

“A VERTICAL DECISION”**EPHESIANS 1:1-7****INTRODUCTION**

AS WE GATHER HERE ON THIS FIRST SUNDAY MORNING, WE ARE REMINDED OF THOSE SACRED SYMBOLS, WHICH CRYSTALLIZE THE FUNDAMENTALS OF OUR FAITH.

THE TABLE UPON WHICH THOSE SYMBOLS ARE SET, FOR CENTURIES HAS REPRESENTED THE FELLOWSHIP THAT WE HAVE WITH GOD AND WITH ONE ANOTHER,

AND THE MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH THAT WE REALIZE THROUGH THE CROSS, IS THAT SALVATION AND THE FORGIVENESS OF SIN, WAS A VERTICAL DECISION OF GOD...

WHEN WE LOOK AT THE WORDS OF OUR TEXT, WHAT WE DISCOVER FROM THE BEGINNING IS THAT GOD LOVED US FIRST.

IN OTHER WORDS HIS DECISION TO LOVE THE SINNER, WAS NOT IN RESPONSE TO OUR DECISION TO LOVE HIM.

WHY, BECAUSE THE LOVE THAT IT TOOK TO SEND JESUS TO THE CROSS, WAS A DECISION THAT WAS MADE BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD...

PAUL AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST, BY THE WILL OF GOD, TO THE SAINTS WHICH ARE AT EPHESUS, AND TO THE FAITHFUL IN CHRIST JESUS:

NOW THE FIRST THING THAT SHOULD BE RECOGNIZED HERE, IS HOW PAUL DESCRIBES HIS AUDIENCE AS SAINTS. THE WORD FOR SAINTS IS “HAGIOS”, WHICH DESCRIBES SOMETHING THAT IS SACRED, PURE, AND MORALLY BLAMELESS...

AND WHEN I LOOK AT WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO BE A SAINT, THERE SHOULD BE A POINT OF HONESTY AND CONVICTION, WHICH REMINDS US OF THE FACT THAT WE DIDN'T REACH SAINTHOOD ON OUR OWN.

IN OTHER WORDS, PURE IS NOT THE WORD THAT COMES TO MIND WHEN I DESCRIBE MYSELF. AND MORALLY BLAMELESS IS NOT ON YOUR LIST OF ADJECTIVES EITHER.

SO IN ORDER FOR US TO BECOME A SAINT AS PAUL DESCRIBES IT, THERE MUST HAVE BEEN SOMETHING DIVINE IN PLACE, IN ORDER TO COVER THOSE TRANSGRESSIONS THAT MADE US UNRIGHTEOUS...

NOW, THE SHORT ANSWER IS THAT, THE BLOOD OF JESUS COVERS US,

AND I COULD END THIS MESSAGE ON THAT TRUTH ALONE. IN OTHER WORDS, WE KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO BE SAVED. AND WE KNOW BY WHAT MEANS JESUS MADE SALVATION ACCESSIBLE.

BUT IN ORDER FOR US TO APPRECIATE THE SACREDNESS OF THESE SYMBOLS, WE FIRST HAVE TO LOOK AT WHAT LED HIM TO THIS DECISION...

AS I STATED IN MY INTRODUCTION, THE FORGIVENESS OF OUR SINS WAS A VERTICAL DECISION FROM GOD. AND THERE'S A MYRIAD OF SCRIPTURES THAT UNDERSCORE THIS TRUTH.

"FOR GOD, SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON..." [JOHN 3:16]

YOU SEE, THE LOVE, WAS IN THE HEART AND THE MIND OF GOD. AND AS SINNERS DOWN HERE IN THE WORLD, WE BECAME THE OBJECT OR THE TARGET OF THAT LOVE.

BUT THE QUESTION THAT BEGS TO BE ANSWERED THIS MORNING, [EVENING] IS, WHICH CAME FIRST, OUR SIN, OR HIS SACRIFICE?...

IN OTHER WORDS, DID GOD SEND HIS SON AS A REACTION TO MAN'S SIN; SORT OF LIKE AN AMBULANCE OR A FIRE TRUCK THAT RESPONDS TO A DISASTER?

