

Jesus is... Mediator
1 Tim 2:1-7, 2 Cor 5:16-21

Well brothers and sisters, if you've been here for the past two weeks as we've started this new series on Jesus Is, you'll have heard me mention something about being at our best as followers of Jesus Christ. Specifically, that we're at our best as Christ's disciples when we have a high view of Jesus and a high view of humanity. So, we've dug into the scriptures to learn more about Jesus as God, Jesus as Human, what that means and how that forms our high views.

But we haven't said much about what it means to be at our best as followers of Jesus beyond the willingness and ability to endure life's trials and challenges and to face persecution – in part because these messages are supposed to be about Jesus, not us.

But this morning as we look at what the scriptures say about Jesus as Mediator, in 1 Tim 2:1 we get a partial glimpse of what it means to be at our best... as the Apostle Paul exhorts us, urges us as Jesus' followers to offer *"petitions, prayers,*

intercession and thanksgiving... for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."

Brothers and sisters, its easy to see how followers of Christ are considered to be at their best, when they are able to pray for **all** people – meaning all *kinds* of people. Jesus' followers are at their best when they can pray for kings and rulers in authority who are terrible people, cruel people, godless people, people bent on persecuting Christians. This directly reflects our Lord Jesus' teaching in Matt 5:44 where he says *"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."*

When Paul wrote these exhortations to Pastor Timothy this meant praying for the Roman Emperor Nero, whom history remembers for instigating a vicious and cruel campaign of persecution against the early church... and praying for all the regional rulers of the Empire who carried out this campaign.

Now, we have to admit there was definitely a pragmatic aspect to Paul's instructions to pray for these rulers so they would cease their persecution. Additionally in an Empire the citizens did not have the opportunity to participate in the making of laws and the running of gov't like we do in a democracy.

If the Emperor decreed a law the citizens didn't like – any opposition to it was seen as open rebellion and would bring down punishment to enforce compliance. So, it was important for the early church not to give the rulers any excuse to think they were seditious but in fact demonstrate they were praying for their ruler's success in ruling and for peace.

But, praying for these rulers is more than just pragmatism, it is also the opportunity to be like Christ who prayed as He was crucified *"Father forgive them, they know not what they do."* It is the perfect opportunity to demonstrate the power of Jesus at work in their lives to do something that is not possible for

sinful people to do, but only for forgiven people to do.

"Forgive us as we forgive those who sin against us..."

No easy task brothers and sisters - but its easy to see how living under these cruel political leaders and praying for them would show Jesus' followers at their very best.

In contrast, consider how Jesus' followers are currently relating to our political leaders and getting involved in the political issues of our times... and we can conclude it does not show us at our best in so many ways.

Since 2016 both Canada and the United States have been marked by increasing political unrest and polarization. Issues like immigration, climate change, human sexuality and gender, critical race theory, defund the police, indigenous land claims, freedom of speech, have all become hyper-politicized and are areas which are increasingly being used and leveraged, to move our society and governments away from our Christian heritage and values towards progressive and socialist ideologies instead.

As a result, followers of Jesus are becoming more suspicious and less trusting of our political leaders and gov't institutions and our participation in our democracy has become characterized by disruptive protest, ends-justify-the-means activism, uncritical support of immoral behavior, and a lot of anger, and when gov'ts classified the church as a non-essential service during pandemic lockdowns and it only made matters worse.

And the progressives have noticed this, and they are taking great pleasure in pointing this out and accusing “*conservative Christians*” of acting un-Christlike and making Jesus unattractive, while simultaneously asserting that their progressive perspective is actually more Christlike and appealing.

I recently noticed an advertising campaign going on in the United States right now, called “*He gets us*” maybe you’ve seen it too? Giant billboards with simple statements that tap into politically charged issues saying things like “*Jesus was wrongly judged*” “*Jesus was a refugee*” and so on...

I have to admit that when I first saw this, I was immediately suspicious that this was some sort of progressive stunt to “*rescue Jesus’ PR image*” from all the damage done by the “*angry white evangelicals*” and “*religious right*” and make him more relatable and palatable to American society as the “*progressive Jesus.*”

And when I checked out their web-site, I was thinking my suspicions were correct when I read statements like “*We simply want everyone to understand the authentic Jesus as he’s depicted in the Bible — the Jesus of radical forgiveness, compassion, and love...*” and their topic list starts with the sub-heading #activist where you can find articles and videos with titles like “*four ways Jesus supported women’s equality*” and “*Did Jesus ever get angry?*” and “*Jesus invited everyone to sit at his table*” I was thinking “*oh boy does this ever sound like the progressive agenda trying to reshape Jesus and cast him in the light of their ideology.*”

But I poked around a bit more and I was relieved to discover they disavowed any identification with being left, or right, and

that they considered Jesus to be the Son of God who was resurrected and ascended to Heaven, all good stuff.

I also read some of the articles and was pleased to find they presented a genuine biblical perspective on the topics which they were addressing – there wasn't any bias or agenda being presented.

