

Worship to Embrace a World

Thomas Robinson, *Life Together in a Difficult World 2*, February 9, 2020

1 Timothy 2:1-7

¹ I'm urging, therefore, as first of all, that **entreaties, prayers, petitions, thanksgivings** be made on behalf of **all people**,
² on behalf of **emperors** and all who are in preeminent positions, in order that we may lead a **tranquil and quiet life**, in all devotion to God and dignity.

³ This is excellent and welcome in the presence of **God our Deliverer**,
⁴ who desires that **all humans be delivered** and come to a **recognition of truth**.

⁵ For **God is One**,

One also as **mediator** for God and humans, as a **human, Anointed King Jesus**, ⁶ the one who **gave himself** as a **redemption from slavery** on behalf of everyone.

This is the **testimony** to be given at proper times, ⁷ for which I was appointed a proclaimer and an apostle. It's truth I tell – I don't lie – as a **teacher** of nations in **faith and truth**.

1 Timothy 1:3-5

³ Just as I urged you, remain in Ephesus, ... so that you can instruct certain people not ... ⁴ to devote their attention to myths and genealogies without end, which create speculations rather than God's way of doing things that's based on faith. ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is a love that's from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a faith without hypocrisy.

Titus 3:1-7

¹ Remind them to be submissive to ruling systems, to authorities, to be obedient, to be prepared for every good work, ² to slander no one, to avoid any contention, to be gentle, and to show all gentleness toward all people.

³ For we ourselves were once unthinking, disobedient, wandering astray, serving as slaves to various desires and pleasures, living life in malice and envy, hated and hating one another.

⁴ But when the kindness and love for humanity of God our Deliverer shone forth, ⁵ he delivered us not on the basis of works that we did to manifest righteousness, but according to his mercy, through a washing of rebirth and a renewal of Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Anointed King, our Savior, ⁷ so that since we have been set right by his grace we may become heirs in hope for Life of the age to come.

Matthew 5:43-48

⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'

⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute (oppress) you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven.

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

⁴ We know that an idol is nothing in the world and that no one is God except one. ⁵ For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many gods and many lords. ⁶ But for us One God, the Father from whom are all things and we to him, and One Lord, Jesus the Anointed King through whom are all things and we through him.

Being True to the Gospel under Powerful Threats.

Reading scripture challenges our imagination and empathy, to put ourselves back in the situation of the writer and readers and hear the words as they heard them. Scripture is more than that, but it begins there. This text can seem bland or obsequious when read from a comfortable setting in modern times. But it is a text that affirms God's heart expressed in worship in a time of vast uncertainty and threat, both from powers and divergent teaching. Put yourself in Ephesus, Roman provincial capital, about 3 years after Nero killed Christians in Rome after a great fire. [Tacitus] Things had been hard, but now the empire has given permission to denounce Christians and execute them. Some want to turn inward to become a group that doesn't engage the world but focuses on special knowledge, speculation, and myth. Paul challenges Timothy to guide the community in prayer precisely for their fiercest enemies.

What does it mean to Pray for All People and for the Emperor?

Rome's empire and politics were highly stratified. Christian communities had no ordinary power. They were too different to be incorporated into Rome's "tolerant" paganism. But they could have railed against it. Instead, Paul draws on Jesus' teaching to urge God's inclusive vision. The emperor is not God but simply one of "all people" who are the focus of God's love. Praying for the emperor is not approving of him, but saying that he's responsible under God. The prayer is for an unthreatened life that allows the community to bring God's desire for all people to greater fulfillment. Paul knows how much damage persecution can do. He wants no withdrawn, isolated community, but simply to work below the radar of threatening powers. It's there that the non-elite, inclusive community can embody God's purpose with dignity.

From Knowing God to Living under the Empire

Though the community knows that they are vulnerable and outside the structures of power, they also know the One God who relativizes even the most obvious claims to human rule. The one God loves all humans –the emperor is just one – and is transforming people by his wholly counter-intuitive, counter-cultural intervention. God is Simple, One and Profound. Only God can also be mediator between God's realm and that of creatures. He has done that in Jesus who gave himself as Human and God to deliver humans from their enslavement. Both withdrawal into isolation and trembling before power fall away. A realization of God's truth at the center is "Faith" – wholehearted commitment to that God and the world he loves.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44. A Roman Senator and Governor of Asia (c. 115) on the fire at Rome under Nero in ad 64

But all Nero's efforts, all the emperor's lavish gifts and sacrifices to the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the fire in Rome was the result of his order. Thus, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class of people hated for their abominations [cannibalism?], who were called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, was executed during the reign of Tiberius by one of our governors, Pontius Pilatus, but his mischievous superstition, stopped for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful ... become popular.

