

# What Becomes of Our Boasting

Romans 3:21-4:17

*Romans (no. 10 in the series)*

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/what-becomes-of-our-boasting/>

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

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## Prayer

Father, I do pray that you would help us to preach. Lord God, I see all these dots—all these little different pieces—and Lord, I pray that you would connect the dots, through the power of your Spirit, with scripture, with our lives. And Lord, connect them in such a way that we would see the truth and Jesus, you are the truth. Thank you for the fact that you are good—you're the good. So, be glorified in us, Lord God, as we speak and whatever is not of you Lord, I pray you'd wash it away. Help us to see you God, in Jesus's name. Amen.

## Message

For most of my life, I've been a dweeb, except for three glorious months during my freshman year at Heritage High School—I was on the soccer team, and we were good. One Friday night along with some of my soccer buddies, I went to the varsity football game. And, as usual, they lost. Leaving the game, we were all hanging out of Bobby VandeKoppel's dad's green AMC Matador, yelling at the top of our lungs "Football Sucks! Soccer Rules! Football Sucks! Soccer Rules!" It was exhilarating; It was so cool, and I was so cool. We were yelling this to the crowd of disappointed football fans leaving the game on either side of Littleton Blvd., as we approached the intersection with Broadway. We were all hanging out the windows and yelling, including Bobby who was driving, had just gotten his license, and didn't notice that the light had turned and the cars in front of us had stopped. We were all yelling, boasting, and exalting ourselves, when we slammed into the line of cars directly in front of us, in the midst of all those football fans from our Highschool leaving the game.

No one was physically injured, but as we sat there waiting for the police, my ego was just crucified; I was mortified; I died a bit. I think it was the worst feeling that I had ever felt. I was humiliated I had made soccer my life, and so I literally thought that I was my boast. "Soccer rules; football sucks; I'm somebody because I'm on the soccer team." That following year, I was cut from the team. I found a hole, behind my house, down by the railroad tracks, sat in that hole, and wept as if I had gone to my own funeral. And in a way, I had, for I thought I was nothing but my boasting.

Undoubtably, you think, “How silly!” And yet I suspect that you’re just the same. If someone asks you, “Who are you; tell me about yourself.” What do you say? Don’t you boast? I mean you say things like, “Well, I graduated from this school or that school,” or maybe “I chose not to waste my time with school but dive right into an honest trade.” Or maybe, “I love the Arts and so I paint” or “I’m into adventure and so I ski.” Or if your courageous, maybe you say, “I’m crippled, I was abused, or I was rejected and defrocked,” but maybe you say it in such a way that you make yourself a victim—which in a backhanded way is also a boast: “I would’ve if I could’ve.” Or maybe you say, “I’m a believer.” Well, is that a boast? Whatever the case, we all boast. We think we are our boast, our resume. We boast in our ability to know the good, choose the good and so do the good. It’s how we justify ourselves—we boast.



Over Christmas, my son Jon was home and cleaning out his old room in the basement. He found this, and yelled, “Hey Dad I found your old trophy.” Ironically, it’s a figure of a boy passing the ball.

It’s the only trophy I ever received. The year after the car crash, and just after being cut from the team, some of us formed a club team. And at the end of that season, we all got these little trophies. It says, “AA champs,” but I felt like a “AA chump.” Long ago, I left it in the basement, for it didn’t feel like a trophy to my success, but a trophy to my failure. It is what became of my boasting—humiliation.

It’s my only trophy and yet, to be honest, I suppose I do have another trophy. I hope you don’t mind me talking about this, but I suppose this is the most obvious way in which our text this morning relates to me. Twenty years ago, we raised millions of dollars to purchase three office buildings and construct this 900-seat sanctuary on the side of I-70. At the time, I was preaching what I preach now. I believed the church wasn’t a building and that a building is simply a necessary tool in a temperate climate. And I thought I knew that everything that’s anything is Grace, including our ability to trust that everything that’s anything is Grace. But, if I’m honest, to me, this building also felt a bit like a trophy to all my faith, my hard work, and my success. I would never ever say it, but I know that I’m constantly tempted to think it: “My church rules; your church sucks; I’m somebody cause I’m the pastor and I deserve a trophy for passing the ball.”



