

(The Full Gospel) 13. No Man Can Boast in God's Presence

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen emphasizes that salvation is entirely a work of God, leaving no room for human boasting or pride.

Scripture: Isaiah 42:8, Mark 10:24, Romans 9:16, Romans 11:36 - 12:1, 1 Corinthians 1:29, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Salvation By Faith", "Humility Before God"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the importance of recognizing that salvation is solely the work of God, emphasizing that no man should boast before God as everything is done in such a way that man cannot boast in eternity. He highlights the danger of pride, especially in being rich in various aspects, hindering one from entering God's kingdom. Poonen stresses the need for humility, acknowledging that only God can save us from the evil of pride and that salvation has three tenses - past, present, and future, all the work of God.

Transcript

"No man should boast before God....ust as it is written, 'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord'" (1 Corinthians 1:29, 31).

God does everything in such a way that no man will ever be able to boast in eternity concerning anything that he himself did or accomplished. God is a jealous God and He will never give His glory to anyone else (Isaiah 42:8).

When the rich young ruler had gone away from the Lord, because he was unwilling to give up his riches, Jesus told His disciples that it was as difficult for a rich person to enter God's kingdom as it was for a camel to go through a needle's eye. The disciples then asked the Lord who could then be saved. The Lord's reply was that it was impossible for man to save himself. God alone could save man (Read Mark 10:24-27).

A rich person is not just one who has plenty of money. One can be rich in many ways - in talents, in Bible-knowledge, in one's opinion of one's own spirituality and in many other ways.

The kingdom of God is very, very large. But the gate into it is as narrow as a needle's eye. It is impossible for a camel to go through it. But what is impossible for a camel is the easiest thing in the world for an

amoeba (the smallest of creatures). It is all a question of size.

It is pride that makes a man rich and hinders him from entering the kingdom of God. And pride is such a subtle, evil thing that it is impossible for man to save himself from it. We may repent of many sins, and even get victory over anger, the lust of the eyes and the love of money and many other sins. But at the bottom of it all, it is still possible to be proud of our salvation and our victory. Deep down in our spirit it is possible to have an attitude that says,

"I thank God that I am not like other men or even like Christians in other denominations." (See Luke 18:11).

It is impossible for us to save ourselves from the evil of pride. Only God can save us. We must recognise this and humbly submit to God and ask Him to save us. Or else at the end of our lives, we will discover that despite all our experience of "victory" and of "being in the Body of Christ", we were just first-rate Pharisees.

So we ask with the disciples, "Who then can be saved?" And the Lord answers us as He answered them, "With men it is impossible, but not with God" (Mark 10:26, 27).

Salvation as described in the New Testament has three tenses - past, present and future. If we are born again, we have already been saved from the PENALTY of sin. We are now to be saved from the POWER of sin. And one day, when our Lord returns in glory, we will be saved from the very PRESENCE of sin.

And each one of these aspects of salvation is the work of God.

God's Word tells us very clearly:

"By grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works that no one should boast" (Ephesians 2:8, 9).

Jonah was delivered from the fish's belly only when he finally acknowledged that "salvation can come only from the Lord" (Jonah 2:9). The next verse states, "THEN the Lord commanded the fish to vomit Jonah out on dry land". God waited until Jonah acknowledged that he could not save himself. And He waits on high until we too acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves from any sin or any difficult situation. Then He commands deliverance for us as He did for Jonah.

When we find ourselves in a "tight" situation, like Jonah was in, instead of complaining and murmuring, if we would only learn to give thanks to the Lord and to confess that salvation comes from the Lord alone, we will find deliverance coming sooner.

Salvation is not a self-improvement program. That can only change us on the outside. The work of God changes us on the inside.

God works in such a way that man can never glory in anything. If we are to experience a thorough salvation from sin, then we must be saved from glorying in anything that the Lord has done for us - including the victory He has given us over sin.

The smaller we are (in our own eyes), the easier it is for us to get "an abundant entrance into God's kingdom" through the needle's eye (2 Peter 1:11). And one proof that we are really small in our own eyes will be that we never despise another human being - whatever his religion or his denomination, or his lack

of light (on the truths that we have understood) may be. Even when we look at the worst of human beings, we will say to ourselves: "There go I but for the grace of God".

Jesus always referred to himself as "the son of man" - or in other words "an ordinary man". This is what we must recognise ourselves to be too, at all times. If we have been saved from the penalty of sin, it is God's mercy alone that gave us that salvation. If we are now being saved from the power of sin, that too is the result of God's mercy and grace given to us freely. So what do we have to glory in? Nothing.

