

1st Timothy 2: 1-4; “The Great Desire of God”, Sermon # 13 in the series – “To Honor God in the church”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on July 20th, 2014, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

Last week I began to introduce to your thinking, that among the duties that we are called to in the Church of Jesus Christ, that prayer is of the first importance. The guarding of sound doctrine must be done prayerfully. The preaching of the gospel must be done prayerfully. The establishment of godliness in the living of a quiet and peaceable life comes through our learning to pray for all men; and especially those in authority, who make either wise or unwise decisions which affect our lives. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; that you and I might pray, as believers in Jesus Christ, to live quiet and peaceable lives, and to cultivate reverence and godliness. But God would have us to pray for all men, as it says here in verse 1, because He desires (or He would have) all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. This afternoon I would have us to consider the great desire of God, and to ask ourselves this question: If God’s desire is that all men be saved and come the knowledge of the truth, is it also my desire? And will you commit yourself to pray for the salvation of all kinds of people who may be very different from you, both culturally and socially? This is a duty of the first importance in God’s eyes.

1st of all – Let’s consider that God is sovereign in His desires.

Our God is a God who is fully in control of what He thinks, and what He wills, and what He desires. I am aware of the fact that it may be hard for us who believe in the doctrines of grace, to conceive of God as having desires at all. For God is a God who is described for us in the Bible as being Impassible. His being Impassible is that attribute of His glorious being which, because of His infinite perfection in wisdom, and knowledge, and power, means that He is unchangeable in regard to all that He has purposed to do in time and space. He does not have anything related to sinful human passions or feelings about the things which we as men have passions and feelings about. No purpose of His can be thwarted. All of His works are known by Him from the foundation of the world. He cannot change in His purposes, and as our Confession says in Chapter 2, Paragraph 1, He does not have “parts or passions” as man His creature has. Therefore, in this exalted sense that we are speaking of, we should worship Him and adore Him that He is not like this in His essential Being. Nothing moves and nothing harms Him. He is perfectly self-sufficient and He intrinsically needs nothing from us to cause Him to be satisfied or happy. He is most blessed forever, as Paul tells us in Romans 9: 5. To a person who knows their Bible well, and who believes in the sovereignty of God, when we hear that God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth”, it almost seems to imply that there are certain things which He purposes which He cannot accomplish, and we know that this cannot be so. “He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, no one can restrain His hand or say to Him, “What have you done?” (Daniel 4: 35) The King James translation says in the verse that we are studying this afternoon: “Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” Which is it? Is it that God desires all men to be saved? Or is it that He will have all men to be saved? I would say that it is both. It is God’s will of desire that all men be saved. This is not to be confused with His decretive will of election in the counsels of God which took place in eternity past. Rather it is to be understood of God’s goodwill toward all mankind in general, in the gospel of His dear Son.

God is sovereign over His own desires. I think that it will be good to establish this fact. Turn with me over to Job 23: 13. “But He is unique, and who can make Him change?” “And whatever His soul desires, that He does.” “For He performs what is appointed for me, and many such things are with Him.” According to these verses God is uniquely different from men in that no man can make Him change; whatever He desires, that He does. God has desires, but they are

God-like desires which are infinitely above man's ability to conceive of how great they are. And those desires are not affected by what men are doing or thinking, to the point that their thoughts or actions make God change. Notice the link between whatever God's soul desires, and whatever is appointed for me. His desire is to do all that He has purposed in relation to me. Now, to follow this up, I want you to turn with me over to Isaiah 46: 3, 4, and 9-11. "Listen to Me, O house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, who have been upheld by Me from birth, who have been carried from the womb: even to your old age, I am He, and even to gray hairs I will carry you!" "I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and deliver you." Verse 9 – "Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure, calling a bird of prey from the east, the man who executes My counsel, from a far country.'" "Indeed I have spoken it; I also will bring it to pass." "I have purposed it; I will also do it." I want you to take notice of the fact that God's pleasure is His desire (in the context here) to uphold the remnant of the house of Israel and to execute justice and judgment through the man who executes His counsel. This would be Cyrus the Persian. He would bring him from a far country do "all His pleasure"; His pleasure is His desire, and His desire is His will in relation to His purpose. I like what Joseph Caryl says in his commentary on Job 23: 13. He says: "We desire only those things which are very pleasing, and those things which are most pleasing to us, are, to us, very desirable." "The desire of man is love in motion, as his joy is love at rest." "But in God desire and joy are not distinguishable, in Him there is no motion, all is rest." "What His soul desires, even that He does." This, my beloved brethren is a very small overview of the Impassibility of God.

