***Praying for Nero***

“1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. 3 This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, 4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” 1 Timothy 2:1-4 ESV

Dear Church Family,
 On Wednesday evenings at 6 PM, we have a Bible study and prayer meeting here at the church. You are invited (free admission). As I write this on Wednesday morning, this passage from
 1 Timothy is on my mind, perhaps because of the Georgia Senate race, or other recent races.

In Paul’s day, as today, political leadership played a direct and controlling part in daily life. Paul’s reference to “kings” would include the emperor. Nero would have been emperor at the time (A.D. 54-68). He would burn Christians alive to light his garden parties. The Roman historian, Tacitus, commented, “it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man’s cruelty, that they (Christians) were being destroyed.”

This raises an interesting issue. Paul strings together a group of overlapping words in verse 1—supplications, prayers, intercessions, thanksgiving—and instructs Timothy to pray with thanksgiving for Nero (along with all people). I don’t really think we need to press this to the point where they were supposed to be thankful that Nero was torturing Christians, but we should recognize that political leaders are important in maintaining control. We are certainly supposed to pray for them—even the ones we don’t really like or agree with.

The reason Paul gives for this praying is especially instructive. Praying for them helps ensure that we can live peacefully, and can serve God with dignified lives. Paul saw the value of Christians living lives that did not bring criticism on the people of God (see 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 for the same idea). Such living might even facilitate the spread of the gospel.

In fact, this motivation is made explicit in verses 3-4. Some scholars believe Timothy was fighting an “exclusive” mindset in Ephesus. As a result, they only prayed for “their kind.” Against this, Paul urges Timothy to teach that God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Verses 5-7 go on to affirm that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humans. A few decades before this letter was written, the greatest danger on the high seas was piracy. Because of the work of Roman leadership, that danger had greatly diminished, which would make it easier for Paul to travel to distant lands with the gospel.

To summarize Paul’s point (and mine): we should pray for our leaders—maybe especially the ones with whom we disagree—because their leadership has an impact on our ability to share the message of salvation in Jesus. That message is the way to salvation for all people.

God bless,

***Pastor Kevin***