Consider an illustration: If others were to admire a beautiful painting that you had painted, you could be tempted to be proud of your accomplishment. But when they admire what someone else has painted, how could you even be tempted to be proud. We could use this illustration to the work of salvation that God accomplishes in our lives. If it is we who have improved ourselves or sanctified ourselves, then we could be proud of it. But if it is God Who has done this work in us, then how can we ever be proud of it?

What is the quality of our "sanctification"? Is it merely a work of moral improvement? If so, we have experienced nothing Divine or supernatural in our lives, but only done what any man with a little determination can do. But if it is a genuine work of God that has taken place in our lives, then we have been given eternal life (God's nature) - and that is a free gift from God (Romans 6:23). (God's nature cannot be manufactured by us in any case). And if what we have become is the result of God's free gift, then all boasting is ruled out.

So if you are proud of your victory over sin, then you must have manufactured it yourself!! In that case, your victory is useless and certainly not the genuine thing. And the sooner you throw it away, the better. Seek instead to partake of the Divine nature.

Paul said that he did not want to be found having a righteousness that was of his own making, but only with the righteousness that came from God(produced by God) through faith in Christ (Philippians 3:9).

In Romans, we see the development of the gospel message chapter by chapter. Here is a brief outline of the first few chapters:

Chapters 1 to 3 - The guilt of man made plain.

Chapter 4 - Justification (being declared righteous by God) by faith.

Chapter 5 - We have freedom of access to God now through Christ's blood.

Chapter 6 - Our old man was crucified with Christ, so that we need not sin any more.

Chapter 7 - We are free from the Law and from a legalistic attitude towards the Christian life.

Chapter 8 - We can now live in the Spirit and put our lusts to death daily.

The result of such a salvation is that "we are more than conquerors in Christ" (Romans 8:37). The danger at the end of all this however, is that we can imagine that this work of salvation is OUR OWN accomplishment.

And so we have three wonderful chapters that follow Romans 8, that explain that salvation is a work of God, from start to finish. Although these chapters (Romans 9 to 11) refer to God's dealings with Israel under the old covenant primarily, the Holy Spirit seeks to apply these truths to our lives today.

Romans 9 - God's Sovereignty

Abraham's two sons Ishmael and Isaac grew up in the same home with the same father. Yet God chose only one of them - Isaac (Romans 9:7). That was not because God was partial, but because He is sovereign. He has the absolute right as the Creator of the universe to do exactly what He likes and to choose whomever He likes for any task. No-one can question His right, because He created all things for His pleasure, and as Paul says (at the end of these three glorious chapters), "From Him, through Him and to Him are all things" (Romans 11:36).

Isaac had two boys, Esau and Jacob who grew up in the same home with the same parents. Yet God chose only the younger Jacob. "Though the twins were not yet born, and had not done anything good or bad, in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works, but because of Him Who calls, it was said, 'The older will serve the younger'" (Romans 9:11, 12). There was nothing unjust in this action of God's, for He is the sovereign Ruler of the universe.

Moses and Pharaoh both lived in Egypt at the same time and in the same palace. Yet God raised up Moses to be a prophet of His. And Pharaoh was raised up, "to demonstrate God's power in him and that God's Name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Romans 9:17), through the hardness of Pharaoh's heart and the judgments that God would send on him as a result.

In all these three examples, we see the sovereignty of God in choosing people. We need to see the same sovereignty at work in our salvation too. Why did God chose you and not some of your relatives - your brother, your sister, your uncle etc.? Was it because you were better than them? Certainly not. Perhaps you were a greater crook and a hypocrite than them (like Jacob was). Yet God chose you. It is sheer mercy and grace.

What shall we say in the light of all this? We can only bow before this Almighty Sovereign God and worship Him with all our hearts, and acknowledge that He alone is worthy, and that our salvation is entirely (100%) due to his grace. It is true that we accepted what He offered us. But the work was entirely His.

There is nothing that so humbles man to the dust as the fact of God's sovereign choice of His children. That is why clever people find it difficult to accept it, and fight against it, and try to twist the Scriptures to make them mean what they don't mean.

It is not because a man determines to be a child of God (or to be holy), or because he decides to run faithfully, that he is saved. It is only because God has shown him His mercy. It is God Who "grants us repentance unto life" and it is He Who "works in us to desire His will and to do His will" (Acts 11:18; Philippians 2:13). What can we glory in then?

Here is what Romans 9:16 says: "It does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God Who has mercy".

