

Boasting and the true state of my heart

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[0 : 0 0] So, I don't know, you know, when I was reading 2 Corinthians, and I don't know if you noticed it when Jeremiah was reading it, there was a particular phrase that really, really jumped out at me, and it's verse 30.

I don't know if it jumped out at you when you were listening to it. You know, I know it can be hard to listen to Scripture, but it says this in verse 30, If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

And that's a bit of a complicated phrase if you think about it. I will boast of the things that show my weakness. Like, is this text saying to us that if Usain Bolt was a Christian, I have no idea whether he is or not, but that Usain Bolt should say that he's actually pretty slow and terrible at running?

Should he actually try to become a worse runner so he could say this? Like, is this telling us that Serena Williams should say that she has a terrible serve? Or that Haley Wickenheiser can hardly play hockey at all?

Or that it's wrong for them to try to get better at their sports, that they should try to get, like, worse at it? Like, when it says here, I will boast of the things that show my weakness, like, is that one of these just, you know, religious or spiritual things?

[1 : 1 6] And yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. It just sort of means you confess your sins, but, you know, you go on living life. Like, if you were to read this in your office or at your coffee shop, would people roll their eyes at it?

Is it one of those things? Would people say, you know, George, I think texts like that are just the way that religion tries to sort of say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm a rich, powerful person.

I'm just acknowledging my weakness. But it's really just a way for rich and powerful people to keep poor people poor. Because the rich and powerful don't believe it, but they want the poor to believe it.

And then they can stay strong. Like, what's going on with that? It's a very, it's an odd statement, isn't it? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

In fact, you know, for some who might actually really be struggling with things in their life, and they come maybe to a church service like this, where they come to read the Bible, hoping that they can find some meaning in their life, like, a text like that can end up making you think, well, you know, George, I'm already really beat up by life, and I'm already feeling pretty weak.

[2 : 3 1] And I don't know, George, I'm looking for something that will give me some type of peace and some type of inner calm and self-possession and strength. I'm not really looking for something that's going to make me weaker.

So it's a very curious text, isn't it? So let's look. Let's just look at it in this context. It'd be a great help if you open your Bibles. And the text is 2 Corinthians 11, beginning at the 16th verse.

It'd be a great help if you open the Bibles, and let's look and see. Maybe the context makes it better. Maybe the context makes it worse. Maybe what's going on in the text. Is anything at all going on? And just so you know, as you're starting to read the text, just before this, Paul was talking about he was having trouble in the congregation.

And the congregation, part of the problem in the congregation was that there's this group of people who are trying to lead the people astray. And you can sort of imagine they all sort of look like George Clooney or take your favorite actress who just looks good-looking and poised and knows how to dress and knows how to move and knows how to charm.

And at the same time, they're sort of very culturally connected and culturally savvy. And they're trying to recommend a way of living that's far more culturally sophisticated and culturally savvy. And they're sort of convincing the congregation that Paul is a bit of a, you know, a bit of a rough hick

type whose gospel has too many rough edges and they want to smooth them out, you know.

[4 : 00] And that's what's going on just before this. He ends up saying that they're really more like the way the serpent was with Eve. And if you remember the story in Genesis 3, the serpent says to Eve, did God really say?

Did God really say? And what's going to happen after this, which we'll look at next week, is Paul's talking about somebody who's had a spectacular vision of heaven. And so anyway, that's what goes on on either side.

Look at, let's start with verse 16. And here's how it goes. I repeat, because he said this earlier, let no one think me foolish. Okay, so he said, I'm not a fool.

But even if you do, accept me as a fool so that I may, but even if you do, in other words, even if you actually do think I'm foolish, because you've been listening to these people who've said that I'm a bit of a hick, accept me as a fool so that I too may boast a little.

What I am saying with this boastful confidence, I say not as the Lord would, but as a fool. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. Now, what Paul's sort of sitting up here is he's going to say, to try to make a point, he's going to play the fool, to make a point.

[5 : 13] It's a little bit like a, yeah, he's just going to play the fool in the hope that by playing a fool, he's going to sort of disarm them and get them to sort of understand a few things.

And then in verse 18, just before we go any further, I'm just going to say a few things about this. And I want to, they're going to be a little bit provocative, but it's actually a really significant sentence to understand this whole thing about weakness.