But 2nd – Let us consider that God conveys His desire to us; His Church.

(verses 3 and 4)

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." God's desire, it says here very plainly, is that all men would be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." It is obvious that this does not happen; that all men shall actually be saved. It has not happened with the will of a decree, and so this declaration of His will must be His telling us His good pleasure in relation to our responsibility to pray and to spread the gospel. It is His will of actual desire in relation to each of us who believe, preaching the gospel to all men, and sharing the truth of the Word with all men. I do not believe that any of us should ever doubt that God will save all of His elect people. There is never any doubt of this at all, in God's holy mind. All of the eternal counsel of God's holy purpose to save each one whom He has predestined to eternal life, will most certainly be accomplished. All the elect are in the Father's hand, and no one is able to snatch them out of His hand, for the Father is greater than all, says Jesus in John 10: 28. But what is not always seen and understood by Christians, is their own responsibility in relation to both the elect and the non-elect. It is God's desire, God is saying here, that the gospel is to be preached to every creature. This is His will, both of desire, and of command. Mark 16: 15 says – "And Jesus said to them, 'Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.'" I hope that you can see that this is His mandate for the Apostles, and through their writings, and through their example to all the nations. And it is His desire and His mandate for all believers down through the Church age, even until the end of the world. Matthew 28: 20.

If we are a true Christian we have the desire to do His will. But we are not sovereign over our desires, as God is. We may not at all understand the important part that we have to play, in the great scheme of things, in prayer and in sharing the gospel with people around us. And even when we do, we may not be convinced to do any regular evangelism, simply because we believe that God is sovereign. I think that this is a tremendous mistake on the part of some Calvinists. It is kind of like John Ryland Sr.'s comment to William Carey when Carey had told others that

missions ought to be undertaken to the heathen nations. I found this account of it on-line. "Before the end of 1786, Mr. Carey, accompanied by another minister of the same age and standing with himself, went to a ministers' meeting at Northampton." "Toward the close of the evening, when the public services were ended, and the company engaged in a desultory conversation, Mr. Ryland, senior, entered the room, and, with his accustomed freedom, demanded that the two junior ministers, Mr. Carey and his friend, should each propose a question for general discussion." "Mr. Carey pleaded several excuses, but a question was imperiously demanded." "At length he submitted, 'Whether the command given to the apostles to "teach all nations," was not obligatory on all succeeding ministers to the end of the world, seeing that the accompanying promise was of equal extent?" "This is the first time Carey had ventured to lay bare the burden of his heart in public, though he had frequently urged the subject in private." "As soon as Dr. Ryland could command sufficient composure to reply, he exclaimed, "Young man, sit down; when God is pleased to convert the heathen world, He will do it without your help or mine."

