

Week of October 7-13

A PRAYER FOR THE CZAR

Scripture Reading: Read 1 Timothy 2

Back in our devotional on Matthew 15, I referred to the wildly successful musical *Fiddler on the Roof* and its opening song, "Tradition." I want to come back to that song again to introduce today's devotional. During the course of the song, the beloved rabbi is asked by the villagers if there was a proper blessing for the Czar? Since in Judaism, there exists a prayer of blessing for everything, the rabbi responds, "Of course." He then proceeds to share the blessing, "May God bless and keep the Czar...far from us!" Everyone chuckles and, then, the song resumes.

I wonder how often we have the same approach when it comes to praying for those in authority over us. Do we truly want the Lord to bless them or do we just want them to go away and leave us alone? Today's chapter reading opens with Paul challenging Timothy and the church of Ephesus he pastored to pray and intercede for rulers who have authority over us (1 Timothy 2:1-4).

We must keep in mind that when Paul wrote this, Nero was emperor of Rome and he was anything but a godly ruler. He murdered his mother. He wasted millions of tax dollars on his whims. He burned down half of Rome and tried to blame the Christians for his deed. He forced Christians to face wild beasts in the Coliseum. He burned Christians on posts in his garden to serve as torches for his parties. He had Paul and Peter put to death. Yet, Paul's command to Timothy was to pray for him and other rulers of their day.

As we noted in our devotional on Romans 13, we live in a day and age of talk radio, blogs and television newscasts where political leaders are regularly criticized, torn down and ridiculed. Paul's words serve to convict us. As Christians, we are called to a different standard and lifestyle. This doesn't mean we have to agree with their policy positions but we are expected not only to respect those in authority as Paul commanded the Roman believers but also to pray for them as he commanded Timothy. The goal in doing so is that we would have a stable environment in which to both practice and share our faith so that more and more people would be won to the kingdom.

So, how should we pray? Perhaps the solution rests in a prayer for the Czar; not the one from the musical but an actual prayer found in a High Holy Day Jewish prayer book (published in 1895): *"May the One who gives power to kings, and sovereignty to princes; may the One who is the Ruler of rulers... bless and keep, guard and aid, exalt and raise the Czar...and his wife...and their heir... May God save them from all harm and pain...And may the Merciful One put in the heart of the Czar compassion and good deeds for the People of Israel..."* It's a good place to start a tradition of prayer for rulers.

Action Step & Prayer Focus: If you don't know who they are already, look up the names of the governmental leaders on the federal, state and local levels who have authority over you. Make a list of these individuals and take time to pray for them by name. Pray that God will bless them and their families, that all rulers who do not yet know Jesus will come to saving faith, that they will make and enforce righteous laws, that they would be given wisdom and that they will model godly servant leadership.

Take-a-way: ***Rather than tearing down your leaders, lift them up in prayer instead.***