

### **“Dead Reckoning”**

Romans 4:13, 18-25; Mark 8:31-38

When I was a young boy, probably around my early teens, my parents bought a houseboat. And when I say ‘house-boat’, that’s what I mean. Not one of these fancy yachts... it was actually a “Terra Marina”, which, as you might surmise or know from the name, was a small trailer that one could also put into the water and sail around. It had also been ‘customized’ by wrapping this little ‘sailor/trailer’ in a steel hull. It was definitely ‘unique’ ... like its ‘crew’ ...

Anyway, as this was our first venture into ‘seafaring,’ my parents and I attended classes on boating safety. I believe it was put on by an organization called the “Powerboat Squadron.” Which I really thought was pretty cool at the time. Especially that ‘squadron’ part! All sorts of neat ‘jargon’ was used... especially for navigation. And one of the terms came back to me as I read today’s passage from Romans. **“Dead Reckoning.”**

Now, I’m sure that there are some ‘old salts’ out there who know a whole lot more about this term than I do. But from my limited understanding, it basically refers to the use of **previously determined points**, or ‘landmarks,’ to calculate one’s **current position**. **Reference points** that **do not change**, that **help** one to be **guided safely** and **not get lost**.

And as I read the words of the great Apostle Paul about Abraham and Sara, and their unwavering faith in God... and Jesus’ challenging words to his disciples about what it really means to be a ‘God-follower’... it occurred to me that perhaps this **nautical** term might also relate to our **spiritual** life. That as we attempt to ‘navigate’ the sometimes treacherous seas of life... during which we can certainly ‘lose our way’... we must rely on ‘reference points’ that ‘do not change.’ The unchanging God who brought generations of life from ones who were as ‘good as **dead**.’ The resolute ‘Son of Man’ who conquered **death** on our behalf. As we seek to live a **LIFE** pleasing to the **Divine**, let us consider what the **Spirit** is saying to us **humans** in pondering our own **mortality**... guiding us through a spiritual sort of ‘**dead reckoning**.’

As we think about Abraham and Sarah (‘Abram and Sarai), we are reminded of the faith that sustained them in the face of their own limitations. How Abe did not **“weaken in faith”** in

spite of his own age, or Sarah's inability to bear children to that point. Paul writes that **"No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,<sup>21</sup> being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."** (Romans 4:20-21)

I particularly appreciate that statement that Abraham **"grew strong in his faith AS he gave glory to God."** That despite how much it appeared that God was NOT going to grant him what he wanted SO much... that God HAD promised... 'Abe' continued to give praise, honor, and glory to His God. And that with that sincere **praise** came answered **prayer**. By continuing to stand firm on God's promises, trusting in His ultimate providence, Abraham and Sarah would finally receive his reward.

How is that working for US? How well do WE handle it when God is 'slow' in granting the desires of our hearts? When God's answer to our prayers is 'WAIT'... which sounds an awful lot like 'NO'... can we continue to **trust in God** unwaveringly? As we consider our own personal limitations... of limited physical, or financial resources... How do we avoid a 'weakened faith?' Perhaps we can learn from Abe, and continue to praise God even more. That our faith will indeed grow stronger as we **"give glory to God."**

Remember that suffering servant Job? Who lost everything? Went from the 'penthouse to the outhouse,' in an ancient sort of way. Remember his comment on how God treated him? **"The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."** (Job 1:21) HOW could he exhibit such faith, such unwavering trust in God? The same way that Abraham and Sarah did. The same way that we are. By **"Being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."** (Romans 4:21) As I read this words of Paul about his being 'convinced' that God 'was able'... and WOULD... do what He had promised, I am reminded about another Pauline quote concerning his 'conviction': **"I am convinced... confident... SURE... that He who began a good work in you WILL be faithful to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus."** (Phil. 1:6) This is the very 'bedrock' belief, this steady 'reference point,' that you and I are called to embrace. A faith that, in Paul's words, will be reckoned to US as righteousness.  
[And, in speaking of "the day of Christ Jesus," what did He say to His...]

And, in speaking of ***“the day of Christ Jesus,”*** what did He say to His disciples that we too can learn from in possessing the kind of ‘steady,’ ‘bedrock’ faith exhibited by ‘Father Abraham?’ As I look at this passage as a whole, it occurs to me that what Jesus is saying to us all... ancient believers and modern ones... is that we must accept the SUM TOTAL of who Jesus is. Not just the ‘warm and fuzzy parts’, but the ‘hard and rough’ parts too. Sure, Jesus is our **Savior...** but he is also the ultimate **suffering Servant** as well. Yes, He healed the sick, fed the poor, ministered to children... but He also called out hypocrisy, risked persecution and death, challenged old ways, and offered new ones. He offered a plan of hope and salvation that was ‘simple,’ but NOT ‘easy.’ In Jesus’ words, ***“Wide and easy is the road to destruction, and many take it... narrow and hard is the road that leads to life, and there are few that find it.”*** (*Matthew 7:13-14*) Simple words to understand... but not easy ones to undertake...

