

9-29-24

Boost Me Up

Genesis 11: 31

If I'm not mistaken, isn't Almont's homecoming scheduled to take place in a couple of weeks? October is usually the month for high school homecomings and there always seems to be an extra sense of festivity in the air, what with the football game, parades, dances and bonfires – at least that was how it was when I was in school many years ago.

Well, this coming weekend, I'll be celebrating a Homecoming of sorts. I'll be attending my 40th high school reunion in Shullsburg, Wisconsin. I hope I recognize my old classmates. There weren't that many of us, 50, but I haven't seen them in 35 years.

For sure, homecomings are celebrations. Recall the Prodigal Son's return home in Luke 15: His father killed the fattened calf. The son was given the family's best robe, new shoes, expensive bling, and a party that would not soon be forgotten. The father's son was lost but now found! A celebratory feast was in order.

At homecomings we celebrate old friendships and renew past acquaintances.

We celebrate the successful navigation of life's twists and turns.

We celebrate the next generation in the form of our own children as they transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Overall, we celebrate life and wonder what the next year or five or ten years will bring.

I bring Homecoming up because in a strange way, it connects with Genesis 11: 31 – in a way that you may not recognize. After all, at the end of Genesis 11 we read that Terah's family leaves home to find a new home. They're not returning home to celebrate.

The truth of the matter is, that when preachers preach on Genesis 11, we love to highlight Terah, the Patriarch of the family, and his shortcomings.

First, Terah is the grandfather of Lot, and Lot has surely staked out an infamous place in the Biblical account. He has a difficult time staying out of trouble and seems to always need rescuing.

Lot's wife didn't fair very well either. And speaking of fair, fair or not, Terah's legacy will always be tied to Lot.

It's like going back to your high school reunion. Eventually the topic of your children's chosen professions come up and maybe the antics they pulled while they were in school.

I remember a neighbor boy who grew up on the next farm over. He was a couple of years younger than I was. Well, he and his buddies decided they were going to have some fun knocking over mailboxes. Eventually they were caught and were sentenced to a significant amount of community service, but to this day – all these years later - he's still known as "the postman."

It's hard to shake off earlier misjudgments and indiscretions, and the ironic thing about it is that his mother eventually got a job working for the post office! In the end, she may have received the more harsh sentence!

Second, we learn that Terah was an idolater. He didn't worship the one true God. This is clearly spelled out in Joshua 24:2 where Joshua addresses the people of Israel saying, *"This is what the Lord, the God of Israel says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah , the Father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River and worshiped other gods.'"*

The ancient Near Eastern peoples were fascinated by the stars and the moon and worshiped them with great devotion. The prominent deity of Ur of the Chaldeans – where Terah left, and Haran, where Terah settled was the moon – god Sin and Yhr, and we hear these names in other names like Sennacherib and Jericho.

No wonder Terah settled in Haran.

It was like a coming home party - a returning to all that was familiar. More often than not, comfort is found in clinging to that which is familiar even when we know it may be harmful to us.

Third, we preachers love to state the obvious. You See, we like to say, Terah started out on the right path – His intention was the land of Canaan. Canaan was his goal – *“They set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan.”* But in the end, settled in Haran.

See what happens? Good intentions will only get you so far. As one scholar put it, “Terah, lacking vision, lost the will to persist.”

In other words, he settled in Haran rather than plunging forward to a new future and new home in Canaan. Canaan became only a pipe dream to Terah.

Thus, as the Biblical scholar continues, “primeval history comes to a close with self-effort issuing in confusion at the Tower of Babel and compromise here in Haran. On his own, man will get no further than this, bowing down before false – gods.”

Quite an assessment of Terah’s life. And the Bible is chuck full of similar statements that remind us, time and again, that without God’s gracious, life-giving, and redeeming activity in our lives, our future is bleak to say the least.

If we have not come to know God in a deep and personal way and have failed to understand Jesus as our only way to righteousness and salvation, then we remain separated from God and outside God's family circle. We all need a homecoming.

Ben Stiller is an actor, and in one funny movie, he finds himself having a difficult time breaking into the family circle or what his future father-in-law calls the circle of trust. At every turn it seems like the dad's there, blocking Stiller's hopes and dreams of marrying his daughter.

The wonder and beauty of the Gospel is that God makes it so easy for us to come to Him and realize our greatest hopes and dreams – to live in God's loving presence for all eternity. There are no games of hide and seek with God or catch me if you can ploys.

You don't have to give a certain amount of money to the church to secure your spot in heaven or stop drinking, smoking, and playing cards.

Jesus says, all we have to do is believe that the light of the world that brings life to men has come in the form of Jesus Christ, and that he's all that he claims to be – the Son of God, the Savior of the World, the One who is has conquered death, who is alive and deserves all our praise and devotion.

