

I TIMOTHY 2:1-7
SEPTEMBER 19, '10

“WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?”

A MAN WAS LOOKING FOR A PARKING SPACE AT THE MALL.

HE DROVE AROUND FOR SEVERAL MINUTES & THEN SAW SOMEONE GET INTO A CAR IN THE SECOND SPOT AT THE MALL’S MAIN ENTRANCE – ONE OF THE PREMIERE PARKING PLACES IN THE ENTIRE LOT.

HE WAITED PATIENTLY AS THE PERSON GOT IN & SPENT SEVERAL MINUTES DOING WHATEVER IT IS SOMEONE DOES WHEN GETTING READY TO BACK OUT OF A PARKING SPACE.

THE CAR FINALLY BACKED OUT & BEGAN HEADING HIS DIRECTION.

FROM THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION ANOTHER CAR SHOWED UP AS THE CAR WAS PULLING AWAY & SLID QUICKLY INTO THE SPOT THE MAN HAD WAITED NEARLY 10 MINUTES TO OCCUPY.

AS THE SPACE-STEALER GOT OUT OF HIS CAR & HEADED TOWARD THE MALL ENTRANCE, THE FIRST MAN OPENED HIS WINDOW & CALLED OUT “WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?”

THAT’S THE WAY WE CUSTOMARILY HEAR THIS QUESTION ASKED, ISN’T IT?

IT’S ASKED RHETORICALLY.

NO REAL ANSWER IS EXPECTED, AND, IN THE EXAMPLE I MENTIONED, IT’S PROBABLY BEST THAT ONE ISN’T GIVEN BECAUSE A RESPONSE OF SOMETHING LIKE “YOU SNOOZE, YOU LOSE” WOULD SIMPLY ESCALATE THE INCIDENT.

WHEN WE HEAR THAT QUESTION ASKED OR ASK IT OURSELVES, IT’S USUALLY IN A DISPARAGING WAY.

THE QUESTIONER ISN’T PLEASED ABOUT SOMETHING SOMEONE HAS DONE OR SAID.

AS WE APPLY THE QUESTION TO THIS PASSAGE OF SCRIPTURE, I THINK WE CAN ADD “WRITTEN” TO THAT LIST.

SOMEONE ASKING PAUL THE QUESTION “WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?,” MAY NOT BE PLEASED WITH THAT HE’S WRITTEN HERE.

NOW, ON THE OTHER HAND, THAT QUESTION – “WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?” CAN ALSO BE ASKED GENINUELY & WITH GREAT EXPECTATION.

IT MIGHT BE ASKED IN REFERENCE TO THESE WORDS.

IS THERE, INDEED, A “BIG IDEA” PUT FORTH BY PAUL IN THESE 7 VERSES?

MY ANSWER WOULD BE “NO.”

THERE ISN’T “A” BIG IDEA OFFERED HERE – THERE ARE THREE OF THEM.

ANY OF THE THREE – ON ITS OWN – WOULD BE A HUGE IDEA, BUT ALL THREE TOGETHER IN SUCH A BRIEF SPAN OF VERSES, IS STAGGERING.

NOW, HAVING SAID THAT, I THINK ALL THREE MIGHT ALSO ELICIT FROM SOME THE RHETORICAL & DISPARAGING QUESTION OF PAUL – “WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA!?”

THE INTERESTING THING HERE IS THAT, DEPENDING ON WHO YOU ARE, YOUR RESPONSE TO EACH OF THE THREE IDEAS MAY BE DIFFERENT.

YOU MAY THINK ONE OF THEM IS GREAT BUT ARE SKEPTICAL & TROUBLED BY THE OTHER TWO.

YOU MAY BE SKEPTICAL & TROUBLED BY TWO & FIND THE THIRD ENLIGHTENING & EXCITING.

LET'S LOOK AT WHAT THEY ARE & THEN YOU DECIDE FOR YOURSELF.

PAUL BEGINS THIS PASSAGE WITH A "FIRST OF ALL."

IN OTHER WORDS, "*THIS IS IMPORTANT.*"

HIS *FIRST OF ALL* IS A CALL TO PRAYER.

BUT IT'S NOT JUST PRAYER IN GENERAL.