So, I'm concluding that this is a legitimate attempt to make Jesus interesting and appealing to the kinds of people who define themselves around these kinds of topics and issues.

Now personally I'm not sure I would take this approach of boiling Jesus down to the lowest common denominators of human concerns in order to help people understand what scripture teaches us about Jesus – I started this series off with focusing on Jesus being God...

However, it reminds me of when Jesus' disciples came to him in Luke 9:49 to report they had come across someone who was driving out demons in Jesus' name and they told him to

stop it because he wasn't part of their group. And Jesus responded *"Do not stop him, for whoever is not against you... is for you."*

So, I take the Lord's rebuke on this and say that *"He gets us"* campaign seems to be a good application of Paul's exhortation in 1 Tim 2:1 where we are instructed to make intercession for all kinds of people... people who are progressives, woke, climate activists, or social justice warriors - because as Paul explains in vs. 3-4 *"This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all [kinds] people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth."* All kinds of people!

Even the political leaders that we despise who work to undermine us, because... there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Jesus Christ! And brothers and sisters it is important that we get this.

The universal, indiscriminate spreading of the gospel seed across all kinds of ground in our Lord's parable of the sower, the drag-net gathering in of all kinds of fish in our Lord's

parable of the net, Paul's gospel presentation strategy in Athens using their idolatry with all kinds of altars but especially the altar dedicated to "the unknown god" as a connecting point, and his identification at the end of our passage this morning as the apostle to the Gentiles – including all the instructions to Timothy at the start of it about offering prayers and intercessions and thanksgivings for all kinds of people... all of this indiscriminate inclusivity is because there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind... the man Jesus Christ – Jesus is... mediator.

And when we understand what this means brothers and sisters, we will gladly and eagerly demonstrate that we are at our best by praying for all kinds of people, we will be the right kind of inclusive for the all the right kinds of reasons.

Now before we explore what it means that Jesus is mediator and what qualifies Him to be this mediator, we need to understand why God's people always seem to end up being exclusive and politically divided – its not just our current context with the Christian right and the Christian left...

It goes way back to the divisions between Catholics and Protestants, Christians and Jews, Jews and the early Christians, Jews and Gentiles, the Pharisees against the Sadducees... Jesus disciples against someone else using Jesus' name who was not part of their group.

At the root of all these divisions is the subtle and devious way that our Sinful nature twists God's sovereign grace into qualified merit. It's the old cats and dogs approach right... you chose me, you picked me to be yours, you love me, you take care of me, you protect me... a dog says *"wow you must be God"* but a cat says *"hmmm I must be god!"*

Whenever God shows his grace and mercy to a group of people and does something unmerited and undeserving for them – our sin twists that around to make us think that God chose us for a particular and specific reason.

God sovereignly picks Israel and makes a covenant with them and gives them the law so they can live in obedience and show their gratitude to Him... but by Jesus' time the Jews had

become exclusive, they believed they deserved God's law for their rigorous observance of it while the gentiles and those who did not observe, could not observe it, did not deserve His blessings.

So as the Jews of Jesus' day came to believe in Him as the promised Messiah, and we'll have another sermon Jesus is the messiah later on, it was a huge challenge for them to grasp that God's Messiah also wanted to offer salvation to the Gentiles as well, these people who didn't keep the law like they did and who had been oppressing them since the Babylonian exile...

Then they discover that the Gentiles didn't even have to observe the Law of Moses in the same way that the Jews had... and we'll look at how Jesus was the mediator between the old and new covenants next week.

But this was the challenge for the early church, to overcome their Jewish exclusivity and include the Gentiles – to be able to

share the gospel with those who had oppressed them and persecuted them both as Jews, and now as followers of Jesus. And we still have that same challenge as the church today brothers and sisters, while we would never categorically say that the gospel shouldn't be shared with any particular group of people, practically speaking who do you have trouble genuinely praying for? Who is it easy for you to pray for?

Or when you think about sharing the gospel with people – who are you eager to share it with and who do you pre-judge as probably not receptive or willing to listen to it?

Or maybe there's a particular group of people of whom you'd emphatically say *"y'all need Jesus!"* which is just a reverse way of being exclusive and saying *"there is something wrong with you that needs major fixin!"*

And fifty years ago that's what prim and proper church ladies would say to the long hairs, but these days it's what us enlightened and tolerant, inclusive sort of folks say to those

who for whatever reason are deemed not as enlightened and tolerant and inclusive as we are...

Which is ironic isn't it – that our human efforts to overcome exclusivity and intolerance only make those of us who are acting all tolerant and inclusive, more exclusive and intolerant of exclusivity and intolerance...

But this is why I'm emphasizing its a high view of Jesus that causes us to be at our best as his disciples. We don't solve the issues of exclusivity and intolerance amongst each other by focusing on ourselves, on humanity, applying our efforts horizontally - trying to minimize or eliminate differences in order to compromise, or through demonizing or shaming or cancelling the other side into oblivion.

Instead as Paul instructs Pastor Timothy's congregation – and therefore us as well – we deal with this horizontal problem vertically, through offering prayer and interceding for all kinds of people, especially the ones who are the kind that offend us, oppose us or have oppressed us.