And here is what 1 Corinthians 4:7 says: "What do you have that you did not receive? If you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?"

Memorise these two verses and keep them always in your heart. They will help in keeping you small in your own eyes at all times.

The new birth does not come through the will of the flesh (human determination), but by the will of God (Divine determination) (John 1:13).

Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose Me but I chose you" (John 15:16). Do we realise that fact?

Very often we imagine that it was WE who had accepted the Lord as our Saviour and that that has made the difference between us and the unbelievers. It is good for us therefore to remember that it was God Who chose us. And He chose us in Christ before we were born - in fact, even before He created the world!! (Ephesians 1:4).

From start to finish, our salvation is 100% from God - so that no man might boast in God's presence one day.

Have you done something wonderful for the Lord and for His kingdom? If so, then try your best to forget about it. Recognise that you could have done nothing if God had not given you health, strength, intelligence, gift, talent, opportunity, knowledge of His Word and of Himself etc., etc. The list is endless. How can you glory then?

When we are taken up with how spiritual we have become or how much we have done for the Lord, we are already Pharisees. A true disciple is one who is taken up with the Person of the Lord Himself at all times.

There are many things God does for which he gives us no explanation. There are many prayers for which His answer is "No", and we don't understand the reason why. It is as impossible for God to explain all His dealings to us as it is to fill the Indian Ocean into a cup. God's wisdom is like an ocean. But our minds are only like a little cup.

Scripture says, "Who are you O man to criticise God?" (Romans 9:19, 20 - TLB). When we are small in our own eyes we don't have any complaints about God's ways. We just submit to God, even when we don't understand His dealings, because we accept His sovereignty.

Romans 10 - God's Righteousness

Israel had great zeal for God (Romans 10:3) - but it was zeal without a knowledge of God, for they did not understand that God's righteousness could not be produced by their own efforts. This was essentially where they failed. And this is where many Christians pursuing righteousness also fail today. They want to be holy, but they pursue after it with a human zeal that makes them haughty and arrogant towards others.

"Not knowing about God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, Israel did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God" (Romans 10:3).

Our own righteousnesses (our very best works) are all like filthy rags in God's sight (Isaiah 64:6). They are an abomination in God's eyes - and that is why they must be thrown away.

It was self-righteousness that made the elder brother (in the story of the prodigal son) into a Pharisee. In the first part of the parable, it is the younger brother who is outside the father's house. But at the end of the story, it is the elder brother who is outside, while the younger brother is clothed and rejoicing inside. Jesus constantly exposed self-righteousness as the worst of all sins - worse even than adultery and murder. Yet very few Christians understand the seriousness of this sin.

It is self-righteousness that makes a Christian look down on other Christians, and that makes preachers preach to others without judging themselves first. Such attitudes are like filthy rags in God's sight.

Is your righteousness something that God has wrought in you, by making you partake of His nature, or is it something that you attained by gritting your teeth, by getting up at 4.30 a.m. every morning, by fasting and prayer and by yogic self-control? Humility is the test.

God is determined that no flesh will be able to glory in His presence in eternity. So the righteousness that you have produced through your own efforts will be worth nothing at all in the final day. You might as well realise it now.

At the very beginning of our Christian lives, God declares us righteous because of our faith in Christ. Otherwise we would not even be able to stand before Him. And then, God sanctifies us by making us partake of His nature increasingly. It is He Who gives us the grace to be faithful and unyielding in the moments of temptation, so that we do not sin. It is He Who gives us the abilities and the gifts of the Spirit whereby we are able to serve Him and be useful in His vineyard. So we see that salvation from start to finish is from God - 100%.

"God is found by those who did not seek for Him and He manifests Himself to those who did not ask for Him" (Romans 10:20). Those are words that most Christians don't even know are found in the New Testament. Paul says there that Isaiah was very bold to make such a statement - and we can be certain that Isaiah was very bold, for that statement goes against the grain of every self-righteous Pharisee of all times.

Humble people however have no problem accepting these facts, for they recognise that their salvation begins and ends in God. Jesus is the Author of their faith (the One Who began it in their lives) and He is the Finisher of their faith too (the One Who will bring it to completion) (Hebrews 12:2). So they have nothing to boast about at all.

Romans 11 - God's Faithfulness

To the early Christians it looked as though God had rejected Israel finally, and that the promises that God had made to Abraham had been annulled. But the Holy Spirit says through the apostle Paul, very clearly that "God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew" (Romans 11:2).

"If some did not believe, their unbelief did not nullify the faithfulness of God" (Romans 3:3).