HE CHALLENGES US TO PRAY FOR LEADERS – LEADERS OF OUR COMMUNITY, LEADERS OF OUR NATION & LEADERS OF OTHER COMMUNITIES & OTHER NATIONS.

ORDINARILY, WHEN WE THINK OF THE PRAYERS WE OFFER, WE DO SO IN A CONCENTRIC CIRCLE KIND OF WAY.

WITH OURSELVES AT THE CENTER & THOSE CLOSE TO US, WE MOVE OUTWARD WITH OUR PRAYERS.

WE HAVE THOSE FOR WHOM WE PRAY – FAMILY & FRIENDS, AND THEN OTHERS ON OUR PRAYER LIST WHO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT TO OUR ATTENTION.

LAST OF ALL, PERHAPS, WE PRAY FOR THOSE IN OTHER PLACES WHO ARE IN NEED.

WE DON'T ORDINARILY PLACE OUR LEADERS FIRST ON OUR PRAYER LIST & LEADERS OF OTHER NATIONS ARE FARTHER DOWN, IF INCLUDED AT ALL!

WHAT PAUL ENCOURAGES US TO DO IS PRAY FERVENTLY FOR THOSE IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS.

SOME OF YOU PROBABLY FIND THIS DIFFICULT TO DO.

YOU MAY FIND IT, WITHIN YOURSELF, TO PRAY FOR THOSE YOU SUPPORT POLITICALLY BUT YOU MAY HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY PRAYING FOR THOSE WHOSE POSITIONS DIFFER SIGNIFICANTLY FROM YOUR OWN.

YOU MAY ALSO FIND THAT YOUR PRAYERS – IF OFFERED FOR THOSE YOU OPPOSE – ARE PRAYERS THAT THEY'LL "SEE THE LIGHT" AND CHANGE THEIR POSITION.

THAT'S NOT WHAT PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT HERE.

HE'S TALKING ABOUT PRAYING FOR ALL LEADERS AS IF THEY WERE MEMBERS OF YOUR FAMILY – PRAYING FOR THEIR HEALTH, THEIR STRENGTH, THEIR WELL-BEING, THEIR WISE JUDGMENT, THEIR DESIRE FOR JUSTICE & MERCY

LET'S TAKE THIS EVEN A STEP FURTHER.

WHEN PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT *ALL* LEADERS, HE'S NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT POLITICAL LEADERS HERE AT HOME & HE'S NOT JUST TALKING ABOUT THE POLITICAL LEADERS WITH WHOM YOU HAPPEN TO AGREE.

HE'S TALKING ABOUT LEADERS OF OTHER NATIONS AS WELL.

HE'S TALKING ABOUT LEADERS OF NATIONS WHO WISH TO DO US HARM.

HE'S TALKING ABOUT PRAYING FOR – WELL, *YOU* FILL IN THE BLANK.

AS YOU DO, YOU MIGHT THINK – "*WELL, BUT WAIT A MINUTE! SOME OF THOSE LEADERS HAVE TAKEN POWER ILLEGALLY. THEY HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE THEY REPRESENT!*"

AND WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT KIND OF ARGUMENT WOULD MEAN TO PAUL!?

DO YOU THINK HE LIVED IN AN AGE WHEN LEADERS WERE ELECTED THROUGH A DEMOCRATIC PROCESS THAT WE'VE COME TO KNOW?

LEST YOU THINK THIS IS MADNESS ON THE PART OF PAUL & A PRACTICE THAT WAS NEVER FOLLOWED, CONSIDER A FEW EXAMPLES FROM THAT ERA OF THE EARLY CHURCH.

IN THE LATTER PART OF THE FIRST CENTURY, IN THE VERY MIDST OF THE PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIANS BY THE EMPORER DOMITIAN, CLEMENT OF ROME WROTE *"YOU, LORD & MASTER, HAVE GIVEN RULERS THE POWER OF SOVEREIGNTY THAT WE, KNOWING THE GLORY & HONOR WHICH YOU HAVE GIVEN THEM, MAY SUBMIT OURSELVES TO THEM. GRANT UNTO THEM, THEREFORE, HEALTH, PEACE, CONCORD, STABILITY..."*

TERTULLIAN, IN THE SECOND CENTURY, WROTE, *"THE CHRISTIAN IS THE ENEMY OF NO MAN, LEAST OF ALL THE EMPORER, FOR WE KNOW THAT, SINCE HE HAS BEEN APPOINTED BY GOD, IT IS NECESSARY THAT WE SHOULD LOVE HIM, AND REVERENCE HIM AND HONOR HIM, AND DESIRE HIS SAFETY, TOGETHER WITH THAT OF THE WHOLE ROMAN EMPIRE."*

AS YOU READ THESE WORDS OF PAUL, SOME OF YOU MAY BE INCLINED TO USE ONE OR THE OTHER USES OF "THE BIG IDEA."

