

Praying for Putin

Well, it's happening again. A powerful tyrant has decided he has the right to take what he wants by force, and so he's raining death and destruction down on his neighbors. We hear casualty reports. We see bombed-out buildings and long convoys of miserable refugees. The international community has condemned the Russian invasion. Humanitarian aid is being sent. But most of us can do little to help except to pray for the Ukrainian people and for a just resolution to the conflict. And that we must do! But are you also praying for Putin?

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." (Jesus, Matthew 5:43-45)

This is not an isolated verse. There are plenty more places in the Bible that tell us to love, pray for, and forgive those who mistreat us, to turn the other cheek (e.g. Luke 6:29, 1 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:14-19, Proverbs 25:21-22). So, yes, I've been praying for Putin. At first, I prayed that he would see the light, repent, and not invade; that God would compel him to act according to His will. Then when people started dying, the tone of my prayers changed. I began praying that God would strike down that evil, arrogant man so he could do no more harm!

Hmm. Seems I had strayed from Jesus' instruction in Matthew 5. I was *praying*, yes, but I certainly wasn't *loving* my enemy. I didn't want his good; I wanted his destruction.

Notice the reason Jesus gives for loving our enemies. *"...in order that you may be sons of your Father in heaven."* In other words, as God's children, we are to be like Him. And our Heavenly Father loves all people, even Vladimir Putin. We are called to do the same. Not an easy assignment. But it did help me to think of how God was able to transform the man Saul – zealous persecutor of the early Church – into the powerfully effective apostle Paul (Acts 9:1-22). Perhaps the persecuted prayed for Saul's destruction, but God had a much higher purpose in mind.

Is Putin another Paul? Probably not, but we don't know God's plan. Our job is just to keep praying – for the Ukrainian people and for Putin. I still pray that God will strike him down, by the way. May he not fall dead but, like Saul, be driven to his knees before the Lord Jesus Christ.

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