

Boasting in the Lord (2)

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[0 : 0 0] I often speak of him but an old man in Aberdeen called Sam Will had more influence upon me as a young Christian than anyone else. Sam had achieved much in his long life, more than most of us ever will. He had been an officer in the British Army and had spent many years as a missionary in Peru.

But for all he had achieved in life, Sam Will was the humblest man I ever knew. The secret of his humility was here in these verses, verses which he used to repeat to me every Sunday morning when I would meet him on the church door in Aberdeen. He would look at me seriously and say, this is what the Lord says. Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom.

Or the strong man boast of his strength. Or the rich man boast of his riches. But let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands me and knows me.

He would look me in the eye and he would have a little mischievous grin in his face, but I knew he was being deadly serious. The greatest honor I could pay him then and now is to live the rest of my life boasting not in myself or in my achievements, but in understanding and knowing Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers, author of the daily devotional, My Utmost for His Highest, writes for the 7th of August, God can accomplish nothing with the person who thinks he is of use to him.

[1 : 5 3] Chambers goes on, Last week we considered together what it means to boast in all the wrong things.

We took examples from the kings of Judah. Uzziah, God gave Solomon great wisdom, but it went to his head and it brought him down into ruin. God gave Uzziah great power, but it went to his head and it brought him down to ruin.

God gave Hezekiah great wealth, but it went to his head and it brought his nation down into ruin. We learned, I trust, to sing with our hearts the first couple of lines from the hymn, How Deep the Fathers Love.

I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom. How important it is for us as individual Christians and as the evangelical church in the western world not to rely upon our techniques, our numbers, or our affluence.

We dare not walk in the path of Solomon, of Uzziah, and of Hezekiah, lest we share in their ruin. But having, I hope, directed us away from boasting in all the wrong things, this week I want us to turn our attention to the second half of the passage, the more important half, that if we should boast, let it be in God, in Christ, in the gospel, that our words center on Him and what He has done for us, not on us and what we have done for Him.

[3 : 4 4] But before we enter into these hallowed doors of what it means to boast in the Lord, and boast in the Lord we should and must, before we learn the path of deep Christian discipleship and a growing experience of the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, I want to review with you just very briefly what the word boasting means in the Bible.

The Hebrew word is one with which we are all familiar. It is the reflexive form of the verb to praise, hallel, hallelujah. And so in the first instance, to boast means to praise oneself.

As opposed to being occupied with the praise of God, here's a man who's filled with self-praise, self-admiration, self-worship. He's a narcissist who looks at himself in a mirror and congratulates himself on his appearance and his achievements.

In the second instance, to boast means to talk about. If you should talk to him, you won't get a word in edgeways because he wants to talk about his riches and he wants to talk about his strength and he wants to talk about his wisdom.

In the third instance, to boast means to describe by. It's an attitude which wants to describe oneself and others in terms of success or failure.

[5 : 10] Gifts, not godliness. Breadth, not depth. In the fourth instance, to boast means to rejoice in. So here in Jeremiah 9, 23, 24, to boast is to rejoice in one's own wisdom, in one's own abilities, in one's own wealth.

This is where this man's joy is to be found. He loves nothing more than reflecting upon, speaking about and boasting to others about these things. To boast, fifthly, means to aim for.

Once again, as we turn to Jeremiah 9, to boast is to have as one's highest ambition the acquisition of wisdom and power and riches. That's what the boaster lives for.

That when he's achieved them, he'll have considered himself to be a success in this life. And then lastly, to boast means to trust in. That in which we boast is that in which we place our faith.

It's our foundation. It's our rest. It's our rock. Well, as opposed to the man who praises himself, the Christian intent on pursuing a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ, praises Jesus Christ.

[6 : 35] He talks about Jesus Christ. He describes himself and others in terms of their spiritual relationship to Jesus Christ. He rejoices in the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He aims to be the holiest and most gracious Christian he can possibly be and trust never in his own abilities, but only ever in the rock who is Jesus Christ.

You will notice from these verses, the prophet does not forbid boasting at all. Rather, he encourages us to boast, but to boast in the right things.

Let me highlight the three areas in which we are to boast as Christians and as a church. Boast in the Lord. Boast in knowing the Lord.

Boast in the things which delight the Lord. Boast in the gospel. Boast in Jesus. Boast in the fullness which overflows into our emptiness.

[7 : 44] Boast in the plenty which meets our hunger. First of all then, boast in the Lord. Boast in the Lord.

God reveals himself here as the Lord who exercises kindness or steadfast love, justice and righteousness on the earth.