When we raised money for the building, we needed a slogan, and I came up with this one: “Where the world drives by.” I meant, “the Gospel: where the world drives by” But I suppose that I also meant “A trophy to Peter’s Success: where the world drives by; where the world drives by a trophy.” And the World still drives by.

But ever since I was defrocked and removed, it's felt like a rather different sort of trophy—something more like my old soccer trophy and a reminder of the worst feeling I ever felt. We've been preaching through Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In our last sermon from Romans, in Romans 3, Paul suddenly asks this question: "So what becomes of our boasting?"



Romans 3:21-4:25—This is the English Standard Version, but I'm going to insert sections from the King James Version, and Young's Literal Translation because modern translators can't seem to take Roman's literally. It's important to remember that in Biblical Greek, righteousness and justice are really the same word—*dikaiosune*; it can be translated either way.

**Romans 3:21-22:**

**But now the righteousness [*dikaiosune*] of God has been manifested apart from the law [the knowledge of Good and evil written in books], although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it— <sup>22</sup> the righteousness [*dikaiosune*] of God through [“the faith of “(KJV, YLT)] Jesus Christ...**

Now, this is a huge topic in the study of most of Paul's Epistle's: There are multiple places where modern versions will translate two Greek words as “faith in Jesus,” while older translations and literal translations will translate those two words as “the faith (or faithfulness) of Jesus.” It all has to do with whether or not the phrase is taken as a subjective genitive, meaning that the faith or faithfulness is what Jesus does—that is, it's Jesus's faith. Or whether it is an objective genitive, meaning that the faith or faithfulness is what we do—that is our faith in Jesus, the object of our faith.<sup>i</sup>

Paul clearly uses the subjective genitive (meaning ‘of’) in reference to faith many times in his letters because his statement can't be understood any other way. Like, in just a few verses he'll use it when he writes of the “faith of Abraham.” But there is no place where his statement must be an objective genitive. And most genitives simply express possession or origin. So, the most literal, and obvious way, to translate this is the “faith of Jesus.” And yet, it's often translated “faith in Jesus.”

So, we must ask, “Is it our faith that manifests the righteousness of God? Or is it Jesus' faith, or faithfulness, that manifests the righteousness of God?” Well, hasn't Paul just spent three chapters arguing that all humanity is unfaithful? You see if Paul is talking about our faith in God, maybe we could boast. We could think of faith as our own good decisions, our judgments. In other words, we could learn about Jesus and then decide about Jesus and call that faith; We could judge Jesus and so choose Jesus and call that faith. We could take knowledge of the Good, and so make good decisions, and call that faith and boast in our faithfulness. However, if Paul is talking about the faith, or the faithfulness of Jesus, we could not boast in ourselves; it's his faith, it's his righteousness. So, if his faith becomes our faith, it's because he gave it to us (and that's called grace). Enough said.

**Romans 3:21-22:**

**But now the righteousness [dikaosune] of God has been manifested apart from the law [the knowledge of Good and evil written in books], although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—<sup>22</sup> the righteousness [dikaosune] of God through [“the faith of “(KJV, YLT)] Jesus Christ for all who believe. (literally: “the believing”)**

He’s already told us that “none are righteous, no one seeks,” that is, none have faith. So now if they do have faith, where did they get this faith?

**Romans 3:22a-26:**

[“the faith of “(KJV, YLT)] Jesus Christ for all [the believing].<sup>23</sup> **for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,<sup>24</sup> and are justified [dikaioo: “made right” ] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,<sup>25</sup> whom God put forward as a propitiation [through the faith in his blood, (YLT)] This was to show God’s righteousness [dikaosune: also, “Justice”], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.<sup>26</sup> It was to show his righteousness [dikaosune: Justice] at the present time, so that he might be just [dikaioo-right] and the justifier of [dikaioo—“the one who makes right”] the one who has [the faith of (KJV, YLT)] Jesus. [God’s Justice is to make others Just]**

And now this is utterly fascinating, Paul tells us that we are justified by the following things:

