

## **Sermon Title: Called to Influence Government**

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**Bible Readings:** Isaiah 59:12-16 & 1 Tim 2:1-4

### **Introduction**

It is a privilege to bring God's Word to you in these challenging times. You may think that I am referring to the corona virus crisis. But brothers and sisters, even before the corona virus came upon us, we were living in troubled times.

Suicide rates are at record levels

Children in our state schools are being taught that only they know whether they are a boy or a girl – that no one can tell them. They have to decide that for themselves. The result: We have increasing numbers of children who are gender confused.

In our schools children are indoctrinated with transgender ideology and they are taught that sodomy is a healthy way of expressing sexuality.

Approximately 1/3 of internet down loads and traffic is pornography.

Religious Freedom is increasingly under threat:

You would know the story of Israel Folau posting a paraphrased Bible verse on Instagram, which resulted in Rugby Australia terminating his contract because he posted a paraphrase of a Bible verse on his Instagram.

You probably have not heard of the 60 or so other cases that the Human Rights Law Alliance, a legal firm set up by the Australian Christian Lobby to provide specialised legal advice to Christians being persecuted for simply expressing a Christian view. Some have been sacked. Others had their professional accreditation withdrawn. The latest is Dr Jereth Kok. He is a GP who has never had any complaints lodged against him by patients. But an anonymous complaint about a social media post he has put up which expresses Christian sentiments has resulted in his registration being cancelled, so he can not earn a living.

The very foundations that have made Australia the country that so many people want to migrate to, are increasingly being removed.

We are living in days where truth and reality have to yield to false ideologies.....

It reminds me of the terrible situation that Judah found itself in that the Prophet Isaiah writes about in Is 59:12-16.

### **Read Isaiah 59:12-16**

That sound so much like our society today! But how should we respond to this kind of situation?

Thankfully the Bible does not keep us guessing: 1 Tim 2:1-4 gives us some pointers:

Paul calls on Timothy as a pastor to **publicly pray** for *kings and all those in authority* v2

#### **1. The Call to Pray for Government**

*Kings and those in authority* are simply those who govern over us.

In those days, ordinary citizens, and certainly persecuted Christians had no say whatever in who would rule over them.

The only way they could influence the government was to call on the sovereign God of heaven and earth, and plead with Him, to bring about a change in attitude in the hearts and minds of those who ruled over them to lessen the horrific persecution they were suffering.

In those days, prayer was *the only* means available to believers to influence governments. Prayer, & more prayer! And still more

prayer! Pleading with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords to bring about change.

You could not write to your local MP, or ring up talk back radio and have a whinge, or get your story on a current affairs TV program, or lobby for a Royal Commission into the treatment of Christians at the hands of the Roman authorities. Neither could you organise a demonstration outside parliament demanding freedom!

The question we need to ask ourselves is: *What does this text call us to do in 2020, living in a nation where the people effectively elect the king and those in authority.*

### **Called to pray**

The text is clear: When believers gather for worship, they are called to pray for the governing authorities. It is not presented as something that is good to do if there is nothing else to put on the list of prayer points: Paul begins our text with the word *urge*. The older translations use “exhort”.

So this is something that is **not presented as an optional extra** to include in a worship service if you wanted to. It is a command that **public prayer in our worship services must include prayer for those in authority.**

Such public prayers serve to not only call on God to act, but also serve to remind the congregation that our God is Sovereign – and is able to change the heart and attitude of rulers.

When Paul wrote this to Timothy, **the early church was suffering severe** persecution. The Roman authorities tolerated any religion as long as its adherents also worshipped the Roman Emperor. And Christian's refused. That put them at odds with the authorities and made them the target of persecution.

If you know history, in 313AD there was a change in attitude towards Christianity by the Roman authorities. It was added to the list of tolerated religions. Then in 380 AD it became the official religion of the Roman Empire. You may well ask: What drove this change? The prayers and pleadings of His faithful people!

God has not changed. He still hears the prayers of His people. If we plead in prayer for relief from tyrannical rulers, do not be surprised if God acts. Russian Christians thought they would have to live out their days under the persecution of the atheistic Marxist state of USSR. They prayed for freedom. And yet when communist rule collapsed, and they gained great freedom, they were so surprised! Believers should not have been surprised, because our God is still very much able to influence the actions of rulers through prayer.

Be they perverted and evil or be they humble and wise, we are to pray for them.

While this passage clearly calls us to pray, it indirectly also calls us to *go beyond praying*:

## **Beyond Prayer**

The early church used every means available to them to influence Government. Prayer. It was the only means they had to influence Government!

Today we have additional means available to us to influence Government.

By God's providence we live in a democracy, which means that we have the God given responsibility of choosing those who will be the *kings and all those in authority*.

**Every time you vote at a local, state or federal election, you are helping to decide who will be governing over us.** Your choice of candidates – who you vote for – will shape the nature of our society. And the shape of society is really important, as we see when we look at .....

**Paul's motivation in urging prayers for those in authority.**

It is spelt out in our text:

*That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness*

In times of good government, where there is law and order along with freedom, the believer is enabled to live the Christian life unhindered.