WAS HE A HELPLESS OBSERVER AS THE EVENTS IN EDEN UNFOLDED? WAS GOD POWERLESS TO STOP THE TEMPTATION OF THE SERPENT, AND THEN PANICKED BECAUSE ADAM DIDN'T STICK TO THE PLAN?...

WAS CALVARY AN EMERGENCY PLAN THAT GOD CAME UP WITH AFTER THE FALL? DID HE CALL A SPECIAL MEETING WITH THE SON AND THE HOLY GHOST, TO DISCUSS WHAT EMERGENCY AID NEEDED TO BE SENT TO THE PERISHING PEOPLE OF EARTH?...

LET ME SEE IF I CAN PUT IT WHERE YOU CAN GET IT.

DID GOD SEND JESUS IN CASE WE SINNED? OR WAS OUR SIN AND OUR SAVIOUR ALREADY IN THE PLAN?

WAS HIS DECISION A RE-ACTION OR A PRO-ACTION?

IN OTHER WORDS WAS JESUS SENT TO GET THE REBOUND IN CASE WE MISSED? OR DID GOD ALREADY KNOW WHAT POOR FREE THROW SHOOTERS WE WERE?...

YEA, WAS IT PANIC OR WAS IT PROVIDENCE? WAS IT HIND-SIGHT, OR WAS IT IN-SIGHT? WAS IT INTIMIDATION OF OUR SINS, OR HIS INTUITION ABOUT THIS VERTICAL DECISION?...

THE ANSWER IS RIGHT HERE IN THE TEXT. AN ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS LET THE WORD SPEAK FOR ITSELF... HE SAYS, "BLESSED BE THE GOD AND FATHER OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, [4] WHO HATH BLESSED US WITH ALL SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST: ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US IN HIM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, THAT WE SHOULD BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME BEFORE HIM IN LOVE..."

DO YOU SEE WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT? IT GOES BACK TO HIM CALLING US SAINTS IN [VERSE 1] BUT IN ORDER FOR US TO REACH THAT STATUS OF PURITY AND BLAMELESSNESS, HE KNEW WE COULDN'T DO IT ON OUR OWN, SO HE GAVE US A SAVIOUR, EVEN BEFORE THERE WAS A SIN FOR HIM TO DIE FOR.

LOOK AT IT AGAIN. [VERSE 4] SAYS "ACCORDING AS HE HATH CHOSEN US, NOT ACCORDING AS WE CHOSE HIM"

SO MANY TIMES WE MAKE THE MISTAKE OF THINKING THAT GOD'S REALNESS OR GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY, IS DEPENDING ON WHETHER OR NOT WE BELIEVE IN HIM...

NO, GOD IS REAL WHETHER YOU THINK SO OR NOT.

AND HE'S SOVEREIGN WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO ACCEPT HIM OR NOT.

SO WHEN YOU WALK DOWN THE AISLE AND GIVE THE PREACHER YOUR HAND, IT'S NOT BECAUSE SOMEHOW YOU CHOSE HIM. YOU'RE ACKNOWLEDGING THE FACT THAT HE CHOSE YOU...

SO YOU DON'T GET TO BE BLAMELESS BECAUSE OF SOME CHOICE THAT YOU MADE IN AND OF YOURSELF. BECAUSE MOST OF US WALK THROUGH LIFE CONVINCING OURSELVES THAT WE DON'T NEED NOBODY...

YEA, WE DON'T NEED NO SAVIOUR, BECAUSE MOST OF US DON'T THINK WE HAVE NO SIN. THAT'S WHY THE BIBLE SAYS THAT THE WAYS OF A MAN ARE RIGHT IN HIS OWN EYES...

THAT'S WHY CALVARY WAS A VERTICAL DECISION. CAUSE IF YOU LEFT IT UP TO MAN, HE WOULDN'T BE CONVINCED THAT JESUS WAS NECESSARY,

HOW DO WE KNOW? JUST LOOK AT WHAT ADAM DID. AFTER HE SINNED IN THE GARDEN, HE DIDN'T CALL OUT TO GOD AND ASK FOR FORGIVENESS. NO, HE WENT OUT AND FOUND SOME FIG LEAVES, AND SEWED THEM TOGETHER IN AN ATTEMPT TO COVER HIMSELF...