**We are justified (made right) by:**

3:24 *“Grace as a gift.”*

3:26 *“The Faith of Jesus (KJV, YLT).”*

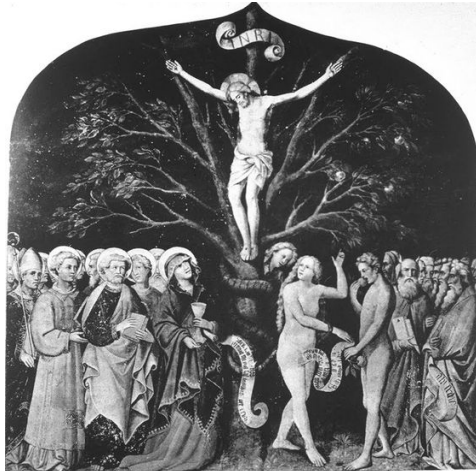
3:28 *“Faith apart from works.”*

5:9 **The Blood of Christ:** *“We have now been justified by his blood.”*

Not just “declared” right but “made” right, with his blood<sup>ii</sup> God’s justice is to make us just, with faith. In 3:25, Paul just told us that “the faith” is “in his blood.”

We’ve been talking about theories of the atonement but according to Paul, the thing that happens at the cross is some sort of universal blood transfusion. And now I want to remind you that Paul is a Rabbi steeped in Scripture and Scripture has been painting a picture for thousands of years.





*"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena*

The entire thing is about this tree in the middle of the garden of Eden, the garden of Calvary, and the garden city of the New Jerusalem.

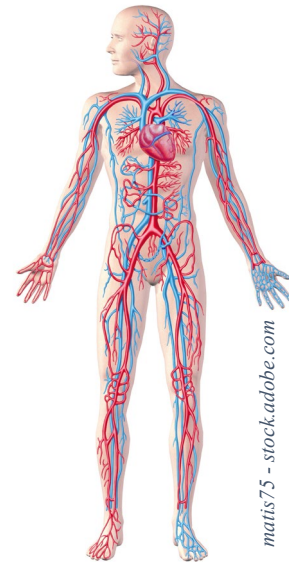


*flik47 - stock.adobe.com*

And that picture lies at the heart of this picture, in the inner sanctuary of the Temple, which turns out to be a body.

The temple is the body of Christ, which is us, for we are individually members of his body. Well, any member of a body that refuses to receive

blood and bleed blood, that is refuses to pass the ball (the life), is not right, and must be made right for the sake of the entire body—justified.



*matis75 - stock.adobe.com*



*Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.*

Well, this is how God makes us all right. The Blood of Christ—the righteousness of God—given to us.

We're justified by faith as a gift and the faith is in the blood; like breath is in the blood, the Spirit and Life are in the blood.

And God does not only justify us; he justifies all. Paul just said so in verse 23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift." For the rest of Romans Paul will keep defending that statement.

Twenty years ago, it was like I couldn't escape from that statement. So, I began preaching that statement and everyone seemed thrilled. Until about 15 years ago when some in authority began to say, "Hey wait, do you actually mean that?" I said, "Well, yeah, I think so. I hope so." And then all sorts of people seemed to get incredibly scared and very angry. I now get calls from people all over the world sharing their stories, and they usually say something like, "This is such incredibly, wonderful news and now I see it all over Scripture. But I just don't understand why so many people just to get so scared and angry at the mere suggestion that it might be true."

At first, I didn't understand either but over the years I think I've come to understand all too well, for others and for myself, for I get scared and angry for myself too. You see, If God justifies everyone, then no one can justify themselves. That means no one can boast in themselves, even if they believe that they are justified and all are justified, for even that belief is the gift of God. In other words: Salvation is humiliation, for you are being saved from yourself—you know that thing that you boast about, that thing that you think is yourself—your pride, your ego, your flesh. It must be cut off, circumcised if you will, forsaken and excluded.

**Romans 3:25b-27a:**

**It was to show his righteousness [dikaioō: Justice] at the present time, so that he might be just [dikaioō-right] and the justifier of [dikaioō—"the one who makes right"] the one who has [the faith of (KJV, YLT)] Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Then what becomes of our boasting?**

It is excluded, cut off, forsaken, and cast out for it forms something like a tough skin around your heart that keeps you from intimate communion; that keeps you from the ecstatic joy of loving and being loved; that keeps you from living the Life that God has given you.

**Romans 3:27:**

**Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law (or way) of faith—that is trust.**

To live by the law, is to trust your own judgement, using knowledge of Good and evil taken from a tree—that is to trust dead knowledge. But to trust a person, is to surrender your judgment to another's judgement, and so you don't boast in your choices you boast in the choices of the one you trust, who is living knowledge—Living Knowledge, not only "with you," but "in you." Paul is saying that faith in you, which is righteousness in you, is actually the Spirit, Breath, and Life of Christ in you, for he has bled for you winning your trust, but even more bled into you, giving you his life—"the life is in the blood."<sup>iii</sup> Lev. 17:11 "Given to us (you) to make atonement."