These three virtues of God are to be compared with the other foundations upon which people place their trust. Wisdom, power and riches.

God's steadfast love, not our wisdom. God's justice, not our strength. God's righteousness, not our wealth.

These are the foundations of our boasting as Christians. We do not praise ourselves. We praise him. We do not rejoice in our successes or our abilities. We rejoice in his.

[8 : 45] The steadfast love of God is the central virtue of his character. A few years ago, we spent some time examining how the steadfast love of God, his so-called hesed, is not so much who he is, but what he is.

It is entirely as essential to his being, as his eternity, as his infinity, as his immutability. We could spend days, hours and weeks demonstrating and defending the doctrine of the love of God from the pages of Scripture.

A love so true and so intense. A love so passionate. A love so intimate. A love so furiously committed to you. What other God is like unto our God in that the chief of his attributes, his very essence, is love.

The justice of God, the so-called mishpat, is again a central revelation of God's character in the Bible.

We live in days of injustice. We heard about this this morning from Luke and Hannah. Days of personal, societal, and global injustice.

[9 : 57] I'm not speaking here about the legal systems of our world, but a lack of truth, a lack of integrity, and a genuine lack of equality.

That certainly was true for the people of Jeremiah's day. Justice could be bought by the rich. The poor were oppressed.

The helpless were vulnerable to exploitation by those who knew how to work the system. Inequality was rampant.

How alien to the God of the Bible. His justice is perfect in knowing and executing judgment.

He knows the heart of a man is relatively unconcerned about his affluence or otherwise. His abilities or otherwise. His wisdom or otherwise.

[10 : 58] The righteousness of God, the so-called sadaka, from which our Arab friends get the boy's name, Sadiq, is another central pillar of God's self-revelation in the Bible.

The righteousness of God is his determination to act according to the promises of his mouth. To be true to himself and all he's revealed himself to be.

There's no twisting of the truth with God. There's no unreliability or unfaithfulness about him. He says what he does and he does what he says. He can't be bribed.

He is never swayed from his purpose to love and save his people no matter the cost to himself. Of course the people of Jeremiah's day were somewhat different from that.

They changed their minds to suit themselves. And they failed to keep their promises based on an emotional or economic whim. Let me tell you, in the language and theology of the Bible, the love of God and the justice of God and the righteousness of God aren't dry, lifeless, cold doctrines which are learned by rote and then driven into our consciousnesses by an ever-descending cycle of fear.

[12 : 19] These aren't facts as much as they are truths to be experienced and cherished and in which we want to grow as Christian believers.

The truth is, those three are fulfilled in only one place. A cross deeply, firmly fixed into the Palestinian soil upon which the Son of God himself died to take away the sins of those who are not by nature loving, just, or righteous.

The cross of Jesus is where the steadfast love and the justice and the righteousness of God meet together and coalesce as one. The cross of Jesus, or rather, the Jesus on the cross.

He is our boast. That's why in Galatians 6.14, the apostle Paul doesn't want to speak about himself. Just doesn't. Rather, he says, far be it from me to boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You want to boast about something? Boast about the love and the justice and the righteousness of God in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Boast in the gospel.

[13 : 45] Boast in the proclamation of God's wisdom, power, and riches in the cross of Christ. I believe that the church in the Western world shall only return to the faithfulness of genuine New Testament piety when it gives up its fascination with its own successes, with its own achievements, with its own abilities, and embraces a greater fascination of how the love and justice and righteousness of God are made manifest by the God-man dying on a cross to take away our sins and give us new life.

Forget Solomon and his wisdom. Forget Uzziah and his power. Forget Hezekiah and his wealth. Fixate on Jesus and his gospel.

Boast in him. Boast in the Lord. Boast second, in knowing the Lord. Boast in knowing the Lord.

It is one thing to know that God has exercised steadfast love and justice and righteousness in the cross of Christ. It is altogether another thing to know and experience him for ourselves.

To experience not the greatness of these gifts, but the God who gives these gifts. Listen carefully to me. We saw this last week.

[15 : 20] God gave Solomon wisdom. But ultimately, Solomon used that wisdom to turn away from God. God gave Uzziah power.

But ultimately, Uzziah used that power to turn away from God. God gave Hezekiah wealth. Ultimately, Hezekiah used that wealth for the ruin of his nation.

You see the pattern? God in his grace gives. Man in his sinfulness becomes proud in the gift.

He defines himself by the gifts God has given him. He begins to think that somehow having these gifts is more important than having a living relationship with the living God Himself.

