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**THE LOVE SENTENCE part three**

Greetings dearly beloved!

We pray that you are finding your identity in the Lord Jesus Christ and discovering all the riches of the glory of your inheritance as joint heirs with Him!

Before we get into this month's teaching, let me give you a brief update on how Shannon, Levi, and I have been doing seeing that I have not done so in some time...

Shannon and Levi just completed Levi's first grade year of homeschooling last month and things could not have gone much better with that... Levi is such a smart young man and has truly excelled in his studies- exceeding many of the expectations of a first grader in every subject.

I continue to work at a local bank here in Macon, GA where the Lord has blessed me with favor and great success in my respective position. I won the award of top at my position for 2013 (my first year at this particular bank, mind you) and received the same award for the first quarter of this year as well. I truly glorify God for granting me the success that I have had in this marketplace thus far and totally expect His continued honor and reward as long as He wills for me to be employed here. Be it done to me according to Your Word, Lord! Amen!

Many of you are aware of this already, but we have made a new addition to the Dickerson family! No, there is not another brother or sister on the way for Levi, but for Levi's 7th birthday, we gave him the desire of his heart- a puppy!

We adopted "Bluesie"- a rescue dog- over Levi's birthday weekend at the end of May. She is so sweet too! The jury is still out on what kind of puppy she is, but one thing is for sure, she has some Blue Heeler in her- to which I told someone how appropriate this is for us because the Dickerson's definitely believe in "divine (blue) heeling." 😊

So we are enjoying our new addition and it is so obvious that God has given us the perfect puppy for our household. She is extremely playful and energetic like her brother, Levi, and is super sweet and affectionate like her momma, Shannon. She also likes to lie around and sleep like her daddy! 😊 So, all in all, I would have to say Bluesie was the best puppy for us.

But I rejoice in that the Lord has kept and blessed our family exceedingly, abundantly above all we could ask or think. Our family has grown even larger as we are growing closer and closer to our church family. I believe this is one of the special blessings of being planted in a local church body: it is that you immediately gain many more mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and children. And, as many of you can testify to, oftentimes you feel closer to your spiritual family than you do to your natural family because of the like-precious faith that you share with your brothers and sisters in Christ. And we feel so privileged to be able to lead this local body here in Macon, GA into the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Well, as for this month's teaching, I felt led to continue with our study that we began a couple of months ago entitled "The Love Sentence." So let's jump right into it...

For the past two months we have camped on, what I consider to be, one of the greatest chapters in the entire Bible- Ephesians chapter one! We discovered that in this goldmine of truth called Ephesians chapter one, there is what is considered to be the longest sentence in the entire Bible- verses 3-14. And we found that these verses are loaded with statement after statement of what the Lord has done for us because of His great love for us.

I made the point that just as this section of Scripture is one sentence in the original Greek language and that these verses declare the wonderful love that the Lord has for His creation, we are likewise "sentenced to love." What I mean by this is that, even before the foundation of the earth was laid, God predestined us to being adopted as sons in Jesus Christ. Therefore, as far as God is concerned, we are sentenced- not to condemnation, but to justification! We are declared and deemed recipients of His wonderful love and are partakers of all that the Father has! Praise the Lord!

So, over the past couple of months, we have covered subjects such as God's blessing, choosing, predestinating, and adopting us. And, saints, it is so important to understand that God has done all of these things for us because He wanted to. He did not do all of this for us because He felt obligated to or because someone twisted His arm to do it. No, He has given us an abundance of grace because it was His good pleasure to do so.

### **TO THE PRAISE OF HIS GLORIOUS GRACE**

So what should all of this result in? What should our response be to all of these things that God has done for us before the foundation of the world? Ephesians 1:6 shows us the answer to these questions... In it, Paul says, "to the praise of the glory of His grace..." In other words, our response to all of these things should be simply to lift up our hands and give praise to God for all of the glorious grace that He has poured out on us through His Son. Amen!

You know, God's people oftentimes miss the way God's kingdom is intended to operate. They think that they have to work hard and labor with all of their might in order to be fruitful. But that is not the way it works. God has intended to do all of the work. He even revealed in the Old Testament this principle when He said that the battle is not ours, but God's.

The Lord, in all of His great wisdom and grace, prepared a way for us to bear much fruit for His glory without much effort from us at all. And the intent of this is that when the fruit comes- totally as a result of God's grace- our only response can be- "I don't know where all of this fruit came from! Oh wait, I guess I do: God did it! But I can tell you, I certainly did not."

You see, God's kingdom is established upon a throne of grace (Hebrews 4:16). Everything- I said, everything- is to be produced by His grace and not our works. Now that does not mean that we have no responsibility. We are certainly to labor with all of our might, yet not us, but God's grace in us providing the strength, ability, and power that is needed to perform the work. Amen!

## IN THE BELOVED

Now I want us to pay particular attention to the rest of verse 6... It says, "by which (i.e. by His glorious grace) He made us accepted in the Beloved."

