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Let's play a game to begin with here are some names of phobias and I want you to guess their meaning:

Phobia list:

Trypanophobia: Fear of needles/injections

Somniphobia: Fear of sleep

Mysophobia (fear of dirt and germs)

Ophidiophobia: Fear of snakes

Hippopotomonstro-sesquipedaliophobia

Fear of long words...

The most common phobia again and again is...glossophobia – fear of public speaking. The fear is quite natural. When we speak we make ourselves vulnerable to the judgement of others – what will they think? It is public

But from the earliest times, Christianity has been founded on public ministry. When he is arrested, Jesus says, 'Why are you coming to me in secret? I spoke to you in public'. The miracles are public, the teaching is public, the cross and the resurrection are public events. Secrecy and concealment are not part of the Christian gospel. Those who say to you, 'I've had a secret revelation of this or that – not today thank you. And this carries on into the life of the church.

'I urge then...requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving are made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority...'

Huh....this is quite incredible. Our faith is founded by one who was crucified in a plot between Jewish authorities, a puppet king and a weak Roman governor. Christians were persecuted by who? Authorities right from the beginning. Nero used to use our predecessors as lamps for his gardens. Our namesake St George was martyred for standing up to authorities because he refused to hurt a village. To this day, Christians are THE most persecuted group in the world. And... Paul is saying to pray for them? He has been physically stoned, imprisoned and beaten by these 'authorities' multiple times. Pray for them. Pray for those in authority. In public life today, Christians today are afraid of other people disagreeing with them because our values differ so much from contemporary culture. We're afraid people will be offended, we're afraid of being 'cancelled' but...our risk is relatively small and certainly not our lives. We're miles away from the actual peril faced by that early church which prayed for those who we're persecuting them. Amazing but why? Well first Jesus loves authorities too but also:

v2 That we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness'

We're trying to avoid two extremes. On the one hand by praying for authorities, some Christians feel like we're just supporting them and to not support authority figures is not godly. This is a kind of twisting of Romans 13 because clearly we have people throughout the bible disagreeing with the established leaders. On the other hand there are those who never want to live under authority – where constant protest and rebellion is a good life. Look how Paul puts these two together – we pray – we take a keen interest in the life of the kings and authorities because they are the ones who can facilitate – give that v2 peaceful and quiet lives...

In the Old Testament one of the great visions for the future is to be a place where people can grow their own vegetables and farms. It's not that you have to really want to grow courgettes or be a tractor driver but because...well gardening requires peace, requires time and it requires water, sunshine and all the rest. Requires to be left alone to get on with it. But never quite totally alone. The original covenant with Abraham was to be a people in a place and to be a blessing. Jesus founds the church which loves the Lord and loves its neighbour. At times retreating from the world around us can be a real temptation for the church. I've been to conferences before which are all Christians and its lovely but people will say – why cant it always be like this? Just worship and fellowship...endless sandals and quiche...all Christians all together all of the time.

Tomorrow is the funeral for Queen Elizabeth and one of the things she was best at was allowing others to be themselves – where she had clear and strong opinions but would not enforce those on others. The founding Fathers of the United States saw this clearly that we want to allow for maximal freedom in the way things are organised. Christians are public people. We are people that get involved because we see how when a tide rises all the boats are lifted, that when others have the freedom to worship and exercise faith – we too will have that ability. And when it goes wrong it can go wrong for generations. My friend grew up in East Germany where communist Russia ruled and though that is all now gone – the church has never recovered after being banned for decades. Good rulers lift us up – bad squeeze us.

Moving on, we get his beautiful phrase:

'v4 God our saviour who wants all of us to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth'

God longs for his people to turn back to him. Longs for them to come to a saving knowledge and relationship with him. But he doesn't force us. You ever been in a friendship with someone who doesn't really want it? Or worse a romantic relationship? I remember going to a party – asking someone to 'go out with me' and no. Felt like world was ending. Or a friendship where you try and contact, text or call and they just don't

respond. It hurts and sometimes we can carry that into other human relationships and so when people do really want to spend time or love us – it can be hard to receive but hear this – God wants us to be saved. God wants us. It's not begrudging – he is a good, good father. You don't have to persuade him, there are no tricks or games to play. The Father who made us, wants to be with us. And better than that – made it possible too – in Jesus we have a mediator – one who makes this whole relationship even possible.

Most of you here today know this. Many of you have known it since you were tinier than tiny. But this is where the public bit of Christianity hits the road. The apostle Paul was a made a herald of the mediator – but so are you. You here in St Georges. You can invite people to Alpha. You can welcome them to a small group. You. It will cost you a bit. I was talking a while back to Mike Clark who left Taunton for Africa, someone stopped him and said, 'you are called there'...but but said Mike, I have a family...and this and that – Jesus died for you and you cannot move house for him? St Georges, Heralds of the gospel. Will we be a people that stand up, takes the small risk of embarrassment or someone saying no, for the great reward of our loved ones, our friends, knowing the Lord? We take a moment, to allow the Spirit to bring to mind, who we might invite along to the next Alpha course.