And it's in verse 18, it's actually pretty significant. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. Since many boast according to the flesh, I too will boast. See, one of the things that we're going to see as we go on is that what Paul is doing in this full speech and this statement about weakness, he's sort of, he's trying to understand, he's going to help us to try to understand two different types of weakness, and he's going to help us to try to understand what boasting, human boasting reveals about our hearts.

Because that's always what the Bible is wanting to do. The Bible is wanting us to understand our heart, this sort of the command center of our lives in light of the reality of the living God.

That's what the Bible is always pushing us towards. And so Paul is going to play the fool, but here's these, a couple of provocative statements. If you could put the first one up, Andrew. The flesh boasts.

[6 : 32] The flesh boasts. And now what the Bible here means, it's not just, in this case, the flesh doesn't just mean, you know, just our body, like the physical stuff, as if there's somehow every human being is, there's a physical stuff, and then there's some type of divine spark within us which is eternal, or that the soul is closer to God and the body doesn't really matter.

That's not what he means. In the Bible, one of the uses of the flesh, the most common in the New Testament, is to describe that there's something in human beings which likes to either ignore God or rebel against God.

That there's something in every human being that loves to ignore God or rebel against God or resent God.

If God's not doing anything to bug us, that's fine. We can just ignore him. But once he starts to do something that sort of intrudes upon our interests, there's a resentment to him, an enmity towards him, not a longing.

And that's what's meant by the flesh. And so one of the things that the Bible teaches and that Paul is saying here in verse 18 is that the flesh boasts. The next point, Andrew. In fact, the flesh, that part of us which is in rebellion against God, not, I mean, the soul, our mind, our heart, our will, our affections, our imagination, our memory, there's part of everything that makes us us that is in rebellion against God and resents him.

[8 : 02] And the Bible is also trying to tell us that the flesh, that part of me, is addicted to boasting. Just as some people can be horribly addicted to crack cocaine and it can ruin and wreck their lives, that the flesh in human beings is addicted to boasting.

And then the final controversial thing, all human beings are addicted to boasting, myself included. All human beings are addicted to boasting, myself included.

If any of you are interested in writing any of these things down, it's all going to be on the webpage tomorrow if I go too quickly. So in this little verse 18, behind it is this basic sense, some of which

Paul has been pointing out throughout the book of 2 Corinthians and in 1 Corinthians, his first letter to Corinth, is that all human beings boast.

All human beings are addicted to boasting, myself included. And some of you think this is probably wrong. I'm going to try to illustrate it later on in the sermon. But I just want you to understand that this is a bit of a context within which Paul is playing the fool and he's going to talk about weakness as being something that he wants to learn to boast in.

So let's continue on. Let's continue on verse 19. Sort of lost my place there for a second.

[9 : 25] 19. Now he's still talking to the congregation. For you gladly bear with fools, being wise yourselves. For you bear it if someone makes slaves of you or devours you or takes advantage of you or puts on airs or strikes you in the face.

To my shame, I must say we were too weak for that. Now just pause. This is a combination of irony and sarcasm. Many of us don't realize that sometimes the Bible uses irony.

You know, irony isn't just something that hipsters invented. Like, it's something that goes right back. Like, the ancients understood irony and sarcasm. The hard part is that often Christians, you know, who always think that the Bible has to be unbelievably serious, that it never has a bit of a joke or never using irony or sarcasm.

And Paul is just going to, you know, because you see, what these false apostles have been doing that have been causing the trouble is they're getting paid lots of money to teach. And who knows, maybe they're really all of a sudden, as we're going to see in a moment, if they're starting to put a whole pile of rules on them and they're beating them up and poor Paul says, you know, I was just too strong to take any money for you.

I did everything for free. You know, he means, it's too bad I was beating you up in such a terrible way by only giving to you and never receiving a penny from you. And it's too bad I was only trying to teach you about grace rather than having you weighed down with a whole pile of advice you can't keep, where people then mock you because you can't keep the advice.

[10 : 51] So he's being sarcastic. He's being, he's full of irony with them. He's trying to use the irony and the sarcasm to make them think, oh yeah, Paul did all of this for free, but you want hundreds and hundreds.

I remember years ago, there was a guy who used to come to the church and I mean, you know, he was like a lot of Anglicans. I don't want to make anybody feel guilty here, but he's like a lot of Anglicans. I think he put like two bucks a week in the plate or something, a hundred bucks a year, maybe an extra 50 at Christmas, you know.

