

February 2, 2014  
Epiphany 4

*"Boasting in the Lord"*

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## **1 CORINTHIANS 1:26-31**

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**B**rothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things-- and the things that are not-- to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

It is not good to boast. We don't like it when people boast about how much money they are making or how great their kids are or even how well they performed during the Super Bowl.

During the dot.com stock market boom in the 1990's I observed a lady boasting about how much money she made in the stock market. She entered the shuttle bus at the Los Angeles Airport and sat down next to a woman she never met before. Within a few minutes of conversation she was bragging about how much money she had made in her investments.

The Christian congregation in Corinth was afflicted by people who liked to boast about themselves. There were divisions in the congregation. Some boasted that they followed Paul, others Peter, others Apollos, and some even boasted about how they followed Jesus in a way that was superior to the others. Then there were those who boasted about their ability to speak in tongues and do other miracles that made them superior to others. Even today we hear Christians boasting about their congregations in such a way that they think they are superior to others.

It is wrong to boast about myself or even my blessings in the Lord in such a way that leads me to think I am better than other people. However, it is not wrong to boast in the Lord as Paul reminds us this morning, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### **We have nothing in ourselves**

When it comes to my salvation I can find nothing, absolutely nothing, in myself that is worthy of being proud and boastful. Paul reminds the prideful Christians of Corinth about their former condition in life. "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth."

All of us can look back at our past life and see it filled with blessings, but we can not find anything in our past life that makes us worthy of being called by the Lord. When Susan

and I attended the funeral for Doris Larson about a week ago, we noticed how the family had gathered pictures from her past life. They wanted to remember all the blessings they enjoyed from the life Doris lived here on this earth. Such reflection is not boasting and prideful. The Lord did not call us to saving faith because we were so wise compared to others, or more influential or important than others, or of some noble birth, or even because we can look at happy moments from our past family life.

It seems that the congregation in Corinth was made up of a wide variety of people. Some were of the lower classes, some were slaves and others were important people in the community. According to chapter six, some of these people were former sexual immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy people, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers.

None of us can look at our past life and see anything that would move our God to call us out of darkness into his marvelous light. As the evangelist Billy Sunday was fond of saying, "He calls the guttermost to the uttermost (the untttermost heights of glory)." In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord Jesus speaks about poor in spirit being blessed with the kingdom of God. The poor in spirit are those who recognize they are nothing in the eyes of God until he brings them the treasures in Christ. Look at your past life. Take a snapshot of even your best moments and you will see them pock marked with sin.

The Apostle Paul lived the early years of his life boasting about the great job he did being a fanatic for the strictest sects of Judaism. But then the Lord called him to believe in Jesus as the source of his salvation. Here is what he said about his past way of life. "I consider everything a loss compared to the greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish that I may gain Christ." The Lord calls the guttermost for his uttermost.

God's way of taking the downtrodden and raising them up seems so foolish and full of nonsense to those who are controlled by the wisdom of this world. "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things- and the things that are not- to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."

There are so many examples in Scripture that illustrate how the Lord our God chooses things that look foolish to accomplish mighty things so that there is no room for boasting. Little David looked like such a fool when he picked up five smooth stones from a brook and put one of them into his sling and fired it at the mighty giant Goliath. Yet, the stone found its mark and embedded itself deep into Goliath's skull. "The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground." Our Old Testament lesson for today referred to how the Lord rescued his people when they were slaves in the land of Egypt. Even a person with the least bit of intelligence could see there was no way for God's people to escape the chariots of the Egyptians. Then the Lord opened the waters of the Red Sea, led them through on dry land and destroyed the Egyptian army. The Lord asked his people to look like fools as they marched around the mighty city of Jericho. But, then the walls came tumbling down. The Lord uses things that look foolish to the human mind to accomplish mighty miracles.

Since the fall into sin all of our human minds are programmed by sin that is passed down to us to believe that we can save ourselves with our own strength and power. We are born boasting in ourselves and not in what the Lord can do for us. What our God does for us at the cross of Jesus seems like such foolishness and nonsense. This past week I attended a pastoral conference in Citrus Heights. We heard missionary Peter Reid and his wife Marlys speak to us about working among the Muslim people in Indonesia. They reminded us how the Muslims believe in a religion that tries to balance out sin with good deeds, the way you might try to balance weights in a scale. That is very logical. It is the default setting for all the religions of the world. It appeals to the natural thinking. God's ways of saving us through the blood of Jesus shed at the cross seems foolish and counter intuitive.

"But God chose the foolish things of this world to shame the wise." Some people look at this book, the Holy Bible and think it is filled with foolishness and nonsense. Satan would even try to convince people like us that daily reading the Bible isn't all that important and valuable for us. Jesus has a different opinion of his Word. He says, "My words are spirit and they are life." When you open this book and read, the Lord is so powerful, he can take one little verse and make it your verse. With that verse of Scripture you slay giants that threaten to destroy you.

"But God chooses the foolish things of this world to shame the wise." In his mercy and kindness to us our God chose to have his Son born of a Virgin to crush the devil's power. The sins of my past life were all forgiven at the cross. The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanses us from all sin. The risen Lord Jesus, in his great strength and power, gives us his body and blood with bread and wine. What seems so insignificant and even foolish to human thinking, a little bread and a little wine, offers us the very body and blood of Jesus for our forgiveness.

It seems foolish to believe being baptized in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit offers forgiveness of sins. Yet, God's Word tells us that baptism washes away sin, puts on Christ, gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit and buries us with Christ. This blessing sustains us through out life. In our lowest moments and darkest days, we can say, "I have been baptized into Christ." I can say, "Jesus is the vine and I am his branch." I can say, "The Lord is my Shepherd." That is not boasting in myself but it boasting in the love that our Savior has for us that is totally undeserved.

### **We have everything in Christ**

So the Apostle Paul reminds us that we have everything in Christ not because of us but because of God's grace. "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God-that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written: 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'" It says that Jesus has become for us the wisdom from God. I can see God's wisdom in the way he created the world, the way the sun shines to warm this earth, the way the cells function in my body, the way plants grow. God's ultimate wisdom is found in the way he has chosen to save us from our sin.

It says of Jesus in John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God, but God, the One and Only who is at the Father's side has made him known." Jesus reveals his heavenly Father's love for us. He makes us wise to salvation as he tells us in the simplest and yet most profound words ever spoken. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

What love we see in Jesus. As Paul says he is "our righteousness, holiness and redemption." Jesus is the source of righteousness, our holiness and our redemption." The 38 million people living in California are experiencing a drought, not just lack of rain, but lack of righteousness to be accepted by God. Jesus has satisfied that drought. He is our righteousness. We can boast with the hymn writer, "Jesus, Your blood and righteousness, My beauty are my glorious dress. " With Jesus' righteousness you can boast about being holy before God, not through yourself but through him. With Jesus you can boast about being redeemed. If the Lord returns in glory this coming week, you can say with all confidence. I know I have been redeemed. I know where I am going when the Lord returns. It is not right to boast about yourself. Jesus wants you to boast about him. I am just a nobody, telling everybody about Somebody who can save anybody." "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." Amen.