IT WAS GOD WHO CALLED OUT TO ADAM, AND HE ASKED HIM WHERE ART THOU.

IT WASN'T BECAUSE GOD DIDN'T KNOW WHERE ADAM WAS. BUT THAT QUESTION WAS TO MAKE ADAM AWARE OF HOW DEEP HE HAD FALLEN.

IN OTHER WORDS, YOU STARTED OUT IN PARADISE, BUT NOW WHERE ARE YOU?

- **PERFECT WORLD**
- **ACCESS TO EVERYTHING**

- ALL CREATION AT YOUR FEET
- WITH A GOOD WOMAN AND A GOOD JOB

I TELL YOU, WHEN YOU FOOL WITH SIN, THE PENALTY IS ALWAYS MORE THAN THE PAYOUT...

SO AGAIN, HE CHOSE US TO BE SAVED, AND HE GAVE US THE MEANS, EVEN BEFORE THE NEED WAS APPARENT.

BUT BECAUSE OF HIS FOREKNOWLEDGE AND HIS OMNIPOTENT AND OMNISCIENT NATURE, HE DIDN'T WAIT FOR US TO LOVE HIM, AND THEN REACT WITH THIS VERTICAL DECISION...

I THINK [VERSE 4] SUMS IT UP PRETTY GOOD. BECAUSE PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES, AND THAT CAN ONLY COME FROM THE LORD.

IN OTHER WORDS, HE ALREADY MADE UP HIS MIND TO BLESS US. BUT OUR BLESSINGS ARE TIED TO OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

AND THE DECISION HE MADE TO LOVE US, IT GIVES US ACCESS TO THINGS THAT THE WORLD CAN'T DELIVER ON.

"GRACE", WHERE CAN YOU FIND THINGS LIKE THAT OUTSIDE OF THE LORD?

- MERCY
- PEACE
- FAVOUR
- FORGIVENESS
- REDEMPTION
- RECONCILIATION
- SALVATION FROM YOUR SINS, AND DELIVERANCE FROM YOUR PAST

THE ONLY WAY TO ACCESS THOSE THINGS, IS THROUGH YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND ACCEPTANCE OF JESUS AS THE CHRIST...

PAUL SAYS THAT WE ARE CHOSEN IN HIM. BEFORE THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE WORLD.

AND WHEN I LOOK UP THAT WORD “BEFORE”, THE GREEK WORD FOR THAT IS “PRO”, WHICH MEANS “IN FRONT OF” OR “PRIOR TO”...

WELL PASTOR WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

IT MEANS THAT PRIOR TO THE WORLD BEING FORMED, OR PRIOR TO ADAM AND EVE BEING CREATED, THE LORD STEPPED IN FRONT OF MAN’S CALAMITY, AND SAW HIS NEED FOR CHRIST...

LOOK AT IT REAL GOOD NOW. BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, GOD CHOSE US TO BE HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME BEFORE HIM.

WELL, WE HAVE ALREADY ESTABLISHED THAT THE ONLY WAY YOU AND I CAN BE WITHOUT BLAME, IS IF THE BLOOD OF JESUS IS COVERING US.

SO IF HE WILLED FOR US TO BE HOLY, AND HE KNEW THAT WE WOULD FALL, THERE HAD TO BE SOMETHING PREORDAINED, IN ORDER TO COVER THOSE SINS AHEAD OF TIME...

WE SHOUT ALL THE TIME ABOUT THE FACT THAT GOD LOOKED BEYOND ALL OF OUR FAULTS AND MEETS ALL OF OUR NEEDS.

AND WHILE THAT MAY BE TRUE, YOU ALSO NEED TO SHOUT ABOUT THE FACT THAT HE LOOKED BEYOND ALL YOUR FAULTS, LOOKED PRIOR TO YOUR MESS, LOOKED IN FRONT OF YOUR TRANSGRESSIONS, AND MET YOUR NEED BEFORE YOU KNEW YOU HAD A NEED...