Now "the Beloved" is obviously a reference to our Lord Jesus, but did you know that the Bible refers to you as "beloved" as well? Yes, there are Scriptures where the writers would refer to the church they were writing to as "beloved." And this should not surprise us, for if we are in the Beloved, we must "be-loved" as well, correct?

Jesus made a very powerful statement regarding this in John chapter 17... In this passage of Scripture, we have the Lord's Prayer recorded just before He was about to endure His Cross. And in this prayer, He prayed- "...and that the world may know that you have sent Me, *and have loved them as You have loved Me.*" (verse 23)

Now that, beloved, is a powerful truth! Could Father-God truly love us as much as He loves His only begotten Son? Well, according to Jesus, He does! But allow me to help us reason this out for a moment. Of course, it does not make sense that God would love us as much as He loves His holy child- whom is perfect and totally righteous when we are not. But why would God send His Son to die for our sins if He loved us any less? For example, would any wise investor pay a price for something that is not at least as valuable as the price paid? No! So why would we think that a God who alone is wise and whose understanding is unsearchable would pay the price to redeem us if we did not have great value? No, saints, we are precious and valuable in His sight! **We evidently were valuable before He redeemed us; and we most definitely are now that we are in the Redeemer! Amen! Praise God!**

## ACCEPTED AND HIGHLY FAVORED!

So we are in the Beloved, and are, therefore, greatly loved by our Heavenly Father! And guess what that results in? As Ephesians 1:6 also says: We are made acceptable! What an awesome truth, saints- You are accepted in Christ!

Many wonder if God will accept them and, sad to say, many Christians live their whole life never knowing or believing that the Lord has ever truly accepted them. They think He just tolerates them- that He puts up with them- just because, "Hey, He is love and that is what love has to do." But no, beloved! You are acceptable to Him and accepted in Him! He looks at you- warts and all- and says, "They are mine! I paid a great price for them! And they are now hidden in my Beloved Son- beyond reproach in my sight!" Praise God!

You see, some incorrectly believe that God maybe has had some throughout the millennia whom He has accepted, but they are few and far between. Like, for instance, one group thinks Mary, the mother of Jesus, is one of those few who were chosen and were deemed acceptable by God. Well, allow me to show you a passage of Scripture that will rock your boat!

These words "made us accepted" in Ephesians 1:6 come from one Greek word which is only used in one other place in Scripture- Luke 1:28. Well, in Luke 1:28, we have the account of the angel of God appearing

to Mary and saying, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women."

First of all, notice how Mary was indeed made acceptable to God- being deemed highly favored and blessed among women. This acceptance also caused the Lord's abiding presence (i.e. the Lord is with you) and, subsequently, His blessing on her life. Therefore, she certainly had the ability to rejoice, didn't she? But guess what? You too are made this acceptable in God's sight right now!

How do I know this? I know this because these words "highly favored one" come from that same Greek word that was used to translate "made us accepted" in Ephesians 1:6! **So when Paul said in Ephesians that we are made accepted in the Beloved, in essence He was saying that we are just as "highly favored" as Mary was!** Hallelujah! Now that is something to shout about, saints!

You see, we are not inferior to the saints of old who were greatly used and blessed by God! In fact, the Scriptures teach us that he who is least in the kingdom of God- the pinky toe in the Body of Christ- is greater than the greatest of Old Testament prophets (see Luke 7:28)! And why? Is it because we are more holy, faithful, and used by God than they were? No! It is because we are a part of the Body of Christ and the glory that we have by God's grace under this new and better covenant outweighs the glory that the greatest Old Testament saint ever had! Praise the Lord!

So guess what? If we're as highly favored as Mary was in this passage of Scripture, then we can claim the rest of Luke 1:28 too... The Lord is with us- meaning, He will never leave us or forsake us and He will abide with us even to the end of the world! Also, we are blessed among mankind- meaning, we have God's blessing upon us which causes increase and success in our lives! Therefore, with all of this being true, this is why the Lord would also say to us what He said to Mary- Rejoice! Friends, we can rejoice in the fact that God has accepted us- He has poured out His favor on our life, He is with us, and we are blessed beyond measure! Thank you Jesus!

You know, there was one place where Jesus was ministering and a woman yelled from the crowd saying, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" (see Luke 11:27) And there are many religious people that think that same thing about Mary, but that is why I love Jesus' response to her statement; He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." In other words, what Jesus was saying here was that those who are privileged enough to hear the Word of God and then are wise enough to keep it, are even more blessed than Mary who bore the Son of God! Friends, that is powerful!

But why would He say this? Well, the words "keep it" in this passage mean "to imprison it." This is describing those who receive and then keep the Word of God in their hearts. Well, isn't Jesus the Word made flesh? So the reason that Jesus could say that those who hear and keep the Word of God are more blessed than Mary who physically carried the Word made flesh is because we have the greater privilege of having the resurrected Word of God in us! In other words, **she had the privilege of carrying the physical Word; we have the privilege of carrying the resurrected Word!**

Saints, we are highly favored in Christ and we are supremely blessed because Christ is living within us! We are rich beyond all comprehension because God is with us and His beloved Son of God reigns within us! We are not inferior in the least to the saints of old like Mary! In fact, we are more privileged in many respects! Hallelujah!