Anyway, he told me, he had a really messed up life and he told me that he'd just gone off on a weekend and this is about almost 20 years ago and he went off on a weekend and he paid somebody 850 bucks.

I don't know what that, like today in today's dollars, that'd probably be like over two grand. And he paid them this for a weekend for the guy to just basically keep yelling at them and the basic message is you need to make a distinction between women you just want to sleep with once or twice, women you want to sleep with for six months, and women you might want to marry.

And he paid 850 dollars to be yelled at about that. And he put two bucks in the plate at my church. I could have told him that for free. Except that I would have said, don't sleep with women, you know.

[12 : 08] I mean, and that's what he wouldn't have liked, right. So it's, you know, the fact of the matter is that a lot of times people will do all these crazy things with their money, right. You know, I didn't say this when I was talking about money, but you know, if our culture thinks it's not messed up about money, I learned this from John Maxwell.

Many people in our offices and many people that we see on the street, because they use credit cards and line of credit, they spend money they don't have to buy things they don't need to impress people they don't like.

And then they think that they have no problem with money and Christians are uptight about talking about money. The Bible wants to free us from doing all that stuff, right.

So that's a bit of a long aside. But here, so get, what's going to happen next? Verse 21 again. To my shame, I must say we were too weak for that. But whatever anyone else dares to boast of, I am speaking as a fool.

I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ?

[13 : 15] I am a better one. I am talking like a madman. Pause right here. Two things about boasting. Now, most of you couldn't give a hoot.

I almost said a bad word. Couldn't give a hoot about that list of qualifications. Right? Who cares? In fact, in our culture, with a bit of an increase in anti-Semitism, it might actually be a bad thing for many in our culture.

That's one of the things about all boasting, you know? Like, it might very well be that the thing that we put down in a resume or the thing that we like to boast about, if we went to another culture, they'd go, yuck.

Or that future generations will go, yuck. Like, you know, couldn't you see that, like in a certain point in time in South Africa, one of the things that they would put down is that they've always maintained the color ban.

Couldn't you see that Christians in the American South at one point of time could have had, in fact, it's one of the things on Hell on Wheels, if you've seen that television series, is the guy gets a promotion in the first season because he was good at managing slaves.

[14 : 26] How would we think about that on a resume today? So that's one of the things about all these things that we boast in is that we boast in them. We think they're really important right now, but in another part of the world, they'd go, yuck, or who cares?

And it might very well be that for some of those things that in 20, 30, 50, 100 years, if they were to find it, if your great-grandkids were to find it, they'd go, oh, that's terrible. I don't want anybody to know my parents were like that.

The other thing about this is it shows a little bit about what Paul is dealing with here. And some of you know, there's certain types of Christians who have like an unhealthy fascination with Jewish people.

And it's almost like, friends like Daniel Avitan and Daniel Gilman can tell you that if people, like there's some Christian circles, if they find out that the person's Jewish, it's almost like they want to touch you because they're going to get extra blessed.

Or something. And it's, you ask them. It's a real thing. And so it looks as if maybe one of the things that's going on with these false apostles is not only do they look like George Clooney or not only are they culturally smooth, but they're probably trying to trade in with their Jewishness or some type of Jewish claim.

[15 : 45] They're probably more like that guy Boyden, the author claiming native hair, doesn't have any, right? You know the guy. And, um, but they're trying to, and it's probably something a bit Jewish and rule oriented that they're going with as opposed to grace.

Anyway, that's, that's just the thing about boasting, right? It's to try to, just, you see the Bible, at first it can look boring or irrelevant, but if you actually spend some time thinking about it, you realize it's, um, sorry.

Anyway, let's go back to 23. Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one. I am talking like a madman. I mean, you should almost yell it if you were reading it, okay? Now, just pause.

What do you put in resumes? Okay, here's the fact. If you, in fact, took nine years to get your four-year degree, you don't, you usually try to figure out some way to get around that inconvenient fact.

Right? You know, if, if grade nine was the three best years of your life, you, you tend to not want to put that in your resume, okay?

[16 : 59] And so, how would a Christian pastor want to, like, if you're looking for a new pastor after I, you know, I, I move on, and you know, what would you want to say? You'd want him to say, well, you know, I planted six churches, you know, the last church grew to 5,000 people on a Sunday.

