

What Jesus Assumed: Our Rejection

Genesis 15:1-18; Luke 13:31-35; Philippians 3:17-4:1

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Brian Russo

Who among us is legitimate? Who is worthy?

Eliezer of Damascus. This poor guy. Three short lines of reference, of relevance, and then he's rejected, forgotten, and cast aside. What can we possibly know of him?

Well, for one his name literally translates to "God is my help, or, God's helper." That's pretty cool. Genesis 15, as we remember, describes him as a *slave* born in Abram's house. Well, that's not so cool. But that if Abram were to continue childless, then Eliezer would remain the heir to Abram's legacy. Ok, cool! But this of course does not happen as Ishmael is then born and then later, Isaac, who in turn supersedes Ishmael. Which is all decidedly uncool.

A bit later, in Genesis 24, a senior servant of the house of Abraham is sent to fetch a wife for his son Isaac, and returns with Rebekah. Scholars believe this is likely the same slave/servant, Eliezer. A couple of other Eliezer references appear later in the Old Testament, a son of Moses; a grandson of Benjamin; a priest and a musician to the king, but these are probably different people. And finally, but most interestingly, in the Gospel of Luke, in the ancestry of Christ given in the third chapter, Eliezer resurfaces as an ancient connection aligning Christ back to Abraham, Adam, and quite naturally, God.

Interesting stuff to be sure. But what's even more interesting is this next question! Which version of Eliezer's account are we reading? In our translation which we read this morning, we get this rendering in verse 2: "*But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.'*" Ok. This popular translation seems to be derived from the Latin Vulgate version of the original Hebrew texts, largely accredited to Saint Jerome, and on the surface it seems clear enough that Eliezer is as we have so far expected: 1) a slave; 2) from the place of Damascus; and 3) is, at present, the heir to Abram's house, not because he is Abram's son, but because he is simply next in line if Abram were to continue to have no children. Still with me?

However, if you read Genesis 15:2 again, though this time relying on the Septuagint, which is the direct Greek translation of the original Hebrew manuscripts often attributed to early Greek Jews, we get an alternative rendering of verse 2 and thus Eliezer's story altogether. Listen to this: "*And Abram said, Master and Lord, what will you give me? Seeing as I am without a child, except for the son of Masek, my home-born female slave, this Eliezer of Damascus is mine heir.*"

Whoa! By this account, not only can it be argued that Eliezer is Abram's son, his heir, but also the son of a previously unknown concubine. Just how saucy is that!? Well, actually, not that saucy or outstanding really as Ishmael will soon be born to another concubine that we already know about in Hagar. Nonetheless, this is an astonishing turn. For if we were to work purely off the Septuagint, poor Eliezer might suddenly no longer be so poor, but actually more or less blessed, as he could share a direct bloodline with Abram, the father of nations, and perhaps this is why he is later trusted to find a wife for Abraham's legitimate son, Isaac. If you watch Game of Thrones, Eliezer is basically Jon Snow. But blessed as he may be in this alternate history, Eliezer, still not being born of Sarah, but by Masek the slave-girl, renders his birthright nevertheless illegitimate, and therefore beyond the promise exclusively brokered by God with Abram and Sarai.

Man though... if only this guy Eliezer had drawn a different card, huh? A different lot. Or, a different mother perhaps. How different would his life have been. How legitimate! Tethered to Abraham's covenant, he could have had opportunities, aspirations, dreams, rather than being resigned to the fate of a mere slave, and ultimately, forgotten by the many who "*don't really care (do u?)*" who he was or might have been.

¹ https://www.blueletterbible.org/lxx/gen/15/1/s_15001

Two days ago I read an opinion piece on The Daily Beast by a woman named Valquiria. The title read: “One Year Ago, America Stole My 7-Year-Old. I Want Him Back.” Following proper protocol, Valquiria and her seven-year old son crossed the border at an official port of entry in El Paso, Texas. She immediately asked for asylum as she had documented their flight from Brazil escaping drug traffickers who promised, threatened, and made attempts on her family’s life. After one night together in a holding pen, she was approached by armed personal who took her son from her arms telling her “you don’t have any rights here, and you don’t have any rights to stay with your son.”

She goes on writing, “I was trying not to cry, and asked my son to be strong while he cried for them not to take him. He was scared they were going to hurt him, or me. He begged me not to let them take him, while all I could do was pray hopelessly to God to take care of him. I didn’t even know where they were taking him. I died at that moment. They ripped my heart out of me and my world ended at that point. Not knowing where my son was was the worst feeling a mother could have. How can a mother not have the right to be with her son. ... The Administration claims it has stopped separating families seeking protection and they’re doing all they can to reunite those who remain apart. I would like very much to believe this is true, but it’s hard for me to have hope. There is no word when we will be together again.”

