

Boasting in Jesus Christ

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Preacher: Graeme Shanks

- [0 : 0 0] Okay, thanks so much, Gary. Folks, keep that passage open in front of you in Galatians chapter 6. According to website L.com, E-L-L-E, avid readers I'm sure you are.
- Here's what's making something of a comeback in the world of high street fashion. The cross pendant. Now if you're there, you're here, and you're wearing one today, then go ahead and enjoy the next five, five seconds, knowing that you are bang on trend.
- And let me then burst your bubble and tell you why it's really strange. Suppose for a minute that we were to jump in a time machine, travel back to the first century, and walk around the region of Galatia, what is now modern day Turkey, wearing a cross around our necks.
- People would not be thinking bang on trend. People would be squinting and looking at us with a puzzled expression, and they would likely ask us, why on earth are you wearing a symbol of torture, of humiliation, and agonizing death?
- That's the thing that criminals are executed on, and where they are made an example of. And you're wearing it around your neck? What's the matter with you? And case in point would be Jesus of Nazareth.
- [1 : 4 0] You see, the Romans, in the first century, looked at Jesus on the cross, and they concluded powerless. The Greeks looked at Jesus on the cross, and they concluded foolishness.
- The Jews looked at Jesus on the cross, and they concluded cursed by God. But have a look at verse 14 of Galatians chapter 6.
- And remember that Paul, the guy writing this letter, was formerly one of those Jews who looked at Jesus and thought good riddance. But now having encountered the risen Jesus, he now looks at what Jesus did on the cross, and he says, My boast.
- My glory, my revel, my pride, my everything, my boast. And fast forward 2,000 years, and here's Alice, a girl from Cumbria, studying to be a vet.
- Her life totally different from this man, Paul, and yet she's declaring exactly the same thing. Curious, isn't it?
- [3 : 0 1] As so many people in our world see the futility and fleeting nature of what modern culture holds out to us.
- And as people today are looking for a bigger and a truer story to anchor themselves in. One that spans the generations and is swept like wildfire across the nations.
- It really is curious. And it's worth reflecting on the durability and timeless nature of the Christian faith. I was listening just the other day to a young man in his 30s called James.
- James was talking about how growing up he swallowed a secular mantra. And try this one on for size when it comes to genius atheist marketing. He said, this is what I heard.
- I heard the mantra that science will fly you to the moon, but religion will fly you into buildings. And he thought, genius. Got it. A snappy slogan, he said, that had me hook, line and sinker.

- [4 : 08] But years later, reflecting on the mental health and meaning crisis facing his generation, he thought to himself, maybe there is something in this Christianity stuff that I was so quick to dismiss.
- And turning to the Bible, he finds in the person of Jesus and specifically at the cross of Jesus, a message that is both compelling and true.
- You know, I wonder if you, maybe you're here this morning and you're somebody that I think G.K. Chesterton was thinking of all those years ago when he said the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting.
- It's been found difficult and left untried. You see, Paul, as he finishes his letter to the people in these churches in Galatia, as a church, we've been through this letter over the last couple of months.
- And the words in this section might be different, but here's the thing. The base is exactly the same. Nothing's changed in his final plea.
- [5 : 15] Here's the big thing. Really simply, Jesus is all you need. Jesus is all you need. And he's going for one last big play, one last big pitch in this letter.
- That's what the whole see with what large letters I write thing is all about. In case you were thinking, what on earth is that? Because here's what would have been going on.
- Paul would have been dictating this letter to a scribe up until this point. But now, as it were, he takes the scroll, he grabs the quill, and he goes to town on the papyrus.
- You can imagine that whoever has the task of reading out this letter in these churches, holding it out so that everyone can see at this point, and saying, hey guys, we know that handwriting.
- It's him. It authenticates Paul. But it does way more than that. This is his way of getting their attention.
- [6 : 18] What would we do when we send emails today, or texts, or WhatsApp messages? What's really important is the text in bold, font size large, underlined.
- You need to get this. If you get one thing, get this. And this is what Paul's doing here. He's saying, you've got to understand this as I leave you.
- And what really simply we have in this passage is a comparison in boasting. And here's the reality for all of us this morning, friends.
- We're all boasting in something. Something gets each of us out of bed in the morning. Something gives purpose to each of our days.
- Something provides the reason for our existence. Something means that we think there is a future. Something, that something is what we boast in.
- [7 : 20] The only question is, what is it? So here's this comparison in boasting. Firstly, from verse 12, he gives you these false teachers who've invaded this church, these churches in this region.
- And they're peddling the mantra that faith in Jesus is a cracking start. But if you really want to perfect your faith, if you really mean business, if you really want to be in, then you must add to your faith a suite of Jewish religious practices.
- So Jesus isn't quite enough. It is Jesus plus the addition of all this stuff. That's the solution to your problem. And Paul in this message, he says, see if you strip it back.
- Really, this is just three quite simple, hollow things. Number one, these guys are all about, just see it in the text, these guys are all about self-promotion.