Jesus literally means "God is Salvation," which means you are not salvation. And if God saves all, it becomes abundantly clear that no one can save themselves. And so, all our boasting is an empty illusion, which nonetheless creates a prison, which we often call "hell." We hide in "hell," for we're terrified of the judgment of God, for the Grace of God means that our boasting is excluded. In other words, we will lose our proud psyches in the presence of God. In other words, we will be humbled, that is humiliated. And for most folks that's the worst feeling the can

imagine. And they suspect that it is the end of them and maybe it is. But in Scripture, the End is also the Beginning.

**Romans 3:28-4:1:**

**For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law <sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? [Remember: everyone is a Jew or a not Jew—a gentile] Gentiles also? Yes, [God] of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. [And Remember: everyone is circumcised or not circumcised] who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means Hell no! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (We fulfill the law with faith) 4 What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?**

Abraham. Now to us, that's an abrupt transition but to Paul and the Jews it made perfect sense. In the Gospels, the Jews are constantly boasting that they are the faithful and obedient children of Abraham, unlike the Gentiles—boasting that they will sit at table with Father Abraham in the Kingdom of God, and that they will rest on his bosom—the bosom of Father Abraham. They boast in him and of him. Perhaps more than anyone in all this world, including Jesus, Abraham is exalted among men. He's exalted in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam.

He is exalted by people, and he is exalted by God but exalted in the strangest of ways, he is exalted through humiliation. You know, God chose him for no apparent reason, made him the most outlandish promises, humbled him for decades, and then exalted him because he had faith. His humiliation is his exaltation; it's faith. Even though I expect us to only comprehend a little of this, just let me read what Paul writes next, remind you of Abraham's story, and then encourage you to accept humiliation with joy.

**Romans 4:1:**

**What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified [*dikaio*: made right] by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted [*logizomai*] to him as righteousness... [Faith is counted as righteousness because it is righteousness and Jesus is our righteousness, according to Paul.]<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believes in [trusts] him who justifies the ungodly [not “some ungodly,” just “the ungodly.” God justifies, makes right, the ungodly.], his faith is counted [*logizomai*] as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup> “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered” [“Father forgive them,” said Jesus on a tree in a garden.] <sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count [*logizomai*] his sin.**

Paul tells us that “love keeps no record, no counting [*logizomai*] of wrongs.” But Love does keep a record of rights—that’s anything done in faith—faith in “the one who justifies the ungodly.” That’s what Paul just told us.

**Romans 4:9a:**

**Is this blessing then only for the circumcised...?**

That seems like a weird transition too. You know, circumcision was the very first religious law outside of the garden. And it was given to Abraham when he was 99 years old. That must have been utterly humiliating, and utterly bizarre, until you discover that it symbolizes the circumcision of the heart, that place in which we hide from the painful presence of Love, and God is Love. God is our “helper,”—*ezer* in Hebrew. The name Eliezer means God is Helper.

**Romans 4:9-17:**

**Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?**

**For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.<sup>10</sup> How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.<sup>11</sup> He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness [of the faith (KJV, YLT)] that he had while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,<sup>12</sup> and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham and his offspring [“his seed”] that he would be heir of the world [that would include you, wouldn’t it? You’ve been promised to Abraham] did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.<sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs—those who inherit—faith is null and the promise is void [or, if anyone earns anything; no one can inherit everything].<sup>15</sup> For the law (knowledge of Good and evil, taken and used to justify self) brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression<sup>16</sup> That is why it (the inheritance) depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—who’s that? All his offspring—not only to [that] of the law but also to [that] of the faith of Abraham<sup>iv</sup>, who is the father of us all We’re all his offspring,<sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I have made you the father of many [all v] nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead [not “some dead,” just “the dead”] and calls into existence the things that do not exist.**

Amazing! So, what does God call into existence? Everything. And, how about Faith in Abraham, which is “The promised seed” in Abraham, which is Jesus Christ in Abraham. You see, Abraham is like a virgin that conceives and gives birth to Salvation, Yeshua—that is Jesus. When a woman gives birth, she goes through intense labor (humiliating labor), but when the child is born, she knows that the child is a miracle, and so, she isn’t proud of the fruit of her womb; she’s grateful. If you boast in and of your fruit of the spirit, you don’t know what the fruit of the Spirit is.