"WOW, PAUL! THAT'S A BIG IDEA! IT'S A GREAT IDEA!"

OR

"PAUL – WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA?! NO WAY AM I GOING TO DO THAT!"

IF YOU HAVE DIFFICULTY WARMING UP TO THIS FIRST BIG IDEA OF PAUL IN THIS PASSAGE, IT MAY HELP TO MOVE TO THE SECOND FOR SOME UNDERSTANDING OF WHY HE SUGGESTS THE FIRST ONE.

HE GOES ON TO SAY, *"THIS IS RIGHT & IS ACCEPTABLE IN THE SIGHT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR, WHO DESIRES EVERYONE TO BE SAVED & TO COME TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRUTH."*

GOD DESIRES EVERYONE TO BE SAVED.

EVERYONE.

THINK ABOUT THAT A MINUTE.

EVERYONE – THAT'S A LOT OF PEOPLE, ISN'T IT?

THAT INCLUDES YOU & ME.

IT INCLUDES THOSE LEADERS FOR WHOM WE MAY HAVE DIFFICULTY PRAYING.

IT INCLUDES THE MOST DESPICABLE PERSON YOU'VE EVER KNOWN.

IT INCLUDES THE PERSON YOU HEARD ABOUT ON THE NEWS LAST WEEK WHO COMMITTED AN UNSPEAKABLE ACT AGAINST ANOTHER PERSON.

IT INCLUDES THE WALL STREET MOGUL WHO FLEECE WIDOWS OUT OF THEIR LIFE SAVINGS.

IT INCLUDES THE DRUG DEALER WHO PREYS ON THE WEAKNESS OF TEEN-AGERS.

IT INCLUDES THE PEDOPHILE WHO VICTIMIZES YOUNG CHILDREN.

THAT'S WHO PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT WHEN HE TALKS ABOUT "EVERYONE."

WHEN HE SAYS “EVERYONE,” I TEND TO THINK HE MEANS “EVERYONE.”

THESE WORDS OF PAUL HAVE BEEN CALLED “THE CHARTER OF MISSIONARY WORK.”

THEY GIVE US A REASON TO OPEN OUR DOORS & OPEN OUR HEARTS TO ALL GOD’S CHILDREN.

THE GREAT MISSIONARY C.T. STUDD USED THIS LITTLE LIMERICK AS HIS GUIDING PRINCIPLE IN REACHING OUT TO OTHERS:

*“SOME WANT TO LIVE WITHIN THE SOUND
OF CHURCH OR CHAPEL BELL;
I WANT TO RUN A RESCUE SHOP
WITHIN A YARD OF HELL.”*

HERE AGAIN, YOU MIGHT BE INCLINED TO OFFER ONE OF THE TWO RESPONSES TO PAUL UPON READING THESE WORDS:

“WOW, PAUL! THAT’S A BIG IDEA! IT’S A GREAT IDEA!”

OR

“PAUL!?! WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?”

THERE IS A THIRD BIG IDEA THAT PAUL OFFERS IN THESE VERSES – AN IDEA THAT NATURALLY FLOWS FROM THE PREVIOUS TWO.

IT’S PUT FORTH IN WHAT WAS QUITE LIKELY A MUSICAL OR LITURGICAL FASHION – SOMETHING THAT WOULD HAVE CUSTOMARILY BEEN USED IN A WORSHIP SETTING.

“FOR THERE IS ONE GOD; THERE IS ALSO ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND HUMANKIND, CHRIST JESUS, HIMSELF HUMAN, WHO GAVE HIMSELF A RANSOM FOR ALL...”

THIS BIG IDEA PULLS IT ALL TOGETHER, DOESN’T IT?