I don't know, you know, 10,000 people have come to faith through my message. You know, some of the people who've, you know, that I disciplined, you know, they're now, like, Regis professors of divinity at Oxford.

I mean, that's what you're looking for, right? That's what resumes do, right? So, Paul is trying to impress these people, right? What does he say? With far greater labors, far more imprisonments, that would really impress a search committee.

I've been in jail 10 times. My record is as long as my arm. With countless beatings and often near death, five times I received at the hands of the Jews the 40 lashes less one.

That means he pissed off the Jewish people. Three times I was beaten with rods. That means he got the pagans mad, different punishments. Once I was stoned.

[18 : 09] Three times I was shipwrecked. A night and a day I was adrift at sea. That means 24 hours. On frequent journeys and danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger of sea, danger from false brothers, and toil and hardship through many a sleepless night in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure.

And by the way, in the original language, with the verb tenses, the implication is this is just a sample, not exhaustive. And apart from other things, and in the original language as well, it culminates in verse 29 as the greatest thing which has beset him, that's hurt him.

And apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant? If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying. And we'll just sort of pause there for a second and think about it.

So, it's a bit of a weird thing. And we need to think a little bit about all of these things that have happened to him that are very, very hard.

[19 : 44] In fact, in the eyes of the world, many of these things in this list would show that Paul's a loser. They wouldn't be things that show there's any particular excellence in him.

It would show that he's a loser. But Paul goes and puts them all out before them as a people. So, what on earth is going on here?

And some of you might say, George, okay, I can just imagine one of the guys that I talk with all the time in one of the Starbucks. Just the other day, he was telling me how, he always asked me how many people came to church.

And he sort of nods, you know, and says, well, you know, that's not very many. And he really likes to make me feel good. And then he says, you know, George, like young people are all just leaving the church and our whole culture is going away from this.

And you're on the losing side of how the culture is moving. He just said this to me this week, actually, and I said to him, well, I almost said his name, we'll call him Bob. Well, Bob, first of all, whoever thinks that opinion polls tell you the truth, that taking a vote will tell you what's true and false.

[21 : 01] And there's lots of examples of cultures leading people astray, you know. And, but he would take a text like this and just say, you know, there's nothing in this, you know, being boasting of your weakness, George, you gave me the context, but it's not very helpful.

And it's only made Christianity look a bit weird. Let's just look at these last, the thing, the culminating thing in the list, 29, 30, and 31. And just keep in mind, in fact, what I remember I said earlier, that the flesh boasts, the flesh is addicted to boasting, and all human beings are addicted to boasting, myself included.

Look at 29, the pinnacle, who is weak and I am not weak, who is made to fall and I am not indignant. If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weaknesses. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

Now, you see, if you're a very careful reader, you'd see that Paul is contradicting himself. You see, in verse 29, when it says, who is weak and I am not weak, who is made to fall and I am not indignant, and indignant could also be translated as, have my heart burn with fire, a hot fire. he doesn't think these things are good, this type of weakness and falling. And then he says he's boasting in his weakness. Well, maybe he's an idiot, but maybe it's wisdom.

[22 : 31] God does not desire the death of the wicked, but rather that they would turn from their wickedness and live.

In fact, the original one is, God desires not the death of the wicked, but that he would turn from his wickedness and live. And that's a very, very powerful phrase.

It's a very gospel phrase. It comes, it's said three times, virtually word for word in the book of Ezekiel. So it's just the book of common prayer quoting it. And it's a very, very important verse and idea to understand everything in the Bible.

God takes no delight in the death of a sinner, but rather that he or she would turn from their wickedness and live. And just to paraphrase it very slightly, but in a way which is in complete

congruence with the text, God does not take delight in anyone dying.

God does not take delight in anyone being diminished. God does not take delight in anyone being beaten up. God does not take delight in people understanding how frail and weak they are, per se. [24 : 04] What he loves is when, whether it's thinking of your own mortality and realizing that one day you die and there must be something more, whether it's, like in my case, it was my weakness which led me to Christ.

It was my diminishment and my brokenness that led me to Christ. That's what Christ loves. That's what God loves. So you see, there's a type of weakness and a type of brokenness and a type of diminishment and an attempt and a type of just getting weaker and weaker and weaker that God takes no delight in.