It is this fundamental misunderstanding of just who this person of Jesus truly was that caused Him to react to Peter as He did. I don’t know about you, but didn’t you think that the words of our Lord to Peter... who RIGHT before this had correctly identified Jesus as ***“the Messiah, the Son of the living God,”*** ... just a ‘bit’ HARSH?! ***“Get behind me, SATAN!”*** ?? Pretty odd title to be given to the man whom Jesus himself would later give the name ‘Peter,’ ***the ‘Rock’ on which I will build my church,***’ wouldn’t you say?

And then, in the very next verse, we read that Jesus ***“called the crowd with his disciples.”*** It’s as though Jesus had gotten really frustrated, and wanted to clear the air with not only his immediate group of disciples, but ANYONE who might be considering being a follower of His. And so he calls a ‘family meeting’ to ‘lay down the law.’ It’s as tho Jesus is saying, ‘If my beloved *Peter* doesn’t get it, then I’ve really got some ‘splainin’ to do!’

And ‘splain’ He does! Jesus proclaims one of the most definitive statements on what it means to be a ‘Christian.’ NO, not simply membership in a church or Bible study. NO, not wearing a bracelet, necklace, or bumper sticker. NOT a family ‘inheritance.’ Jesus says that ***“If ANY want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”*** (*Mark 8:34-35*)

To be a follower of Christ, we are to 'deny self.' Focus on OTHERS. We are to 'take up OUR cross.' Not the one Jesus took up. ONLY He could do that. But take up the same TYPE of cross. One that **humbles** oneself. One that is carried **for the benefit of others**. A cross we take up not in order to save ourselves, but to give our lives for JESUS' sake... for sake of the Gospel. That as we give our life for the One who died for us, we will be saved. As we look to the cross... a **reckoning** point associated with **death**... we can instead see **life**. At that cross we see that 'REFERENCE POINT' that we are to use to best determine our 'POSITION' in life: **Jesus**. In the words of *Hebrews*, "**Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners,<sup>[b]</sup> so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.**" (*Hebrews 12:2-3*) Through Jesus... like Abraham before Him... we will not grow weary or lose heart, possessing what Paul called a 'faith reckoned to us as righteousness'...

Which brings us back to that word 'reckon.' More so than any navigation term, I 'reckon' that most of you know this word from more 'down home' usage. I would imagine that more than one of you heard this word spoken by a father, grandfather, or older adult in general. The 'gospel (little 'g') according to Webster' defines "reckon" as "**to count or estimate; to consider or think; to settle accounts. To accept something as certain. Reliance. To take into consideration.**"

Well, using words from this secular definition, I 'reckon' that this is what you and I should 'take into consideration' from today's Scriptures: 'Accept as certain' that Jesus loves you... and loved you enough to 'settle the account' of your sins against God. 'Count' the cost of what it takes to be a follower of Christ. Particularly, 'reliance' on Him. And as you 'think' about what it means to 'carry' your cross, also 'consider' the One who endured so much more than we ever will, so that we will 'not grow weary' or 'lose heart.' In Jesus' words, "**If anyone wants to be my follower, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**" (*Mark 8:34*) And I 'reckon' that about says it all. And may all God's 'cross-carriers' say, AMEN!

## CHARGE

This week, our world lost a great man of God whose work to grow the Kingdom of God rivals any in recorded history... outside of the Savior he served. In the words of our Gospel reading, Rev. Billy Graham most certainly 'carried his cross' and 'followed Jesus' ... giving his life work 'for the sake of Christ and the Gospel.'

I believe that Rev. Graham would certainly agree with Jesus words in today's passage:

*"Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father..." (Mark 8:38)*

As you and I go forth from the safety of this sanctuary to the distractions of the world, may we NOT be ashamed of Christ and His Gospel. But rather, always be prepared to give the reason for the hope that we have." To that end, Let us now depart, emboldened by the truth that "the Spirit of the living God..."

## Intro for "My Tribute"

The author of our first song, the late Andrae Crouch, for those of you not familiar with him, was a popular gospel singer from the 70's on to his death in 2015. At age 18, while working in L.A. for "Teen Challenge", a faith-based corp. that helps people with problems such as substance abuse, met an ex-prisoner Larry Reed, whom he befriended. Years later, he rec'd a call from Mr. Reed, telling Crouch about a dream he had that his old friend would write a song based on a particularly Scripture that would be the biggest hit he would ever have. This is the verse, from John 17:

*And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. <sup>4</sup> I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. <sup>5</sup> So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. (John 17:3-5)*

Initially, he felt NO inspiration at all. But awoke the next morning with the phrase 'To God be the Glory' on his mind, and in 10 minutes wrote what would become one of this greatest songs, and covered by many other Christian artists.

This song story reminds us that we can touch people's lives 'early and often' ... and sometimes they touch ours in return. That God can speak to us in many different ways, sometimes through others. And, that 'inspiration' CAN come in the morning...

As we, in those words of John, seek to know the only true God, and His Son Jesus Christ, may today's worship also be OUR 'tribute.' I invite you all now to stand, as we join our voices in praise to sing, "To God be the Glory" ... (and even if you don't know the song very well, I hope that you will at least join in singing the chorus...)