The Greek words used, convey the sense of *tranquillity, and peace*.

If believers can lead a tranquil life – that is the ideal setting in which to pass the faith on to our children and to share the gospel with those who as yet do not believe.

And of course it is the best environment in which the believer can devote themselves to the Word and the fellowship of believers.

Or put it another way: *When a land is at peace and well governed, the gospel can flourish.*

That is why Paul urges prayer for those who govern – he wants them to live in a situation where **the gospel can flourish!**

Paul knew first-hand the difficulties persecution created for the gospel.

It made many people fearful to accept Jesus Christ as their Saviour. Becoming a Christian meant you could lose your job, you could be a social outcast.

You only need to ask the **Syrian Christian refugees** who survived the rule and persecution of ISIS and settled in Australia, to find out just how much they love living a peaceful and tranquil life in Australia.

At the time that Paul wrote this passage, he urged Timothy to use the **means** they had available to them to influence Govt.

So today, we too should **use the means available** to us to influence government so that we can live quiet and peaceful lives and the spread of the gospel can occur unhindered.

Every time we pray the **Lord's prayer**, we say:

*Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

If we pray that God's will be done on earth, then we also need to do what we can to make that a reality.

By prayer **and choosing the right people to govern over us**, and seeking to influence others to make the right choices when it comes to voting at elections, we can help shape who will govern us.

Sadly many Christians don't seriously engage in that process at all.

**Tragically, many Christians** almost wear it as a badge of honour to say that they don't involve themselves in politics.

Thankfully, in the past, many Christians did not succumb to that lie.

Instead – they used the means that a growing democratic system of Government afforded them.

One man's name that springs to mind is **William Wilberforce (1759-1833)**

When he was elected to parliament at the age of 21, he was a nominal Christian.

He was converted a few years later and gathered around himself other believers and they prayed regularly and did their utmost to make sure that legislation that passed parliament reflected Christian values.

They mockingly became known as the Clapham St sect – because they met in a little hall in Clapham St, near the parliament for prayer and planning their strategy.

They were committed to prayer and to seeking to have government embrace Christian truths, and so have laws shaped by the Word of God. And they had a huge impact. Transformed people have the tendency to transform society!

**Coming to faith in Christ**, brings about a very radical change in our lives – so radical in fact that Jesus calls it **being born again**.

Everything changes!

But we live in a “fallen creation”, where God is not given His rightful place. And in our day, as fewer and fewer people are committed to the truth of God’s Word, and hence to Kingdom values, our culture is increasingly in opposition to the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we grasp that we were born in sin, unable in our own strength to turn to God, that we deserved His just judgment, but that Christ took that judgment at Calvary for us, and now declares us righteous, and not only says that about us, but actually makes it happen through the work of the Holy Spirit, and that now our lives are able to bear fruit for God.

**These truths can NOT leave you indifferent!**

Knowledge of those truths changes **you for life now and for eternity**.

If you embrace the gospel, then you start to live by the values of God’s Kingdom. We become **salt and light** in the world.

We are called to be God’s agents for transformation in this world.

Our faith causes us to engage, because we want our community to have the benefit of living by the values of God's Word.

In Australia we often hear people says that “*Religion and politics don't mix*”. But that is a lie of Satan. **The** fact is they always mix. Always have done and always will.

For Wilberforce: the fact that all humans are made in the image of God, meant that no one had the right to 'own' another person and treat them like a horse or a bullock, or a beast of burden. Hence he began the fight to end slavery. **His religion shaped his politics.** Religion and politics sure mixed for Wilberforce and his mates.

As his faith grew, the Word of God was increasingly shaping his world view.

The common wisdom of the day was that slavery is an economic necessity, and that if slavery were abolished the whole British Empire would collapse. Nearly everyone thought him crazy and deluded:

He gave speech after speech pointing out that in light of the fact that every human being is made in the image of God, no one had the right to own another human being. The conviction of the truth of Scripture's teaching that every human being is made in the image of God kept him going throughout those long, difficult years. That biblical truth motivated them to bring about prison reforms, mental health reforms and more.

Through prayer and political campaigning, he managed after 46 years to have slavery abolished.

The Britain that Wilberforce grew up in was a very cruel place. Animal cruelty was rife – the organisation that we know today as the RSPCA was founded by Wilberforce and his Clapham St Sect mates to bring about change in that space, as he believed that animals were created by God and that cruelty was contrary to God's purpose for creation. His faith shaped his politics.

Many historians credit Wilberforce and John Wesley and George Whitefield with the transformation of British culture, which spared Britain the kind of trauma that France endured with the French Revolution.

Whatever its faults, 19<sup>th</sup> century British public life became famous for its emphasis on character, morals, and justice and the British business world, famous for integrity. In those days it was said that British business man's handshake was of more value than a written contract from a continental European business man. The values of the Kingdom came to be seen as the ideal that everyone should aspire to.

And through his personal witness, many came to a living faith in Christ.

There are many in our land who worship false gods, who hate the things of God with a passion, and who are seeking to influence those who govern us to make it harder and harder to live the Christian life, and to proclaim the gospel.