God is faithful to His promises, and that is why He has brought the seed of Abraham back into the land of Israel in this century, after they had wandered about in many countries for over 25 centuries.

"There is also at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice" (Romans 11:5). This is because God is faithful to His promises. Even though a hardening has come upon Israel at this time, one day "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:25, 26).

God is merciful even to those who crucified His Son.

We who are under the new covenant can learn something from that, and find our comfort in the faithfulness of God to His promises. Not one promise that He made to Abraham concerning his seed has failed or will fail. And not one promise that He has made to us His children will ever fail. The faithfulness of

God will see us through to the very end of our lives, and until Jesus comes again.

"I am confident of this very thing that He Who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6).

"I know Whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day" (2 Timothy 1:12).

Romans 12 - The Only Adequate Response

In view of these attributes of God that we have considered, what shall we do? Shall we take advantage of His goodness and go forth and sin even more. Far be it from us to take advantage of the goodness and mercy of God like that.

Paul says that in view of all the mercies of God that He has showered upon us, the only adequate response that we can make is:

To present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God; and

To present our minds to be renewed each day to think like Him, instead of like the world

Thus we will be able to prove and fulfil the perfect will of God for our lives. (Romans 12:1, 2).

There are mean, selfish Christians (as there have always been) who can only think of taking advantage of God's goodness and grace, and who therefore take sin lightly, because they know that God is so merciful and forgiving. But any believer with even the slightest sense of gratitude will long that he might never sin again, and that he might live his whole life entirely for the Lord, considering that:

The Lord has forgiven him all the sins that he had committed in his unconverted days;

The Lord has been even more merciful in forgiving the many sins that he committed after he was converted (including the ones he committed knowingly);

The Lord has promised never to remember his past sins and follies any more;

The Lord has covered his sins from the eyes of others, thus preserving his dignity;

The Lord does not listen to the accusations that Satan or any of Satan's agents (who know about his past failures) make against him.

The Lord has blessed him again and again in ways that he did not deserve.

The Lord is always on his side against Satan.

Such love breaks even the hardest heart and makes it willing to live utterly and only for God henceforth. We do not give ourselves to the Lord because He threatens us with fire and judgment. No. It is God's immense kindness that wins our hearts. That is God's way.

The man who had received one talent buried his talent, because he had thought his master to be "a hard and exacting man" (Luke 19:21). That was not the truth but because he believed it, he wasted his life. So also is it with many believers who consider God to be hard and exacting and demanding. They waste their

earthly lives. In the day of judgment, they will bring forth their wasted lives and talents and show them to God.

God is not a spoilsport. "He rejoices over us with shouts of joy" (Zephaniah 3:17). He longs to be gracious and merciful to us, and to give us the very best in life. He only gives good and perfect gifts and He is more kind and loving than the best father that there ever was on earth. He gives good things to His children - and above all, the gift of the Holy Spirit. He desires to make our lives glorious in every possible way.

We must not allow Satan to paint a wrong picture of God to us. Nor must we allow Satan to portray a wrong picture of God to others through us. Those who imagine God to be a hard and austere person usually end up being hard and austere towards their marriage partners and their children, and towards other human beings as well.

We must be so convinced of God's forgiveness, that Satan cannot even try to accuse us any more, or make us feel condemned.

The secret of the overcomers, (who are mentioned again and again in the book of Revelation), is described in Revelation 12:11:

"They overcame him (Satan - and his accusations - see verse 10) because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even unto death".

Notice the order here: They were first convinced that the blood of Christ had cleansed them. Then they told Satan what the blood of Christ had done for them. That was "the word of their testimony". Only after that did they take up the cross and follow Jesus ("They did not love their life even unto death"). That order must never be reversed. It is impossible to follow Jesus if we haven't been freed totally from condemnation first.

We are not going to be more holy by looking inside ourselves all the time and seeing how rotten we are. No. We are to run the race "looking unto Jesus", and not looking inside ourselves (Hebrews 12:1, 2).

God's Word is like a mirror (James 1:23). And God has given us that mirror so that the Holy Spirit might first show us the glory of Jesus through it - and not our own rottenness (See 2 Corinthians 3:18). As we see the glory of Jesus more and more, we will naturally see how unlike Him we are, in area after area. But that will not discourage us, for the Spirit has also come to transform us into the likeness of Christ.

Let us then use the one talent (the one life) that God has given us to produce ten talents for Him.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/the-full-gospel-13-no-man-can-boast-in-gods-presence/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net