WE PRAY FOR LEADERS BECAUSE GOD DESIRES EVERYONE TO BE SAVED & THERE IS BUT ONE GOD WHO CAN DO THAT.

WHEN I WAS IN SEMINARY, I REMEMBER READING A BOOK ENTITLED CHRIST IN A PLURALISTIC AGE.

IT WAS A BOOK THAT, IN THAT DAY, WAS WAY AHEAD OF ITS TIME.

I REMEMBER NOT REALLY PAYING MUCH ATTENTION TO IT BECAUSE, FOR ALL INTENTS & PURPOSES, OURS WAS STILL A NATION OVERWHELMING DOMINATED BY CHRISTIANS.

THE ONLY OTHER HOUSE OF WORSHIP ONE MIGHT SEE WAS A JEWISH SYNAGOGUE OR TEMPLE.

THERE WERE NO MUSLIM MOSQUES OR ISLAMIC CENTERS.

THERE WERE NO HINDU TEMPLES.

30 YEARS AGO, WE LIVED IN A BUBBLE & THAT BUBBLE HAS SINCE BEEN BURST.

THERE HAVE ALWAYS, OBVIOUSLY, BEEN A PLETHORA OF RELIGIONS AROUND THE WORLD.

THEY JUST WEREN’T HERE – CERTAINLY NOT TO THE EXTENT THAT WE SEE THEM TODAY.

SO, IN A SENSE, PAUL WAS MUCH MORE ADVANCED IN THIS THINKING THAN WE, IN THIS COUNTRY ARE TODAY.

HE WAS SURROUNDED BY WORLD RELIGIONS.

HE WAS SURROUNDED BY THEM & HE KNEW THE PROPER APPROACH TO THEM.

HE KNEW THAT HE WAS TO PRAY FOR THOSE WHO WERE DIFFERENT FROM HIM & NOT JUST TO PRAY FOR THEM TO “SEE THE LIGHT,” BUT TO PRAY FOR THEIR SAFETY, THEIR HEALTH, THEIR WELL-BEING.

HE KNEW THAT GOD DESIRES THAT EVERYONE BE SAVED.

AND HE ALSO KNEW THAT THERE IS BUT ONE GOD FOR EVERYONE & ONE MEDIATOR AS WELL.

NOW, *THIS* IS A BIG IDEA – PERHAPS THE BIGGEST IDEA OF ALL – NOT JUST THE BIGGEST IDEA IN THIS PASSAGE BUT THE BIGGEST IDEA EVER COMPREHENDED BY THE HUMAN MIND.

THERE IS ONE GOD & THERE IS ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD & HUMANKIND, CHRIST JESUS...”

NOW, DOES THAT MEAN THAT ONLY THOSE WHO PROFESS THEIR FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST & JOIN A CHURCH WILL BE SAVED?

FRANKLY, I DON’T KNOW.

FORTUNATELY, GOD HAS NOT GRANTED ME THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE THAT DETERMINATION.

WHAT GOD *HAS* GIVEN ME, THOUGH, IS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PRAY FOR EVERYONE – EVEN LEADERS WHOSE POSITIONS DIFFER FROM MY OWN & EVEN LEADERS WHO WISH TO DO ME HARM.

FURTHERMORE, GOD HAS GIVEN ME THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIVINE DESIRE THAT EVERYONE BE SAVED.

FINALLY, GOD HAS GIVEN ME THE ABSOLUTE CERTAINTY THAT THERE IS BUT ONE GOD OF THIS UNIVERSE & ONE MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD & HUMANKIND & THAT ONE MEDIATOR IS JESUS CHRIST.

IN OTHER WORDS, SALVATION COMES THROUGH CHRIST ALONE.

SO WE END WHERE WE BEGAN.

PAUL OFFERS US THREE BIG IDEAS IN THESE 7 VERSES.

WHERE DO YOU STAND ON THEM?

ARE YOU ENLIGHTENED & EXCITED BY THEM OR ARE YOU SKEPTICAL & TROUBLED BY THEM?

ARE YOU LEFT SAYING, “WOW, PAUL! *THOSE ARE BIG IDEAS – THEY’RE GREAT IDEAS!*”

OR ARE YOU MORE INCLINED TO SAY, “PAUL – *WHAT’S THE BIG IDEA?!*” AMEN.

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