So they're after boasting in how many converts they make. That's their skin in the game. They're not really interested in you. Right? It's like when you phone up a call center and they say your call is really important to us and you think, well, if I'm caller number 362, I'm not quite sure that's true.

[8 : 43] That's what he's saying here. They don't care. You're just a number to them. You're just a statistic to them. You're a tally mark. And what does it come down to?

Verse 12, what do they want? They just want to impress people with the number of converts that they've made. Number two, these guys are all about self-preservation.

They just don't want to be persecuted for what they believe in. Do you know, a message that says at its heart, really, it's still all about you and what you do and what you contribute.

That kind of goes down well with the world. Okay, you do your Jewish things, but we'll do our pagan things. We'll do our other things. And we're all kind of in the same game here. We just all think we're working our way to God.

Christianity is completely different. But these guys don't want to be persecuted. A state-approved religion is not a threat to the world. And three, these guys, their message really is all about self-help.

[9 : 48] Saying that there is something that you can do to contribute something to your salvation. But Paul says, verse 13, do you see the emptiness of it all? They don't even keep the law themselves.

So the very thing that they want you to do, they don't even do it themselves. Do you see how hollow that is? These teachers, they talk big.

But at the end of the day, there's no fruit. And here's the drum that Paul's been banging all the way through this letter. It's a mindset. It's a mindset.

Thinking that by cleaning up your outside, your inside is going to follow. Think again. It just doesn't work like that.

You've got a completely the wrong way around. But do you know what does work? Do you know what really does work? It's the thing that I'm about to tell you I'm about to boast in.

[10 : 51] Verse 14. I boast in the cross of Jesus Christ. And you think, hang on a minute.

That brutal form of execution? How does that work? What did Paul find? What has Alice found as they both look at the old rugged cross?

Friends, that's the place where you and I see what God really thinks of us. The cross says two things to us.

It says, number one, that you and I are more broken and rebellious and lost than we stop to think. And let's be honest, that's really jarring.

Because we're not used to that kind of talk in our culture. Right? At kids' sports days today, everybody wins. At Pass the Parcel, if you watched that Bluey episode, everybody gets a prize.

[11 : 59] That's the reason that love hearts are still one of the best-selling items from the sweetie aisle at the supermarket. You're the best. You're awesome. You're perfect. You're number one. The cross says, no, we're not.

We're not. We're really, really not. And deep down, friends, we know that that's true. We look out and we see that.

We look inside and we feel that. Multifaceted problems. Multifaceted problems. And it's really interesting because the Bible, into these multifaceted problems, gives us a multi-angle definition of sin.

lives that fall short of God's standards, missing the mark, minds that are darkened, desires that are bent out of shape, lives that long to worship, but look for that object of worship in all the wrong places, hearts that suppress the truth, like a beach ball holding it underwater, suppressing the truth, the things that we know to be true.

And I'm really glad that the Bible does that. Because when I came to Jesus and I read his diagnosis of the world out there and the heart in here, it fitted hand in glove.

[13 : 27] The cross declares to you and I publicly that there is a problem. A problem so big and unsolvable by us that God sent his son, Jesus, who willingly stepped into our earthly existence, who knew pain, who knew grief, who knew mocking, who knew injustice, and all of those things culminating in the only perfect one being crucified on a Roman cross.

It says there at the cross that God is just. In our world where we long for justice, that's what the cross declares, that every evil thing, every bit of suffering, everything that's wrong with the world, that declares to us the cross that it's true.

God's just. He is perfectly just. He cannot just sweep sin under the carpet. What kind of God would he be if that was what he did? God's justice, his wrath, his anger, all of human sin and evil.

Jesus goes to the cross and pays the penalty for it all. And no one puts this better than John Stott.

And this quote stopped me in my tracks this week when I was preparing for this. Can I just read it to you? See if this connects.

[14 : 59] He says this. Every time we look at the cross, Christ seems to say to us, I am here because of you. It is your sin that I am bearing, your curse that I am suffering, your debt that I am paying, your death that I am dying.

Nothing in all the universe cuts us down to size like the cross. All of us have inflated views of ourselves, especially in self-righteousness until we have visited a place called Calvary.

It is there at the foot of the cross that we shrink to our true size.