"But a deep impression was made upon the little assembly of Baptist ministers, when the association met at Clipstone in 1791, by a sermon from Fuller on "The Pernicious Influence of Delay in Matters of Religion." "Such solemnity brooded over the congregation that Carey was moved to urge immediate action in behalf of the heathen world. "Such was the effect of his earnestness, that had it not been for Sutcliff's counsels recommending further consideration, a society had then and there been started." "They went far enough, however, to request Carey to publish what he had written on the subject." "Another year's delay brought the opportunity for the pent-up yearnings of years to pour forth." "The occasion was an annual meeting at Nottingham; the preacher, William Carey. He chose the well-known text Isa. 54: 2 and 3, and gave to missions for all time to come the inspiring motto, "Expect great things from God: attempt great things for God." "Let the man, who a half dozen years before, had told Carey to sit down, tell the effect of this new stone in the foundation of modern missions: "If all the people had lifted up their voice and wept," said Dr. Ryland, "as the children of Israel did at Bochim, I should not have wondered at the effect; it would have only seemed proportionate to the cause, so clearly did he prove the criminality of our supineness in the cause of God." "Dr. Carey gave forty-one years of service to India, and lived to see much fruit of his labor." "Besides the first complete translation of the Bible into the Bengali by his hand, and into the Chinese by Dr. Marshman, they printed Scripture portions in forty languages and dialects." "They established a college to train native ministers and Christianize educated Hindus, a medical mission, and a leper hospital, besides at least thirty large mission stations." (End of quote)

This, my friends is God's great desire, that we should see the desire of His great heart, that all men would be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth. If we do not see God's desire, will we have the desire to spread the truth? Will we speak gospel truth to people around us and tell them that they must have Christ? This is a very significant thing to God. He will save His people, but do we realize His will of desire, His heart to seek and to save that which is lost? We must not excuse our negligence or laziness in prayer and witnessing on the grounds that God will save His elect. We must be like Paul in 2nd Timothy 2: 9 and 10 which he says, "I endure all things for the sake of the Elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it—Eternal glory." We must remember that God uses means in the propagation of the truth, and in the salvation of souls, and that means may actually be us speaking to others, and sharing the gospel with them. Why not let us resolve, as a congregation, to bring unsaved people whom we come into contact with, before the throne of grace? We do not know God's purpose. But we do know our responsibility.

I can remember 25 years ago or more, when I first came into the Reformed Baptist movement of churches, that there was an idea going around in some of our churches that we

should not pray for the salvation of particular people we were concerned for; that there was no Biblical command, or warrant for us to do so. We should pray for the opportunity to share the gospel, but that since we did not know whether they were elect, that we dare not ask God to save them. I think that this kind of thinking is exactly what Paul is trying to refute in these verses. God is going to save people of all sorts from every tribe, tongue, people, and language, and we do not know who they are. So he tells us God's will of command, and His will of desire. Prayer is to be made for all men.

And 3rd – This great desire in the heart of God for the salvation of men, women, and children is not to be denied, or to be thought inconsistent logically with the doctrine of predestination.

It says in the book of Ephesians, Chapter 1 and the 3rd verse – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” And in verse 11, he says: “In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will.” You can see from these verses that God has ordered all things after the counsel of His decretive will; according to His predestinating purpose. It says here, that this includes the predestination of all of His elect people to adoption as sons, according to the good pleasure of His will. The good pleasure of God's will, also includes His conveying of His will of desire to His people to labor for the salvation of all men generally, because He is full of goodness, kindness, and love, having given us His Son. He would have us to tell others of the great supper of salvation that He has prepared for all those who will come. Think about how these verses read in Luke 11: 16-23. “Then Jesus said.... “A certain man gave a great supper and invited many, and sent his servant at supper time to say to those who were in invited, ‘Come, for all things are now ready.’ “But they all with one accord began to make excuses.” “The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go and see it.’ “I ask you to have me excused.” “And another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to test them.’ “I ask you to have me excused.” “Still another said, ‘I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come.’ “So that servant came and reported these things to his master.” “Then the master of the house, being angry, said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind.’ “And the servant said, ‘Master, it is done as you commanded, and still there is room.’ “Then the master said to the servant, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.’ This is not the description of an unfeeling, remote God, who simply chooses whom He wants to be saved and then does nothing to show that He cares for the lost. No, God may be angry when people will make their excuses of why they cannot come to the feast that He has prepared. But let us see from this parable that there will be others who will be persuaded. And even the poor, the maimed, the halt and the blind, are people who we can pray for, and speak to them, and by God's grace, compel them to come in. This is what we should pray for. This is why we preach to all men. For it is God's great desire, His will, that they come to Christ.