That places us in the midst of a mighty battle today

We see that hostility in **academia**, in our **educational institutions**, in our **media** and in the **corridors of power**.

It seems everything is tolerated, except Christianity.

Tragically, many believers don't seem to be too concerned about it.

Or at least not concerned enough to think about what God might be calling them to prayer and action to stem the tide of growing persecution and antipathy to the gospel and to Christians.

**Former Justice Michael Kirby**, for example, has repeatedly suggested that anyone who adheres to "literalist" readings of "very ancient texts, like the Bible" are wrong in their interpretation, ignorant, irrational, hateful and harmful to others. The attribution of mental illness is often inferred by his language (he frequently comments that such people have "demons" or "hobgoblins" in their heads) but was made explicit in his 2000 address to the Australia and New Zealand Association of Psychiatry, where he stated that, in future, people of this sort "**may require psychological and psychiatric attention**".

As believers in Jesus Christ, who know His transforming grace in our own lives, we are salt and light. We are called to influence our nation by prayer and influencing those who rule over us in such a way that we can continue to proclaim gospel freely and live our lives openly in obedience to the Word.

The anti-Christian forces have deliberately occupied and engaged in the political sphere, to re-shape our culture and impose their view of the world.

The late Senator Lionel Murphy, who went on to be a High Court Judge in the 1980s said *his motivation for getting involved in politics was to remove the last vestiges of the Judeo Christian ethic from the fabric of our society.*

If things continue the way they are it will be increasingly difficult to live the Christian life in our land and it will be increasingly difficult to preach the gospel.

Many believers just don't see the urgency for prayer and action at this time, because we can do pretty much what we like behind the 4 walls of your churches.

But in Australian society, more and more people are being penalised for living by the values that God's Word sets before us.

Does that mean that we simply need to accept the anti-Christian rules that governing authorities are increasingly imposing on us?

In the days when Paul wrote these words to Timothy, the Roman empire was **not exactly friendly to Christians**. Emperor **Nero** was an evil man, and blamed everything that went wrong on the Christians, and so that gave him an excuse for launching **terrible persecution** against the Christians.

**Our Response**

It was in that context that Paul urges Timothy to always pray publicly for those who govern over them, so that they would have freedom to proclaim the gospel because it is God's desire that all men come to the knowledge of the truth.

We are to pray this not so that we can lead a comfortable life.

We are to pray and act so that **the gospel can continue to flourish.**

The world needs to hear the gospel!

It alone has the power to transform people.

So what does our text call us to:

It calls us to pray for those who are in authority – your MPs, your local councillors, and the high level bureaucrats. Our text urges us to pray and work that those in authority will ensure the law gives the freedom to live the Christian life and proclaim the gospel.

**Young people**, when you are deciding which course to do at University, don't ask how much will I earn but rather ask: How much opportunity will this job give me to be a Christian influence on how we are governed?

A career in media gives you the opportunity to have immense influence on how people think, because most people's ideas are shaped by the popular media.

**University lecturers** – especially in the area of teacher training – they train teachers who in turn impart their values and ideas to children.

Be a **teacher** – and think carefully about what you are taught at university. Don't swallow what they teach you hook, line and sinker.

If you are able, write letters to the editor, call up talk back radio, write letters to your local MPs. Subscribe to the free Australian Christian Lobby emails that keep you informed of what is going on in our nation.

Involve yourself in the political process.

Throughout history there have been times when Christians have been very influential in shaping their culture.

The impact Wilberforce and his mates had, led to the great Missionary movements of the 1800s which led to many millions around the globe hearing the gospel and being saved.

### **Conclusion:**

As believers in the glorious gospel, we know the joy of being citizens of His Kingdom.

We know the truth of God's Word.

We need to speak truth into the public square and so impact this nation!

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that believers should abdicate the running of our nation to the pagans!

We have the truth, the Word of God as our rule for faith and life.

And Paul tells Timothy that it is our Lord's desire that all men come to a knowledge of the Truth – so let us do all we can – to make that a reality.

**If our nation is to be turned around, it needs to start with us. 2**

**Chron 7:11-16**

*...if my people , who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked way, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.*

We need to repent of not having consistently prayed for those who govern over us.

God may yet be gracious and turn thing around in our nation, that we as God's redeemed people may continue to proclaim the gospel and the truth of God's Word to our nation, and to openly live by the values of God's Word.

Our Lord is honoured when people accept the saving work of Christ and are transformed to live by the values of His Kingdom.

We may live in challenging times. But friends the gospel of Jesus Christ is still the answer that people need to hear and embrace! For it is only as people's hearts and lives are turned to God, that He receives the glory and the honor that is his due. Amen

As our hope is found in Christ, and his accomplishing that which the Father has tasked him with, let's sing *In Christ alone my hope is found*

crisis forced some changes on the way that we live, work and worship, there were things happening in Australian society, that should have been of serious concern to Christians. - especially Christians who want to live by the truth of God's Word, and see the gospel proclaimed freely in our land so that people might come out of darkness into the marvellous light of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even before the corona virus hit us,