And it is there, friends, that Paul and Alice and every single believer bows because it is the place that says, my sin put him there.

It declares there is a problem in the cross, but here is the wonderful second thing that it declares, that you and I are more loved and known than we could ever hope possible.

[16 : 21] Paul has already talked about that back in chapter two. He talked about the Son of God and Alice quoted it, didn't she? Of the Son of God who loved me. And it is really interesting there that he goes personal.

He doesn't say us, which would have been true. He says me. Jesus loved me. And Paul, of all people, knows that he deserved nothing but the opposite.

That is the guy with dead Christians on his conscience. He says, Jesus loved me. Jesus was patient with me. Jesus showed grace and kindness to me when I didn't deserve it.

And that's where he showed it. At the cross. And so bring these two things together, friends. Do you see the perfect justice of God and the unfailing, unrivaled love of God?

They kiss at the cross. Some of you might remember, you might be of a vintage, that you remember tennis player from years ago, a female tennis player called Chris Avert.

[17 : 36] Some of you will have no idea what I'm talking about, but some of you will know. She was formidable in her day. I think her career win-loss record was the best of any singles player in history.

But here's the really interesting thing I read this week. See, she contemplated retirement. The massive success of her career. She was utterly petrified of giving it up.

Here's what she said in this interview. She said, winning made me feel like I was somebody. It made me feel pretty. It was like being hooked on a drug. I needed the wins, the applause, in order to have an identity.

Now listen, tennis might not be your thing. You might not know your forehand from your backhand, but sketch what she's saying onto each of our lives.

What is the thing? What is the thing that we're all looking to to give us that sense of being somebody? Putting in the work at the gym, in front of the mirror, cramming at the library, extra hours at the office, trying to get your kids into that school, contemplating taking the bigger mortgage to get the house.

[18 : 52] Listen, none of these things in and of themselves are bad. But whatever that thing is, it's as if Jesus would come alongside to us and say, listen, what's really going on in your heart?

What's the applause you're living for? What's the thing that you are seeking? Listen, see, whatever it is, is it going to be enough? Whatever it is, you're chasing bubbles.

You know that song, they fly so high, they reach the sky, and like my dreams, they fade and die? What has Paul found at the cross?

Why does he boast? Because he's found everything that he needs. He's found the one applause worth living for. Because he's found at the cross, he's found in Jesus the way to be reconciled with the living God.

The God that he thought he was pursuing in all the wrong ways, the God that met him in Christ, he's been reconciled reconciled to the living God. And he's been saved to know the living God.

[20 : 05] And it was nothing to do with him. What greater purpose is there in the world, according to Paul, than to experience that possibility? And that's why Paul says, I boast.

I boast in the thing that made me right with my creator. I boast in the place where the justice of God is seen. I boast in the place where the love of God is seen.

And I boast about the fact that I can know this God is my Father. And do you see in this text how he doesn't leave it there. He kind of drills it down. Notice the two C's. What does that mean for our lives if we follow this Christ?

It means, first of all, do you see that the world has been crucified to us? Paul says, I have been crucified to the world. And caught up in that word world is a whole plethora of values, of desires, of ambitions, of logic, of thinking, of the God-doesn't-exist mindset.

And Paul said, now the world, ambition, status, value, all these things that I once pursued, they no longer have the entrancing appeal that they once had in my life.

[21 : 26] And guess what? It works both ways. I have been, as it were, untethered from the world. I don't recognize the world. And it works both ways because the world doesn't recognize me.

It thinks I'm bonkers. But guess what? I don't care what the world thinks of me and I don't want what the world has to offer me. because I have been crucified to the world and the world has been crucified to me.

And by implication of that, to drill down into application. Friends, I faced up to this language this week. Faced up to the language this week of that word crucified.

And faced up to the many, many ways that my heart is still drawn out to dance the tango with the world. I don't know do you know what's going to wean me off that the best?

It's when we see the second C that he talks about here. It's the word counts. What now counts? What now is the ultimate thing in Paul's eyes?

[22 : 39] He says, have you been circumcised or haven't you been circumcised? That's the wrong question. If that's the question that you're drawn to, can I suggest your horizons are way too small?

It doesn't matter. What matters, verse 15, is the new creation. That because of what Jesus did for you and because the Spirit now lives in you and because God is now your Father, you have every single reason to live.

the old you has gone. Have you ever thought about the fact that that's what a baptism service is? It is the funeral service of the old you.

And it is, if you like, the birthday party of the new you. You are a new person. God has saved you and he's called you out of the darkness to live in his wonderful light and to live in a new way of life.