THAT’S WHY GRACE IS SO AMAZING, BECAUSE HE MADE A DECISION TO LOVE US NOT ONLY IN SPITE OF OURSELVES, BUT ALSO IN LIEU OF OURSELVES.

IN OTHER WORDS, NOT ONLY DID THE BLOOD COVER MY SINS B.C.. HE ALSO HAS THE POWER TO COVER ME A.D...

**RIGHT HERE IS WHERE I NEED SOME HONEST FOLK.
BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH YOU'RE FREE FROM THE LIFE YOU LIVED B.C., THERE'S STILL SOME STUFF IN YOU'RE A.D., THAT YOU NEED THE LORD TO HELP YOU WITH.**

THAT TEMPER THAT SOME OF US HAVE, THAT AIN'T JUST A [B.C.] ISSUE, AND NOW IT DON'T BOTHER YOU NO MORE.

SOME OF US ARE SAVED, SANCTIFIED, AND FILLED WITH THE HOLY GHOST. AND WE ARE STILL MEAN AS THE DEVIL...

THAT ADDICTION, YOU ARE STILL STRUGGLING WITH THAT,

- **PRIDEFUL ATTITUDE**
- **STUBBORN BEHAVIOUR**
- **SELFISH MENTALITY**
- **UNFORGIVING HEART [THAT IS AN A.D. ISSUE]**

I'M GLAD HE SAVED ME FROM MY PAST. BUT I'M HONEST ENOUGH TO ADMIT THAT I NEED HIM RIGHT NOW!...

THAT'S WHY I'M GLAD FOR THIS VERTICAL DECISION. BECAUSE IN SPITE OF WHAT CONDITION I FIND MYSELF, GOD HAS ALREADY MADE UP HIS MIND TO LOVE ME ANYHOW.

IT'S NOT THAT WE TAKE GOD'S GRACE FOR GRANTED AND KEEP ON SINNING. BUT WE HAVE TO ADMIT THAT THERE'S NEVER A TIME WHERE WE DON'T NEED HIM...

YEA, WHETHER YOU CHOOSE TO ADMIT IT OR NOT, WE ALL COMMIT SINS EVERY DAY, AND SOME OF THEM WE DO UNKNOWINGLY.

FACT ABOUT IT, IF IT WERE NOT FOR JESUS, YOUR THOUGHTS WOULD SEND YOU TO HELL, IN LIEU OF THE SINS THAT YOU ACTUALLY CARRY OUT.

SO BY THE TIME WE REALIZE WE NEED HIM, HE'S ALREADY MADE HIS VERTICAL DECISION...AGAIN THAT WORD "PRO", THAT'S WHERE YOU GET THE WORD PROVIDE OR PROVISION.

IN OTHER WORDS, BEFORE THE NEED EVEN CAME UP, THE LORD WAS ALREADY THERE WITH GRACE TO SUIT OUR CASE.

IT'S NOT LIKE AN AMBULANCE THAT RESPONDS AFTER THE ACCIDENT. CAUSE THE GOD WE SERVE IS SO GOOD, THAT HE'S THERE WITH YOU IN THE MIDST OF THE ACCIDENT.

HE SAID, "*I'LL NEVER LEAVE YOU NOR FORSAKE YOU,*" EVEN DURING THOSE TIMES WHERE YOU TRY TO DUCK AND DODGE HIM...

WHEN YOU'RE ACTING THE FOOL, I'M WITH YOU.

- **OUT THERE DOING YOUR THING**
- **STUCK IN YOUR WAYS**
- **REFUSE TO LISTEN TO REASON**
- **TRY TO FIX STUFF ON YOUR OWN**

THE REASON WE KNOW HE'S WITH US, IS BECAUSE TIME AND TIME AGAIN, HE COVERED US WHEN HE SHOULD HAVE CONSUMED US...

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU ALL TONIGHT, BUT I NEED A GOD WHO CAN LOOK BEYOND AND LOOK BEFORE.

BECAUSE THERE IS ALWAYS SOMETHING IN THIS WORLD TRYING TO CONSUME ME.

THAT'S WHY DAVID SAID THAT IT IS OF THE LORD'S MERCY, THAT WE ARE NOT CONSUMED.

