Give us, Lord, when we're prone to anger—I confess I am, Lord—when we are prone to being upset—I confess I do get upset—when we're prone to doubt and despair and being an utter pessimist, Lord, would you grant us the ability, whether we are males or females, to lift up holy hands, to intercede and to pray, and when we do that, Lord, to rest in the assurance that Jesus is on our side, and his good purpose is going to be fulfilled as we follow him. In Jesus' name. Amen.