This is the salvation God offers to all who believe. It is the grace by which we can confidently and most assuredly call ourselves children of the living God. And it's in this grace that our hope of eternal life rests secure.

Paul writes in Romans 5: 1- 2: *"Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God."*

“We have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand.”

In other words, God’s grace and God’s grace alone is the key that opens the door to God. Without it, we have no long – term permanent hope of knowing God and experiencing all the good, perfect and wonderful things that have their source in God.

Think of all the things that bring you hope and peace and joy in your life on a daily basis – they all find their source in God:

Love, significance, purpose, security, respect, devotion, loyalty, purity, beauty, laughter, human relationships, intimacy, physical and emotional fulfillment and bonding, life itself!

The list goes on – all these things are created by God and He wants all of us to have them to the fullest extent. John 10:10, *“I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.”*

And here’s the beauty in all this and gets back to the idea of celebration – God is so bent on us having life and having it to the full, that all these blessings that we have and are directed toward God’s children, are so overwhelming and abundant, that they cannot help but overflow into the general public.

In other words, those of us who call God Father and have a special relationship with God because we’ve recognized God’s Son Jesus as the Messiah who takes away the sins of the world - we don’t have the corner market on God’s grace!

True, we’ve entered into a new a living hope with Christ when we called on his name to rescue us out of our sin, death and hopelessness, but God’s grace has been poured out in the world in so many ways!

In other words, the flood gates of heaven have been opened and the righteous and the unrighteous are both recipients, feeling the tangible effects of God's love. The only difference is that some of us recognize the source while others do not.

Go home today and open your refrigerator. Is there food in there? God has blessed you.

Look up. Is there a roof over your head? God has given you that provision.

Did the furnace kick on last night? Then God is watching out for you.

Did you lay your head on your pillow and catch a few winks without fearing for your life?

These are all examples of God's grace toward mankind. God's grace culminates in the gift of eternal life with him, but we're getting a foretaste of it in the here and now.

This leads me to the reason I entitled this message, **Boost Me Up**. I have many albeit foggy memories of my school years stretching all the way back to my days in kindergarten.

I can name most if not all my teachers. Mrs. Hawley, Jan, Calvert, Brown, McNaughton, Spillaine, Staver, Klein, Pierce, Boyle, Boettcher, Chamberlain, Reisner among others.

They were all good people that gave me a boost up in life. They taught me history, science, math, literature and music and so much more.

We're they Christians? I don't know. They never said they were, and I never asked, because at that point in my life, I don't think I even knew what a Christian was, and didn't really care, but I do know this: Looking back, I was the recipient of God's loving grace through them even though I was completely oblivious to it, and maybe they were too.

God was using these people to boost me up in life and maybe they were or maybe they weren't aware of it., but that's the truth.

The same goes for my mom and dad and my other family members. God's grace was working through all of them to bring me to the place I am today.

It's like that old analogy: Climb on my shoulders so you can catch a glimpse of your promising future.

This is what Terah did for Abram. He took Abram and his family part way down the path to the Promised Land. Did he know what he was doing? Well he probably knew that he was trying to secure a better future for his family. Did he understand that this was part of God's plan for his son Abraham?

I doubt it, but the book of Acts seems to suggest that perhaps Terah was at least partially clued into his son's relationship with God.

In his speech to the Sanhedrin, Stephen gives us some valuable insight into when Abram received God's call: *"The God of glory appeared to our Father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Haran. 'Leave your country and your people, God said, and go to the land I will show you.'*

So, he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Haran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living."

The point in all this is that God's divine plan for Abraham, which is centered on the promise that God wants to bestow his grace on all the nations of the world is partially carried out by Terah, who was an idolater!

Abraham, at least figuratively, stood on his father's shoulders, and for a moment caught a vision for what his future held. Did Terah see it? Probably not, but God still used him as a vessel of his grace.

I want us to think about this as we go through our daily lives. We all know many people with whom we work, rub shoulders with, cross paths with and we're quick to categorize them as Christians or not, stable or flakey, young or old, open or closed, but do we see everyone as potential vessels of God's grace? – not that they're church goers or even Christians, but that they are channels God's grace on some level without they themselves even knowing it!

Sort of like Terah, who always gets a bad rap by preachers, and who may never have become a follower of the One True God, but helped his son, Abraham in his own special way travel toward the destiny God had for him.

For this, we celebrate Terah's life and by extrapolation, celebrate those who have given us a Boost Up whether they're aware of it or not, so that we could see God. Perhaps, by God's grace, we can turn to them or to another and return the favor.

So, when I attend my 40th high school reunion. I'm going to look for God's grace in the lives of my old classmates and when I recognize it, I will celebrate and hopefully, help them recognize it too if they don't already.

“Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.”