There's nothing good or holy about that. This isn't teaching us, this text isn't teaching us to cut ourselves or whip ourselves or beat ourselves up so that somehow or another we're more holy. It's not talking about that at all. And this other weakness that Paul is talking about, it's talking about, it's a little bit like this. I know it's a bit of a, you know, I don't know, I was worried about whether this is going to be an analogy that will help you.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall. All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again. All of us are Humpty Dumpty.

[25 : 28] Every one of us will fall. And when we fall, all of the ingenuity of Apple and of Google and all of the power, whether it's Trump and Putin and China and all of the power can't put us back together again.

And one of the things that the gospel is all about is that God sees that we are Humpty Dumpty. And God, the Son of God, became weak and he became broken and he became poor and he dies the death that every human being has to die, but he dies it in such a way that it is for us that when we receive this gracious act of God's, you know, what is it in Isaiah?

He was wounded for our transgressions. He was bruised for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, for by his wounds we are healed.

By his wounds we are healed. And the gospel is this message of unimaginable grace, that God seeing human beings that are addicted to boasting and pretending that they're God and walking around as if they're God and wanting to have only intermittent connections with God and God seeing human beings like that and still he loves us and still he loved us and sends his son to die upon the cross for us knowing full well what we are like.

And he dies our death and dies our and takes our punishment so that he takes, as I like to put it, our doom.

[27 : 10] And as he takes our doom upon us, he offers us his destiny. In other words, another way to put it is, and this is sort of something that's all the way through the New Testament about changing stories and changing states of being, that in a sense I'm humpty dumpty and as I'm falling, and before I hit the ground and fall into all these pieces, and I call out to Jesus for mercy, and he comes and grabs my hand.

You ready for this? and he turns me into the ugly duckling. Here's where I'm not sure if the analogy would work. But you know, in the ugly duckling, the story of the ugly duckling is that you're a swan, and the swan egg breaks amongst, opens up amongst the ducklings, and the ducklings make fun of the swan because it's big and gangly and everything like that, and then eventually the ugly duckling becomes a swan, and the other ducks are just in amazement at this unbelievably beautiful and glorious creature.

And in a sense, what happens in the gospel is that God changes the story of our lives when we give who we are in the story of our lives into his hands.

And God takes humpty dumpties and turns us into swans, who right now we're sort of living like ugly ducklings.

If you could put up the point, Andrew, when I accept the gospel, I cease being humpty dumpty, and God himself makes me his ugly duckling.

[28 : 54] But some of you might say, well, the ugly duckling suffered abuse, the ugly duckling was sad. But why is the ugly duckling sad? This gets to what's going on in this whole text and the whole issue of human boasting.

The reason the ugly duckling was sad is because she did not know who she was. And the other reason that she was sad is because she believed she should be or needed to be like a duck.

Her longings and her yearnings, the things that she desired to boast in, were what going around in her culture, and she didn't realize that she was a swan. listen again to verses 29, 30, and following. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant? He doesn't take any pleasure in just seeing Christians persecuted, having things robbed from them, having things stolen from them, seeing them fall morally, seeing them get confused theologically.

That doesn't please God's heart, it doesn't please Paul's. If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness, the God and Father of the Lord Jesus, he who is blessed forever, knows that I am not lying.

[30 : 14] In the context of his weakness, he makes this great claim that only the God who really does exist, who is the Father of the Lord Jesus, he alone is blessed forever.

I want to share you a terrible thing about my heart. God, you know, I am quite comfortable if something goes very well with something I organize or something in my family or something in the church.

You know, I have to confess before you, I'm quite comfortable if I get all the glory and don't think about God at all. Maybe I'm the worst person in the room.

And I have to confess that most of my attempts at holiness, as I'm trying to learn to be gripped by the gospel, is that at times I realize that that's wrong.

And so, if I'm honest, what I really hope is that I still get most of the glory, but God can get a little bit. And then as the Holy Spirit starts to convict me, maybe I think to myself, okay, God, I know you need to get all the glory as long as I get a little bit.

[31 : 27] Yeah, yeah, yeah, you're blessed forever in George. That's the story of my heart. And the gospel wants us to move to this place to understand, George, you were humpty dumpty falling towards a great fall, and all the king's horses and all the king's men wouldn't be able to put you together again.