A life because of the Spirit that is slowly and gradually producing marks of the new age. It's a wonderful thing to think about.

[23 : 53] Maybe if you're slightly older in the Christian life, many people tell me that they're struggling with old age. Listen, that might be absolutely true. But here's the challenge is you grow and experience the old age.

Why not make it your thing to excel in showing the evidences of the new age? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

Younger people, if you want to be a revolutionary today, remember what it was like being your age. You get what I mean? Leaving university, at university, with plans to change the world, and then getting beyond university and then realizing that I've got not a lot to offer.

But if you want to be a revolutionary today, don't think fight, think fruit. Display in your life those things.

In our world, it just seems to be so angry. Angry. Why not excel in displaying kindness and patience and self-control?

[25 : 13] Do you know what those things are? They are evidence that Jesus reigns in your life. And as somebody reminded us in our home group last week, we should be better as a local church at spotting those things in each other's lives.

You know, you're really growing in gentleness. You're really growing in goodness. You're really growing in faithfulness. You're really growing in all these things that won't make the news at 10, but boy, will they show up on the new speed of heaven.

The marks of the new age. And Alice, that is why God has saved you. So that you would bear witness to him by a life that's been transformed by him that you are.

And those are the people he envisages when Paul says, all those who walk by this rule. That's all those who put their faith in Jesus, who live by that mantra, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus alone.

They are the true Israel of God. Listen, our time is gone. Let me try and land the Galatian plane by leaving you with one question. If you've been tracking through this series, here's the question.

[26 : 26] What's just been your biggest takeaway? What's been the biggest thing that you've been challenged on, maybe that you've learned or you've seen for the first time? Can I give you mine just as we close?

Try and get you into mine by telling you about my weekday routine. Every day begins with the school run. And I play a little game with myself.

It's called Parent Phrase Lingle Bingo. It begins after I've taken great delight in putting on the big light in the kids' bedroom, the thing that I hated my mum for, but now I am so that man.

The questions come. You can tick them off. Right? What do you want for breakfast? Have you got a snack? Where are your shoes? Where is your water bottle? What jacket do you want?

Have you done your teeth? Has mummy done your hair? Because it's been made clear to me that that is not daddy's gig. Right? But there's a new phrase that's just entered the top ten. As we leave the house and we walk to school and we cross the various roads that we come to en route and I find myself every morning saying that phrase see if you can complete the sentence.

[27 : 39] Have you looked both ways? Yeah? Have you looked both ways? Every morning have you looked both ways?

And the thing about that phrase is that there's pretty good advice for the Christian life. Because this is how Galatians has challenged me and invited me.

See when it points in your life you're struggling and you maybe don't know what's up ahead. You're feeling a bit weary. You're feeling a wee bit tired. Your life story is maybe lost and you think I've lost sight of the big story.

Friends, here's the thing. Look both ways. In that word new creation that's what it's inviting us to do. Look both ways. Here's what I mean.

Look back to the cross and see the place where Jesus secured your forgiveness and won for you that newness of life.

[28 : 41] That empty tomb. Look back the way and see it all. You didn't earn that. I didn't earn that. He won that for us on the cross. He secured our place.

He did it there. Look backwards. Look to the cross. But don't stop there. Look forward to the new creation. Alice has mentioned that it's great.

It's great when someone else does your sermon for you before you've even got up here. The new age, the place where righteousness dwells, where we will be with God, where sin will be a distant memory, where there will be no more death, where tears will be wiped away.

Friends, we live our lives between these two great bookends that Jesus has won for us. And these two things will not change. So when I'm struggling, when I'm working out what I'm doing in my life, I look up and I see these two bookends and the invitation in the middle as we wait for Jesus to come back is to know that he's not left us.

We have his spirit. And what is the spirit doing? It is drawing out our hearts to say no to the old us and yes to the new us. I am a new creation.

[29 : 54] I am a new creation. So friends, look both ways. Look both ways. And maybe even this morning is the day, the morning, where you put your faith in this Jesus for yourself.

Why don't I pray? Father, we thank you this morning for everything that we've heard and sung and read. Father, thank you for this wonderful testimony about the transforming grace of Jesus Christ.

And so, Father, I pray maybe for many of us here who are struggling. Maybe we are doubting. Maybe we're weary. Maybe we're even thinking about tapping out. Lord, may this morning by your spirit as your word has gone forth, may you encourage us and challenge us in the perfect way.

Lord, thank you that it is true that all the books in the world couldn't tell the glory of your son, Jesus. And so, Father, we look to him this morning and we pray that you'd be with us just as we close our time now in Jesus' name we ask.

Amen.