WHY, BECAUSE HE HAS ALREADY LOOKED INTO OUR FUTURE, AND CHOSEN TO LOVE US BY VERTICAL DECISION....

IF YOU CAN'T SHOUT ABOUT ANYTHING ELSE, YOU NEED TO SHOUT ABOUT THE FACT THAT YOUR SALVATION, WAS NOT DECIDED ON THE BASIS OF HORIZONTAL OPINION.

PAUL SAYS THAT GOD PREDESTINED US UNTO THE ADOPTION OF CHILDREN BY JESUS CHRIST TO HIMSELF, ACCORDING TO THE GOOD PLEASURE OF HIS WILL...

IN OTHER WORDS, IT WASN'T BECAUSE YOU LIVED RIGHT.

AND IT WASN'T BECAUSE YOU WON SOME KIND OF POPULARITY POLL.

IT WASN'T BECAUSE HE SAW THE BEST IN YOU, WHEN EVERYONE ELSE AROUND YOU COULD ONLY SEE THE WORST IN YOU.

NO, NO. HE SAW THE WORST, AND STILL MADE A VERTICAL DECISION TO GIVE YOU THE BEST.

IN THAT WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR THE UNGODLY.

"FOR GOD, SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE, HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON..."

AND EVEN THOUGH THERE IS SOME WHO WOULD ARGUE AGAINST GOD'S DECISION, IT WAS A CHOICE THAT HE MADE BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD...

IN OTHER WORDS, I AM SAVED, RIGHT NOW I'M BEING SAVED, AND WHEN IT COMES TO MY FUTURE AND WHERE I SPEND ETERNITY, THE FAITH THAT I HAVE IN HIM SAYS WITHOUT A DOUBT, I SHALL BE SAVED...

PAUL SAYS; "TO THE PRAISE OF THE GLORY OF HIS GRACE, WHEREIN HE HATH MADE US ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED, [7] IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS, ACCORDING TO THE RICHES OF HIS GRACE."

IT'S ALMOST POETIC WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT. BECAUSE THE LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR US, SOMETIMES THE BEST WAY TO EXPRESS IT, IS IN A POEM OR A SONG.

SONGS LIKE 'BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE...'

- **AMAZING GRACE**
- **OH HAPPY DAY**
- **DOWN AT THE CROSS WHERE MY SAVIOR DIED, DOWN WHERE FOR CLEANSING FROM SIN, I CRIED, THERE TO MY HEART WAS THE BLOOD APPLIED, GLORY TO HIS NAME.**
- **WHEN PEACE LIKE A RIVER**

BUT THE ONE I LIKE, THAT DESCRIBES THIS VERTICAL DECISION, IS THE ONE THAT TALKS ABOUT THE CONDITION I WAS IN, AND HOW GOD SENT JESUS TO GET ME OUT.

"I WAS SINKING, DEEP IN SIN... BUT THE MASTER OF THE SEA...IT WAS LOVE... WHEN NOTHING ELSE COULD HELP..."

HE LOOKED DOWN, AT MY CONDITION. AND THEN HE CAME DOWN, IN THE PERSON OF CHRIST.

IT WAS AT THE CROSS THAT FRIDAY MORNING, WHERE HE PAID A DEBT, THAT NOBODY ELSE COULD PAY.

HE;

- **LIFTED A BURDEN - NOBODY ELSE COULD LIFT.**
- **MADE A SACRIFICE - NOBODY ELSE COULD MAKE**
- **SOLVED A PROBLEM - NOBODY ELSE COULD SOLVE**
- **SUPPLIED A NEED - NOBODY ELSE COULD SUPPLY**
- **DEFEATED AN ENEMY, THAT NOBODY ELSE COULD BEAT**

**AND RIGHT EARL, SUNDAY MORNING, HE GOT UP WITH ALL
POWER IN HIS HANDS.**

- **HE'S GOT POWER...**
- **IT REACHES, TO THE HIGHEST MOUNTAIN.**
- **AND IT FLOWS, TO THE LOWEST VALLEY**
- **THE BLOOD, THAT GIVES ME STRENGTH, IT WILL
NEVER LOSE IT'S POWER**