And you called out to me for mercy, and I, in my grace, no matter how deep you had fallen, no matter how broken you already were, I went far deeper still and was completely and utterly broken, even broken in my relationship with Almighty God, and I bore all that in myself.

By my wounds, you are healed. And when you put your hands in me, you could do nothing. You were about to be broken. I did this unbelievable miracle in you. I turned you into a swan, a creature of beauty and glory, who can fly and can soar.

And George, shouldn't the desire of your heart be that God gets all the glory, and you are quite happy and quite content if you get none?

George, isn't that wisdom? I want to just ask you, remember earlier I said that people are addicted to boasting and maybe you think that that's not true.

[32 : 56] How many of us, maybe even within these past few days, have felt a little bit beaten up because we've said to ourselves, I thought by this point in time, you know, I don't know, here I am, I'm 24 years old, the guys and gals I went to high school with, they're already finished university, they're in law school, or they have a job, and they're, you know, maybe they're an engineer, they're doing something making \$75,000 a year, and here I am living in this crummy apartment with a whole pile of people, and I'm still in school.

I thought it would be better. I thought I'd be done by now. How many of us are beaten up thinking, you know, I thought by now I'd be healthier. I thought by now I'd be more popular.

I thought by now I would be slimmer. I thought by now I would be stronger. I thought by now I would be richer. I thought by now I would have that special person in my life. I thought by now I would have more promotions.

I thought by now I would be more important. I thought by now I would be a more superior Christian and people would acknowledge it. I thought by now my church would be bigger.

I thought by now I would be more talented. Am I the only person who ever thinks any of those things? you see, here's the thing that this text, if you take for a second and say, let's just assume for a moment that Paul was not an idiot.

[34 : 21] Let's just take for a moment if Jesus really died and rose from the dead and will come again and that he was able to teach his apostles to write words of wisdom that touch our hearts, that reveal our hearts, so that our hearts would become more tender and open to him.

Let's just assume for a second that the Bible is wise and spend some time thinking and meditating upon it. What we see is this, if you could put it up, Andrew, boasting and shame slash

self-accusation are two sides of the same coin.

Why? Because I'd like to boast. You should see my promotions. You should see the size of my church. Boy, am I ever articulate. Boy, do people ever like me.

Next point, Andrew. The idols which shape my longings to boast shape my shame and self-accusation.

If we make an idol of having that special person in our life, if we make an idol of having the right type of relationship, we make an idol of having a certain amount of power, if we make an idol of popularity, if we make an idol of money, if we make these things, some of which are not bad in and of themselves, but they become the source of our identity.

[35 : 47] They become the source that gives us meaning. They become the thing that we surrender ourselves to, become the things that we want to give ourselves to. And they are just ephemeral things. Some of these are things that if we put them down in our resume or if we were to actually say them out loud in public, people would want to turn from us, especially in Canada.

Some parts of the world you can go ahead and boast in Canada it would be viewed as tacky to say a lot of these things out loud. And some of the things that we might put down in our resume that we wish that we'd had this by now, you know, if we're 20 and by the time we're 50 we look back and we think that was so ridiculous.

Or if our kids or grandkids were to see it, they'd look, gosh is that ever lame, dad. And yet we give our lives to that. We think that is important for our meaning and our identity.

Next point, Andrew. The boasts which I base my identity on become my relentless and merciless accuser as we suffer shame and four o'clock in the morning times that just go on all night because we can't fall back asleep.

Too bad the gospel is too weak. And wants to tell us about God's grace. What is it that the Bible wants us to tell?

[37 : 08] Here's the thing. Andrew, if you could put up the next point. To my fallen heart, I can only be a god or garbage.

To my idols, I can only be a god or garbage. And what is the gospel? Next slide, Andrew.

To the gospel, in the gospel, I am never a god and I am never garbage. I am always a jar of clay redeemed by God's grace alone through faith alone in Jesus and his saving death alone.

I am always a jar of clay who will live loved by him for all eternity. Just turn back in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 4.

2 Corinthians 4. And listen to what Paul says just earlier. Therefore, having this ministry, and the ministry is telling people about Jesus dying on the cross, about the fact that we're jars of clay.

[38 : 18] Having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word. But by the open statement of the truth, we would commend ourselves.

He's commending the message to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, humpty dumpty. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them.