And Faith is the fruit of the Spirit. Faith is NOT a work of the flesh; faith is the fruit of the Spirit—a miracle. And how does God implant that miracle in us? Well in Abraham he did it with a Word: a huge promise, a lifetime of humiliation, and an outrageous exaltation. Do any of you ever feel like God has made you a promise and now you find that promise to be humiliating?

Remember Abraham's story?

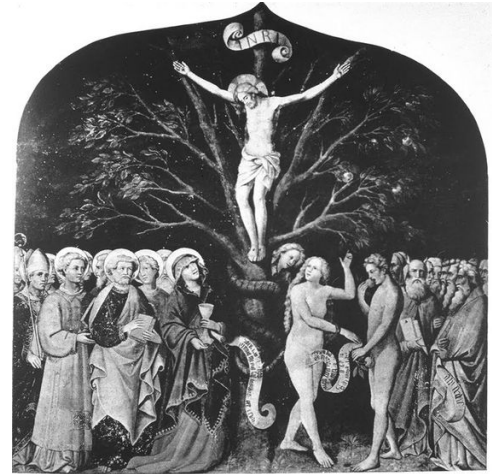
- In Genesis 12:1, God just speaks to a 75-year-old uncircumcised gentile named Abram, saying “I will make of you a great nation and bless you, blessing those that bless you and cursing those that curse you.” There are no conditions; he's just told to keep travelling the direction he was already travelling.<sup>vi</sup>
- In Genesis 12:7 in Canaan, God says “to your seed, I give this land.” But then there's a famine in the land. Abram flees, then in fear of his life, he pimps his wife to the Pharaoh in Egypt, is humbled, and then returns.
- In Genesis 13 God promises the land to Abram and his seed “forever”—no terms, no conditions, just an outrageous promise.
- In Genesis 15 and decades later, God appears to Abram and says, “fear not.” And Abram says, “But Lord, I'm childless and Eliezer, my Syrian slave, is set to inherit all I have.” But God tells Abram to go outside and count the stars, if he is able, and then says, “So shall your descendants (your seed) be.” Abram believes God's Word, and God counts it as righteousness. Then God cuts a covenant as Abraham watches—it's a covenant of Grace, for there are no terms and there are no conditions for Abram.
- In Genesis 16 When Abram was 85, he still has no offspring, and takes matters into his own hands—he impregnates Hagar, his wife's slave. If Abram believes God, he also doesn't believe God, for he tries to manufacture the blessing with works—his work—fornication. He has faith, but it's maybe the size of a mustard seed.
- In Genesis 17 when Abram is 99, God says to Abram, “Walk before me and be blameless, that I may establish my covenant”...the land and the baby and Abram falls on his face and laughs. Then God says, “Your name is not Abram, but Abraham, for I have made you (not will make you) have made you the father of many nations.” Now cut the skin from the tip of your baby-maker, and everyone else's baby maker, your wife Sarah is going to have a baby.
- In Genesis 21 when Abraham is 100, Sarah has a baby and they name him Isaac, which means Laughter—Isaac is Abraham's Laughter, his Life, and God's promised blessing. But when Isaac is about 30 years old, God tells Abraham (130-year-old Abraham—So Isaac must've agreed to this) to go to the Holy Mountain and offer Isaac as a sacrifice on a pile of wood.



*Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ, [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.*

That mountain was also this mountain—Mt. Calvary—which was the Temple Mt. and Mt. Zion.

And the Jews believed it was also this mountain—the holy mountain on which Adam is made in the image of God: Eden.



*"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena*

God tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. So, old Abraham binds Isaac and lifts the knife, preparing to sacrifice his laughter, his life, and the promised blessing. Because of some terrible atonement theories, most modern Christians have really no understanding of the sacrifices and offerings in Scripture (the Old Testament). Father Abraham was sacrificing his own heart on the Holy Mountain. He didn't hate the sacrifice; he was the sacrifice.