## THE TERMS OF HIS LOVE

Now, last but not least, I want us to focus on the next verse that Paul wrote in this great love sentence-verse 7... Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

Notice, first of all, that this verse says that in Him (that is, in Christ through being positionally placed in and identifying with Him) we have redemption... Now if we are not careful, it is easy to only view terms like "redemption" through our religious glasses. What I mean is, that we use terms like this and have never allowed their meaning to truly impact our hearts. They are just religious terms that we throw around but we have never truly contemplated their meaning.

So what does this word "redemption" really mean? Well, it comes from the Greek word "apolutrosis" which describes a release or deliverance of a slave or prisoner secured by the payment of a ransom. This word was usually used to describe the setting free of a slave by paying for their freedom.

You see, saints, we need to understand that before we came to Christ, we were all slaves to sin. We were in bondage to Satan and under his dominion. But when Jesus was obedient to death, even the death of the cross, the price was paid to purchase our freedom from both Satan and sin. This is what we were redeemed from! Praise Jesus!

But what was the price that was paid to secure our freedom? Paul answers this question by immediately following this statement of redemption in verse 7 with "through His blood." Peter made a similar statement in his first epistle by saying that we were redeemed, not with gold or silver, but with the precious blood of the lamb (see 1 Peter 1:18-19). In other words, our redemption was not secured by the payment of things with monetary value like silver and gold; our freedom was purchased with the blood of God's only Son! Thank you Jesus!

Then Paul goes on to further describe our redemption by saying that it is the "forgiveness of sins"... Now this word "forgiveness" is another word that I feel, as a general rule, the church today is very ignorant of. This word "forgiveness" comes from the Greek word "aphesis", and this word is derived from the Greek word "aphiemi" which literally means "to send away." So while this word "forgiveness" (Grk. aphasis) describes a release from bondage or imprisonment (similarly to the word redemption); it also carries the added quality of dismissing someone with no debt, obligation, or punishment. In other words, when the Lord forgave us of our sins, He actually sent us away from them (or more literally, sent them away from us). And Psalm 103:13 tells us how far He sent our transgressions. As far as the east is from the west! Praise the Lord! So to receive forgiveness from the Lord is to be set free from sin's enslaving dominion as well as sin's penalty- and not just set free at arm's length, but to be separated far from them.

## THE PORTRAIT OF HIS LOVE

So allow me to paint a picture of what occurred through our salvation explained in Ephesians 1:7... We were all lost in the world, being blinded by its darkness. And we did not know it, but the place in which we were groping around was actually Satan's slave market. We were in his prison, being bound by the chains of sin and death. There was nothing we could do to make ourselves free either. In fact, similarly to how those born into slavery do not even know any different, we were ignorant of

how dreadful our plight was. We were without hope and without God in this world.

But then, an amazing act of love was made: One morning, as we lay in our cell with no light and no life, a strong arm reached into our darkness, snatched us up and raised us out of this prison. As we were lifted by love above this underground slave market, we began to see the light. We immediately realized that the only life we knew was actually death and the only light we knew was actually darkness. Then that mighty hand and outstretched arm placed us on a ship- a ship built to take us to a new land that we have now heard is promised unto us.

But before we set sail and passed through waters of baptism, similarly to how the children of Israel passed through the divided Red Sea, the enemy approaches from behind, staking his claim to his ownership of us. He said, "They are mine! I own them!" to which the One who reached into that cell and snatched us out of our darkness responds- "No! They are now my purchased possession, for I have redeemed them from your control." "With what?" replies Satan, "The price is too high!" And our Savior responds with- "Here is the price paid: The blood of my precious Son!" And the enemy could not refute that. He is forced to turn away and withdraw from us, knowing that his claim over our souls cannot be validated because the price was paid in full.

So then our response was- "Oh, Lord, thank you, thank you, thank you! Whatever could I do to repay you for your grace and kindness?" And the Lord then shows us the Land He has promised us and says, "Nothing. You are free to enter into this Promised Land. You are free to enjoy the liberty to which My Son has made you free." Amen!

What a beautiful picture of our salvation this paints, amen? Saints, we are free from sin! We are free from its penalty and from its dominion! And it is all by His love that we are free! Praise God forevermore!

Well, I know that I did not cover every truth contained in this great love sentence, but this should be enough to whet your appetite for the riches found in Ephesians chapter one. So I encourage you to meditate on these verses and uncover for yourself the buried treasures contained therein. Make them your own! Make them personal! For, as Jesus said in John chapter six, as we continue in His Word, we will know the truth, and that truth will make us free! And, saints, I can assure you that there are not too many others truth that will make you any more free than the truth of God's great love for us and all that He has accomplished for you and me through His grace!

Until next month, may you live free in the liberty by which Christ Jesus has made you free! Amen.

Victoriously,