Do you care, really? Does this in any way land emotionally?

I wonder...If only Valquiria was white. If only her child was more light. Perhaps like Natalie Holloway, or Elizabeth Smart, or Amber Hagerman, or the Lindbergh boy, we all would have heard her story by now. What life could her son have lived, what dreams he could have dreamed, if only his mother wasn’t Valquiria. Alas, we don’t even know where he is now. We don’t even know where a seven-year old boy is, and his mother doesn’t know.

Who is worthy? Who is valued? Who is legitimate? Are some more than others? Should some be more than others? And is this just the way it goes? From Eliezer to Ishmael to Isaac. In Joseph and his brothers, Jacob and Esau, Leah and Rachel, Cain and Abel; is this just the way it has always gone? Where some are preferred while others are not? Where some are favored while others are ignored, forgotten, and rejected?

Have you forgotten? Have you become tired and apathetic? Yeah, I get it, Spring is near and Bryce Harper has signed, but you know, those kids are still crying out in the wilderness. In those prisons. Can we even hear them anymore? Are we even trying to hear them anymore?

Kids cry out. Parents scream in anguish. And 50 now lay dead in another senseless shooting. 50 descendants from the same patriarch, 50 descendants of the same God.

50 peaceful worshippers.

50 brothers and sisters.

50 dead at two mosques in New Zealand.

The Bureau of Justice Statistics states that approximately 250,000 hate crimes take place each year in the United States but only 2 percent are reported to the F.B.I.

For the fourth year in a row, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a civil rights organization that tracks hate groups, reports that hate and domestic extremism are rising in an unabated trend. The center found a 30 percent increase in U.S. hate groups over the past four years and a 7 percent increase in hate groups in the last year alone. The group designated 1,020 organizations as hate groups in 2018, a high of at least 20 years.

One thousand and twenty hate groups.

Professor, theologian, and pastor Daniel Migliore writes that, “Sin is the refusal to live in right relationship with God and others, the denial of God’s grace and the refusal to live in just and peaceful community that participates in and reflects God’s own life in communion.”

My friends, we are truly a sad, sinful, and broken people. For here we are now even scamming admissions boards and drowning the dreams of others because we want what we want, at no matter the cost, and we think we deserve it. That we always deserve it. Because we alone are worthy. Because we alone are legitimate. And because *they*, simply, are not.

And so, we have rejected God. And made a mockery of Christ. Because we have rejected others and made a mockery of their humanity.

There is no place, as Gregory of Nazianzus states, where God is not. So likewise we should treat all encounters, landscapes, and people with that reverence.

But we don’t really want that. No, we don’t want to hear that. We stone that prophet. Turn off that news. And put up sound proof insulation. Because we thrive off division. And understand only by comparison and rank. And we think, how could we ever be favored if *those* people are to be also?

And YET, and yet...despite all of this brokenness, all this vanity, all this sin, and despite that we have largely rejected him and his Gospel... nonetheless, Christ came, and comes still, without bias, without distinction, without favoritism, to gather all to him. To God. In mutual affection, acknowledgment, and love.

Enslaving Godself to our humanity, Christ assumed it all. Such that even those who rejected him, are yet accepted in him. That which he has assumed, he has healed, and in these waters, and by the Spirit, all are engrafted back to him, and made equal citizens in the commonwealth of Heaven.

My friends, isn’t that just incredible?

None of us are worthy, and yet all of us are legitimate.

We are all brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, and joint heirs of the promise of this gospel.

No matter if you are the first born, second born, or last born; no matter if you are black, brown, white, or yellow; no matter if you are man, woman, or a bit of both; no matter if you are straight, gay, or also a bit of both; no matter if you are Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist or an amalgamation of all, you are legitimate. No matter if you are Cindy Jarvis, Ken Lovett, Bill Cobb or Dolores Edwards, Reds Johnson, Sarah Wright, Troy Foxworth or Maddie Dickinson, God has made a new and special covenant with each of us and, in some way, we are all favored.

For amazingly, astonishingly, and most undeservedly, Great is God's faithfulness!

For no matter who we are or what we have done, or left undone, God is yet with us.

Forgiving us still, accepting us now, and loving us to the end.

And boy, we are lucky for that.

Amen.