And this kind of prayer is not complaining to God about them, rather its interceding for them, offering thanksgiving for them - in other words, we are bringing them to God and we can do this because - Jesus is... mediator.

Now as you probably know a mediator is someone who acts as a go-between for two opposing parties, who works to bring about some sort of agreement or resolution or reconciliation between them.

We have mediators for contract talks between employers and unions, we have mediators who try to broker peace deals between warring nations, we have mediators who try to resolve situations where people have been taken hostage.

So as followers of Jesus, with a high view of our Lord as the only Mediator between God and mankind, we understand that any polarization and exclusion and intolerance between two groups of people is actually the result of the polarization between God and all of humanity.

Because if a mediator is required between God and mankind, this means there is a need for it – so when we say that Jesus is mediator we are implying and acknowledging that God and all of mankind are separated in some way that needs reconciliation.

When you have two opposing parties the best person to mediate them is someone who can truly understand the concerns of both sides, that puts them in a unique position of being able to propose something that is a solution to what is preventing agreement or resolution. I've always thought that whenever there is a strike between Hockey owners and players that Wayne Gretzky should be the mediator because he is both a player and also an owner.

So, how does Jesus function as a mediator in this way? Well Paul gives us two clues in what he says about Jesus' person and his work. He identifies Jesus as a man, and then says He gave His life as a ransom for all kinds of people. So Jesus' was the right person for the job and was able to do the work needed for the job.

Jesus is the right person for the job because He is both God and human, and I don't need to say too much about this because we've just spent two Sundays looking at Jesus being God and being human.

So in the person of Jesus Christ, there are two natures – one fully divine as God, and the other fully human as man. There is no other person that has existed, exists or will exist in this way – Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the only mediator. So right in his very existence with these two natures united in His person Jesus Christ has brought together the opposing parties of God and mankind.

That's why we're very particular about saying that these two natures of Christ are not mixed together in any way, or stating that certain aspects of Jesus are divine, like His spirit while His body would be his human part.

If that was true then in his person Jesus would not actually be fully human like us, nor would he be fully God like the Father – and what is produced in who He is does not bring humanity

together with God in a way that keeps humanity who we are created to be. It would also mean He is not fully God, because God simply can't become altered in anyway from the essence of who He is – or give off pieces of His divinity, He is immutable and unchanging!

Now – I know this is challenging theological truth to grasp – but its important to learn it and believe it firmly - because not only does it give us our high view of Jesus Christ, when you don't believe this about Jesus, as his followers you are vulnerable to your sinful nature twisting God's grace into exclusivity and all the problems that result from that. It's very practical!

Jesus is the only mediator because in His one person He has a fully human nature, and a fully divine nature, and thus He IS God and mankind reconciled.

Secondly, as the God-man mediator Jesus is able to offer His life as a ransom for everyone. So this is a hostage situation. God is one party, Sin is the other party who has taken all

humanity hostage, and they are held captive by the power of sin. Jesus as the mediator offers himself to Sin in exchange for freeing all the other hostages. Sin accepts this exchange because Jesus as the God-Man is a more valuable captive, in the same way that terrorists will set all their hostages free in exchange for one political leader to become their captive as leverage for their cause.

Now we shouldn't push the analogy much farther than this because its not Paul's intention to use it as an explanation for all the mechanics of how Jesus death atones for our sins and pays our debt to God under the law of Moses and the Covenant. We'll look at that next week in Jesus as mediator part 2.

In this example, the mediator's life is not given to satisfy God, its not a reconciling action in God's direction – it moves towards Sin and takes the place of those held captive so they may go free. The reason why Paul uses this analogy here is so that we give all kinds of humans the benefit of the doubt – or the benefit of being held captive to sin.

Why do progressives pursue their anti-Christian agenda? Why do gov'ts persecute the Church? Because they – like we once were – are held captive to the power of sin. When we understand that Jesus as mediator exchanges His life for all kinds of people who are held captive by sin, we have no reason not to pray and intercede and offer thanksgivings for whomever we find to be offensive or oppositional to us.

It pushes us back to the grace of God in Jesus Christ because were it not for the work of the mediator making this ransom for us – we too would still be under the power of sin and held captive to it.

But we are not - and the proof of our freedom from the power of sin isn't in the fact that we don't do terrible immoral things like those people, or that we're not deceived by the ideologies that those people fall for, or that we're more enlightened and tolerant and accepting and inclusive than those people are...

It's when we can genuinely be moved to obey Paul's exhortation and *"make petitions, prayers, intercession and*

*thanksgiving for **all** people— for kings and **all** those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."*

The proof is when we are able to do this and demonstrate that we are at our best as followers of Jesus because we get His grace – we really get His grace...

Because brothers and sisters - Jesus is mediator!

So yes, He gets us... but I think if we want to be at our best as followers of Jesus – I think that it's more important for us to really get Him.

So in light of all that has been said – let's re-read our second scripture passage this morning together...

Amen