What is it to keep them from? What is it that the serpent wanted to keep us from? To keep us from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves. I boast in my weakness. But Jesus Christ is Lord. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed forever with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, that's in Genesis, has shown in our hearts when we receive the gospel to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

[39 : 30] But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

That when Jesus takes us into himself, he takes us into himself. He takes us into his death for us and into his resurrection. That enters into us and we enter into him. Verse 11.

For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, we always stay jars of clay. So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our mortal flesh.

So death is at work in us but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence. For it is all for your sake so that his grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. You see, Usain Bolt should never say, I'm going to hurt my legs so I run slower.

[40 : 52] Einstein, if he was still alive, should say, I'm going to start taking, I'm going to start smoking lots of marijuana because it will make me dumber. That's actually true by the way. No, they should say, I'm a jar of clay.

God has blessed me with this speed but he is the one who is blessed forever. I will die. My legs will become crippled and not able to move.

They will become dust. But my hope is found in the one who has defeated death, who died for me, who has loved me and loves me now and will love me for all eternity.

And I do not get my identity from my speed. I am so grateful for God for my speed. It doesn't make me special but I'm so grateful for it that God has blessed me with such a thing.

Keep going. Let's go to verse 12 again. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believed and so I spoke. We also believe and so we also speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.

[42 : 04] For it is all for your sake so that as grace extends to more and more people it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

That part of us which belongs to Jesus, which will become more like him, which will be glorified and live in the new heaven and the new earth for all eternity. For this, verse 17, this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us jars of clay, an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look, not at the things that are seen, the ducklings who say that we're an ugly duckling, but to the things that are unseen, to the God who does exist and who lives, to Jesus who is now, who died for us, we can no longer see it, we can only hear about it.

For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling. If indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent we groan, being burdened, not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal jars of clay may be swallowed up by life.

[43 : 42] He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. In the gospel, I am never a God, and I am never garbage.

I am always a jar of clay. I am redeemed by God's grace alone, through faith alone, not my works, in Jesus and his saving death alone. And I am always a jar of clay who will live loved by him for all eternity.

As the gospel grips me, the Holy Spirit frees me up to say, if I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness.

I invite you to stand. If you're here and maybe you've heard the gospel explained in a way which has touched your heart for the first time, and maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, or maybe you'd say you're a lapsed Christian, if God is, there might be a pressure in your heart to do something in terms of God, and what that pressure is, is God is inviting you to surrender and let go. And to lift your hands to him and say, Jesus, save me. Thank you that by your wounds I am healed. Thank you that your punishment has brought me peace.

[45 : 23] I want to be yours forever. I want to get off of this treadmill of either being a God or garbage. I want to know I'm a jar of clay saved by you and eternally loved by you, and I want to have my identity formed by that.

I give myself to you. Just don't have to use my words. Just say, Lord, I give myself to you. I give myself to you. I never want, I just only want to give myself to you.

Your own words. There's no time better than now to say it. And for all of us who struggle with being a God or being garbage, there's no better time now than to just say out to God, Lord, I want to be gripped by the gospel.

I want to be a disciple of Jesus who's so gripped and rooted by the gospel that it so forms my affections and my identity and my longings that I can live free in this life.

It's time to just surrender to the Holy Spirit and do that as well. Just bow our heads in prayer. Father, if there's those here who are maybe crossing the threshold of hope to put their faith and trust in you, pour out your Holy Spirit upon them.

[46 : 33] Guide their words. May your Holy Spirit flood them so they know your peace and assurance and receptivity as they surrender their lives to you. Father, for those of us who are maybe here and we're still searching, we're not ready for that, pour out your Holy Spirit and your love upon them.

Make the gospel real to them. And Father, for those of us who have put our faith and trust in Jesus, and we know that he is our Savior and Lord, but Father, we struggle with boasting. We struggle with being either a God or garbage.

Father, we struggle with idols. And Father, you know the struggles of our heart, and we thank you so much that you have saved us, that you will never let us go. And we ask that your Holy Spirit would move a mighty work in our heart, that your word would do a mighty work in our heart, that we would become, grow day by day to be ones who say no to idols, that are gripped by the gospel and are learning to live day by day as jars of clay, confident in your love and living for your glory and not our own.

Father, do this work in our hearts, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.