Soren Kierkegaard calls this “the teleological suspension of the ethical” and the definition of Biblical Faith. For in that moment of supreme faith, Abraham had to believe that the good was not a list of rules, that is ethics, that is “knowledge of good and evil” that he could take and comprehend and thus know. In that moment, Abraham had to trust that the Good was the Word of the Lord that comprehended him and knew him. In other words: Wisdom was not a list, law, or formula; Wisdom was a person that knew him, loved him, and helped him—His helper.<sup>vii</sup> Abraham trusted His helper, more than he trusted himself.

The Author of Hebrews writes that “Abraham considered [*logizomai*] that God could raise the dead.” He believed that God would keep his promise. Many modern Christians say “God would never ask such a thing” and I suppose that now, in a way, that's true. At the time God had not given any laws, except for circumcision, but now he's told us: never ever sacrifice a child. God would never ask such a thing and yet, in a way, he's always asking such things, isn't he? God is sovereign, and he will ask all of us to surrender our husbands, wives, children, friends, homes and even ourselves—we will all lose our psyches; we will all die. In fact Paul is working his way toward this statement in Romans 12:1 “Therefore, present your bodies a living sacrifice.”

Well on the Holy Mountain, Abraham sacrifices his judgment to the judgment of God, and that's called faith and that is utterly humiliating. Yet, the Lord intervenes and provides a substitute that we now know is his own son, his own heart, his very self, and actually the promised blessing that is promised to Abraham, Jesus our Lord, who does die and is resurrected even in us, his body, the household of faith. Then, God says (Genesis 22:25) “By myself, I have sworn, declares the Lord, because, because, because, you have done this—this act of faith—and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you.” And yet God had already promised, unconditionally promised, to Bless Abram fifty years earlier when he was an uncircumcised pagan living in Syria. Do you see what this means? God knew that Abraham would have faith,

for he knew that he would create that faith, with a promise, a humiliation, and an exaltation.<sup>viii</sup> In Scripture it's like everything depends on faith but faith always depends on God.

People will sometimes say, "If you believe God saves everyone, you obviously don't believe faith is necessary for salvation." But I believe faith is salvation and what they think is salvation is actually damnation; it's their own judgment. But Faith is a miracle. Faith is the Spirit of God flowing through Your veins. Faith is Jesus rising from the dead in the tomb that was your heart.

God creates faith with a Promise and a Humiliation—that is the realization that you cannot create the Promise. God creates faith with a Promise, a humiliation, & an outrageous exaltation. God promised the blessing to Abraham, and then spent a lifetime humbling Abraham until Abraham fully surrendered the promised blessing on the wood on the Holy Mountain. Then God blessed Abraham beyond his wildest dreams—for in Abraham, God had created Faith.

Abraham gave it all and received it all back and more. In Romans 8:32 Paul says, "He gave us his own son, will he not with him graciously give us all things?" Abraham gave it all and received it all back and more, but he received it all back in a new way. You know in the days of his flesh, Abraham didn't inherit all the land, and all the nations, and he still had to surrender Sarah and Isaac; he still had to die. But in the New Testament Jesus tells some outrageous stories about Abraham, as if he really does inherit all things and in a new way. In the Gospels, Jesus tells of "many" (like the stars of heaven) coming from East and West and sitting at table with Abraham in the Kingdom of Heaven. In Luke he tells of a man named Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, and a rich man on the other side of a chasm. Lazarus is a Greek form of the Hebrew name Eliezer, and you remember that Eliezer was Abraham's slave, of whom Abraham complained to God. Well in Jesus story, Eliezer is in Abraham's bosom—back in a new way, not as a slave but a brother.<sup>ix</sup> And the Rich Man, with five brothers, who despised Lazarus, that is Eliezer (which means God is Helper), appears to be Judah, the Father of the Jews. It's not that Judah can never get to the bosom of Abraham; it's just that he'll have to watch Jesus destroy the chasm, and give him a new heart, first—so that he'll enjoy hanging out with people like Lazarus.

My point is that you will inherit the blessing and all things with him, like Abraham. But you cannot receive and enjoy the blessing and all things and with him until you've been humbled like Abraham on the Holy Mountain. And that's because the blessing, and all things with him, are a gift. You cannot truly enjoy anything, until you know that absolutely everything is absolute Grace. So, what becomes of our boasting? Well on the holy mountain it becomes our humiliation, and then it's transformed into our exaltation—an eternal communion of Love and Laughter.