Accordingly, they first arrested all who admitted that they were guilty (of being Christians), and then, from their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much for burning the city, as for hatred of humanity. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were condemned to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle ... while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer. As a result, even for criminals who deserved extreme punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

Scriptures 1 Tm 2:1-7 Worship to Embrace a World

Titus 3:1-7

¹ Ὑπομίμησθε αὐτοὺς ἀρχαῖς ἐξουσίαις ὑποτάσσεσθαι, πειθαρχεῖν, πρὸς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθὸν ἐτοίμους εἶναι, ² μηδένα βλασφημεῖν, ἀμάχους εἶναι, ἐπικεικείς, πᾶσαν ἐνδεικνυμένους πραύτητα πρὸς πάντας ἀνθρώπους. ³ Ἡμεῖς γάρ ποτε καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀνόητοι, ἀπειθεῖς, πλανώμενοι, δουλεύοντες ἐπιθυμίαις καὶ ἡδοναῖς ποικίλαις, ἐν κακίᾳ καὶ φθόνῳ διάγοντες, στυγητοί, μισοῦντες ἀλλήλους. ⁴ ὅτε δὲ ἡ χρηστότης καὶ ἡ φιλανθρωπία ἐπεφάνη τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν θεοῦ, ⁵ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων τῶν ἐν δικαιοσύνῃ ἃ ἐποιήσαμεν ἡμεῖς ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος ἔσωσεν ἡμᾶς διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας καὶ ἀνακαινώσεως πνεύματος ἁγίου, ⁶ οὗ ἐξέχεεν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς πλουσίως διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν, ⁷ ἵνα δικαιοθέντες τῇ ἐκείνου χάριτι κληρονόμοι γενηθῶμεν κατ' ἐλπίδα ζωῆς αἰωνίου.

ESV Titus 3:1-7

¹ Remind them to be submissive to ruling systems, to authorities, to be obedient, to be prepared for every good work, ² to slander no one, to avoid any contention, to be gentle, and to show all gentleness toward all people. ³ For we ourselves were once unthinking, disobedient, wandering astray, serving as slaves to various desires and pleasures, living life in malice and envy, hated and hating one another. ⁴ But when the kindness and love for humanity of God our Deliverer shone forth, ⁵ he delivered us not on the basis of works to manifest righteousness that we did but according to his mercy, through a washing of rebirth and a renewal of Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Anointed King, our Savior, ⁷ so that since we have been set right by his grace we may become heirs hoping for Life of the age to come.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-4

¹ Διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι ² καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν ³ τὸ μηδένα σαίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις. αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα. ⁴ καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν, προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ οἶδατε.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 3:1-4

¹ Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.

Tacitus, Annals 15.44 Roman Governor of Asia (Ephesus) in about a.d. 115.

But all Nero's efforts, all the emperor's lavish gifts and sacrifices to the gods, did not banish the sinister belief that the fire in Rome was the result of his order. Thus, to get rid of the report, Nero

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(In Latin: *Sed non ope humana, non largitionibus principis aut deum placamentis decedebat infamia, quin iussum incendium crederetur. ergo abolendo rumori Nero subdidit reos et quaesitissimis poenis adfecit, quos per flagitia invisos vulgus Chrestianos appellabat. auctor nominis eius Christus Tiberio imperitante per procuratorem Pontium Pilatum supplicio adfectus erat; repressaque in praesens exitiabilis superstitio rursus erumpebat, non modo per Iudaeam, originem eius mali, sed per urbem etiam, quo cuncta undique atrocita aut pudenda confluunt celebranturque. igitur primum correpti qui fatebantur, deinde indicio eorum multitudo ingens haud proinde in crimine incendii quam odio humani generis convicti sunt.*^[11])

Tacitus then describes the torture of Christians:

1 Corinthians 8:4-6

⁴We know that an idol is nothing in the world and that no one is God except one. ⁵For even if there are so-called gods whether in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many gods and many lords. ⁶But for us One God, the Father from whom are all things and we to him, and one Lord Jesus Anointed King through whom are all things and we through him.