

MY SALVATION
BY LEON WAYNE HAWKER SR.

IT WAS A LONG JOURNEY TO MY SALVATION, STARTING WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD. MY PARENTS WHO WERE WORKING DID NOT ATTEND CHURCH. MY FATHERS FAMILY HAD A JEHOVAH WITNESS BACKGROUND. I KNOW MY GRAND-MOTHER NANNIE HAWKER READ HER BIBLE EVERYDAY AND I TRULY BELIEVE SHE IS HEAVEN THIS DAY WITH THE LORD. MY MOTHERS FAMILY WERE NON PRACTICING EPISCOPALIANS. I DO NOT KNOW IF ANY OF MY OTHER KIN ARE IN HEAVEN AS THEY NEVER WITNESSED TO ME. TO MY KNOWLEDGE MY MOTHER NOR FATHER ATTENDED SERVICES, HOWEVER, WHEN I WAS SIX YEARS OLD THEY TOOK ME TO THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH ON JEFFERSON AVENUE, WHERE I ATTENDED SUNDAY SCHOOL.

MY FATHER WORKED AT THE POST OFFICE DURING THIS TIME AND MY MOTHER AND HER FAMILY OPERATED A RESTAURANT NAMED "FUZZY'S" AT FIVE FORKS. WE LIVED IN AN APARTMENT ON JEFFERSON AVENUE, IN DANVILLE, VIRGINIA, NOT TOO FAR FROM THE FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH. I CAN NOT EXPLAIN WHY THEY DIDN'T ATTEND THE CHURCH. WE MOVED SEVERAL TIMES DURING MY YOUNG LIFE. EVENTUALLY WE MOVED TO BERRYMAN AVENUE IN DANVILLE WHEN I WAS TEN YEARS OF AGE. AT THAT TIME, I ATTENDED MOSLEY MEMORIAL CHURCH SUNDAY SCHOOL.

WHEN I TURNED TWELVE YEARS OF AGE, BILL WHITE RECRUITED ME FOR THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BASKETBALL TEAM. MR WHITE WOULD PICK ME UP ON SUNDAYS ALONG WITH SEVERAL OTHER YOUNG FELLOWS AND TOOK US TO THE PRESBYTERIAN CENTER. WE HAD TO ATTEND SUNDAY SCHOOL TWICE A MONTH IN ORDER TO BE ELIGIBLE TO PLAY ON THE TEAM. AFTER SUNDAY SCHOOL MR. WHITE WOULD TAKE US TO THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH FOR SERVICES.

I CAN REMEMBER WE HAD TWO ELDERLY LADIES, ONE WAS MRS. NELSON, TEACHING US IN SUNDAY SCHOOL. THEY HAD A ROUGH TIME KEEPING US DISCIPLINED. SEVERAL OLDER INDIVIDUALS LED OUR SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS. IN FACT, PAUL BELL WAS THE PRESIDENT OF THE CLASS. HE EVENTUALLY WENT TO PRISON FOR MURDER. PAUL DENNY WAS OUR VICE-PRESIDENT. HE WAS KNIFED TO DEATH IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA. NANCY MCCLELLAN WAS OUR TREASURER. SHE WAS KNOWN AS "BIG RED". SHE WAS A LARGE FEMALE FOR HER AGE. SHE WAS SHOT AND KILLED IN WASHINGTON, D.C. GERTRUDE BROOMFIELD WAS THE SECRETARY OF THE CLASS. SHE WAS CAUGHT UP IN WHAT WAS KNOWN AS "SNEAKY PEEK", A PROSTITUTION RING ON ROUTE #58 EAST OF DANVILLE. SEVERAL OF US WERE ABLE TO ESCAPE FROM THE CLASS WITHOUT A CRIMINAL RECORD. WHETHER THEY KNEW THE LORD AT THE TIME OF THEIR DEATH, I AM NOT THE JUDGE.

FROM FIFTEEN UNTIL I ENTERED COLLEGE I DIDN'T GO TO CHURCH OFTEN. I WAS MAINLY INTERESTED IN SPORTS WHICH TOOK MOST OF MY TIME.