Recently I was really struggling with my old trophies of shame and to be honest, really missing hundreds of old friends that fifteen years ago I lost. I asked Susan to pray for me and she said, "It doesn't make any sense to me... all I hear is 'Philemon' and 'Don't count the stars.'" I thought a moment and said, "Wow that makes perfect sense to me." Philemon is the slave owner in the New Testament, whose runaway slave takes refuge with the Apostle Paul, and so Paul writes to Philemon saying, "Perhaps he was parted from you for a while that you might receive him back forever... but not as a slave, but a brother—you know the kind, you'd hold to your bosom."

As a pastor, it's easy to count attenders like Abraham tried to count the stars. But then I don't enjoy you, I feel possessive of you, responsible for you, and insecure about you and it's utterly humiliating for me when you leave. But when I surrender you, I receive you all back, not as slaves to my ego, but brothers at a Great Banquet and everyone shines like the stars.

We used to call this the Banquet Hall. We had a big sign over the door to the sanctuary: "The Banquet Hall." One day I'll receive everyone back in a communion of Laughter, Love and Life as we all pass the ball in gratitude and praise. This is a trophy, but it's God's trophy. And you, my friends (the Sanctuary), are a trophy, but you're God's trophy. And I'm a trophy—I'm a trophy of Grace. It turns out that God just wants to share all his trophies with each and every one of us. He does it on the Holy Mountain.



## Communion

On the Holy Mountain our Lord humbled himself, submitting to the humiliation of the cross. He took bread and broke it saying, "this is my body given to you." And, in the same manner, he took the cup saying, "this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you."

Don't run from your humiliations, for the only place in which to hide is hell. But face your humiliations with Jesus and humiliation becomes exaltation and a banquet of eternal love—a communion of life and laughter. Perhaps you have a trophy of shame? This morning, why don't you just bring it to the table?

## Benediction

So, I think this is the good news (the Gospel): God keeps his promises. Even if the promise appears to die, he keeps his Promise, and it rises from the dead. You just ingested the Promise. That means you are on quite a roller coaster—humiliation and an exaltation beyond your wildest imagination. So have hope. That's what we'll talk about next week. That's a wonderful thing to say and a terrifying thing to say because hope hurts. But have hope because God keeps his promises. In Jesus's name, Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Genitives normally express possession, and Paul speaks of faith in this way all the time, so I'm not sure the debate over objective and subjective genitives even applies; perhaps it's just the common genitive construct simply expressing possession: the faith belongs to Jesus. The Gospel is that he gives it to us... and yes, it's even him that's doing the believing in us—he believes from within us, Christ in us, (subjective genitive).

<sup>ii</sup> Sometimes people talk as if “justification” is simply declaring something is right, even if it isn't right—that's called lying. God doesn't lie. He doesn't declare us right if we're not right—that would be wrong.

<sup>iii</sup> For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. – Leviticus 17:11

<sup>iv</sup> This is obviously a subjective genitive. Paul does not mean “faith in Abraham” but the “faith (or faithfulness) of Abraham.” In the same way he must not mean “faith in Jesus” in 3:22, but the “faith of Jesus.”

<sup>v</sup> Unlike English, in Biblical Greek, “many” can also mean “all.” Here that is clearly the case, based on what Paul just said “father of us all” and based on God's original promise to Abraham to bless “all the families of the earth.”

In Greek πολλοί is differentiated from πάντες (όλοι) by the fact that it is the antonym of a minority. It is thus used exclusively for many (but not all). In contrast, the Heb. רַבִּים (ר) / Aram. רַבִּים can have an inclusive sense: “the many who cannot be counted,” “the great multitude,” “all.” The same is true of (οἱ) πολλοί in Jewish Greek writings. This inclusive use is due to the fact that Heb. and Aram. have no word for “all.” –TDNT

<sup>vi</sup> Genesis 12:31 Abraham was already travelling to Canaan but had stopped in Haran.

<sup>vii</sup> Eliezer means “God is helper.” A Greek form of that Hebrew name is “Lazarus.” Remember that in the beginning, Adam couldn't find his helper—God is our Helper, Eliezer, Lazarus...

<sup>viii</sup> It seems that everything is somehow dependent on faith, but faith is always dependent on God.

<sup>ix</sup> It's helpful to remember that in the beginning Adam couldn't find his “Helper.” Now Abraham has found Eliezer and Eliezer has found Abraham and God makes his home in each.