AFTER GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL I ATTENDED HAMPDEN-SYDNEY COLLEGE. FOR FOUR YEARS I HAD TO ATTEND CHAPEL TWICE A WEEK. WE DID HAVE VOLUNTEER CUTS, ONE MY FRESHMEN YEARS, TWO MY SOPHOMORE YEAR, THREE MY JUNIOR YEAR AND FOUR MY SENIOR YEAR, THEY WERE THE ONLY EXCEPTIONS.

WHILE AT HAMPDEN-SYDNEY I HAVE THREE YEARS OF BIBLE. I FAILED MY FRESHMAN YEAR, THEREFORE, IT TOOK ME THREE YEARS TO FINISH TWO YEARS OF BIBLE.

I WAS MARRIED IN APRIL 1961 TO A FINE CHRISTIAN WOMAN, IRENE BAUM. SHE HAD COME TO KNOW CHRIST AT AN EARLY AGE. DURING SEVERAL YEARS OF OUR MARRIAGE I WOULD

ATTEND CHURCH AND SUNDAY SCHOOL WITH HER. MANY SUNDAYS I WOULD PLAY SOFTBALL AND NOT GO TO CHURCH. SHE WOULD CONTINUALLY REMIND ME I SHOULD BE GOING TO CHURCH RATHER THAN PLAYING SOFTBALL.

AMAZINGLY THROUGH MY FIRST 28 YEARS, I HAD BEEN TO CHURCH MANY TIMES AND STILL DID NOT KNOW THE LORD JESUS AS MY SAVIOR. I'M CONFIDENT I HAD HEARD THE PLAN OF SALVATION MANY TIMES BUT SPIRITUALLY MY EARS WERE DEAF AND MY SPIRITUAL EYES CLOSED.

ON FEBRUARY FIRST 1967, DR. LUKE SMITH, PATOR OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN DANVILLE CAME TO MY HOME TO VISIT. HE AND I HAD A ONE ON ONE CONVERSATION. I HAD FELT I HAD TO BE PERFECT BEFORE I NEEDED TO JOIN THE CHURCH. I HAD WITNESSED DEACONS AND OTHER LEADERS IN THE CHURCH DRINKING AND CHASING WOMEN. DR. SMITH EXPLAINED TO ME I COULD ONLY BE PERFECT IN JESUS. HE GAVE ME THE PLAN OF SALVATION AND I ACCEPTED CHRIST AS MY SAVIOR AT MY RESIDENCE 112 CALRENDON CIRCLE IN DANVILLE. ON SUNDAY FEBRUARY FIFTH 1967 I WENT DOWN FRONT AT THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH AND PROFESSED BEFORE MAN MY BELIEF IN JESUS CHRIST AS MY SAVIOR. I WAS BAPTIZED ON THE SAME NIGHT AT THE CHURCH. SURPRISINGLY NO ON BUT THE LORD AND I KNEW I WOULD GO DOWN FRONT ON THAT DAY, NOT EVEN MY WIFE. I'M SURE IT SURPRISED MANY. I KNOW IT WAS A RESULT OF ~~THE~~ PRAYERS BY MANY.

I HAVE MY BIRTH CERTICATE FOR THAT SPECIAL DAY OF FEBRUARY 5TH 1967. I WAS APPROACHING MY 29TH BIRTHDAY IN MAY. PAIRSE THE LORD HE ALLOWED ME TO LIVE TO THAT SPECIAL DAY IN MY LIFE.

SO THE RECORD WILL BE COMPLETED, MY MOTHER AND FATHER ACCEPTED CHRIST AS THEIR SAVIOR WHEN THEY WERE IN THEIR SEVENTIES. THEY ACCEPTED CHRIST AT LEE STREET BAPTIST CHURCH IN DANVILLE.

I HAVE THREE CHILDREN AND THEY KNOW THE LORD. I HAVE EIGHT GRAND-CHILDREN. SIX OF THEM KNOW THE LORD. THE TWO YOUNG ONES, FIVE AND SEVEN ARE GROUNDED PROPERLY AND THEY WILL EVENTUALLY ACCEPT THE LORD AS THEIR SAVIOR.

WE GIVE THE LORD ALL THE PRAISE AND GLORY FOR WHAT HE HAS DONE AND WILL DO IN OUR LIVES FROM THIS POINT ON.