But suppose we have none of these gifts for ourselves, but we know and understand God in the gospel of His Son, Jesus Christ.

[16 : 32] Then we are wiser and stronger and richer than the whole world around us. this then is what we aim for and rejoice in.

Not the gifts God gives us. Not the successes God blesses us with. Not the achievements our sovereign Lord graciously affords us.

but simply the wonder of knowing Him. Listen to what the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 4-7.

This church which boasted, which boasted in the abilities and the successes of its leaders. He said to them, Who makes you different from anyone else?

What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not? In other words, everything we have as Christians, yes, even our abilities and our successes and our achievements, they come from God.

[17 : 50] They are gifts of His grace just as surely as was Solomon's wisdom, Uzziah's power and Hezekiah's wealth. Why boast then if what we have is not ours by right?

And why do churches boast of their techniques and their numbers and their prosperity when a graciously sovereign God has given it to them in the first place?

By contrast, the Apostle Paul dares to say, I want to know Christ. I want to know Christ. Do not dare claim credit for what God has done.

Do not dare boast in the gifts that He has given you. Boast only in that you know Him. Intuitively, I think we all know what it's like when we meet a Christian who is not interested in drawing attention to himself or herself but is interested only in knowing Jesus more.

They carry around with them a certain fragrance of piety and godliness. not that they are hopelessly dithery with their head in the clouds.

[19 : 13] Rather, they have their feet firmly planted in today's world but have their hearts in heaven. men. They don't want to speak about themselves. They only want to speak about Jesus.

The words I, me, and I think are almost totally absent from their vocabulary. they have airs and graces in the best possible sense of the word in that they breathe the air of the gospel and they breathe out the grace of the gospel.

That's the kind of person we need more of in our churches today. People like Sam Will, who by any standard was yesterday's man, even in his own day, I would take his godly yesterday to anything our godless today can provide us with.

He never talked about himself except to point out how God had provided for him in life and God had blessed him through his long and exciting journey.

At the same time as knowing and learning from Sam, I had a roommate who was learning to play the guitar. He was a lovely Christian and every night in bed I could hear him across the room strumming quietly and singing to himself the hymn The Greatest Thing in All My Life is Knowing You.

[20 : 48] I never said anything. I just listened. The more I go on in my Christian life, the more I agree with him. At the end of days when God calls us all to account for the people we have been, do you suppose he will be interested in us claiming credit for what he gave us?

His successes, his abilities, his achievements. Or do you suppose he'll see in our eyes an adoring reflection of his love for us?

I'll leave the last words in this point to Jesus in Matthew 7 21 through 23. Not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day Lord, Lord did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly away from me you doers of evil.

Boast in the Lord, boast in knowing the Lord and then thirdly boast in those things which delight the Lord. Boast in those things which delight the Lord. Yes, boast in who God is and by all means let your boasting be in the cross of Christ but perhaps and with this we close we can allow God to boast little himself.

[22 : 26] He boasts in takes delight in those who follow him into kindness and justice and righteousness. Those who because they themselves have come to benefit by faith from his steadfast love justice and righteousness on the cross of Christ are now showing that steadfast love to their family and friends.

acting justly in the workplace and at home and living in a righteous way. He delights in it. He boasts in it even as he boasted to Satan all those thousands of years ago regarding Job.

Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him. He is blameless and shuns evil. A man who fears God and is upright.

The thought that God could delight in us as individual Christians is amazing.

But the thought that we by imitating his steadfast love his justice and his righteousness should bring him pleasure is even more amazing.

[23 : 38] You can bring delight to the heart of your God today. Not by learning new techniques. Not by boasting in the power of the church.

Not by continually speaking about yourself and your achievements but by loving others and by being just and righteous in all your ways.

when I go to great ministers conferences it's a temptation to look up to those ministers who stand at the front on podiums and tell us all how they have successfully grown churches from 50 people to 50,000 people.

It once was a temptation for me. Not so much now. Yeah, I'm sure there are things I can learn from them but the men I really look up to now are those who are faithfully working in difficult and challenging circumstances who are seeing little fruit for their labor but are striving not for church size but for church health.

These are those who I believe are most closely imitating those things which delight the Lord. let's internalize this and ask ourselves can I point to areas of my life where I'm showing love to the unlovable I'm exercising justice for those who are the victims of injustice as we heard this morning from Luke and Hannah and living righteously even though the temptations are flying into our heads.

[25 : 26] am I truly mirroring the self-denial of the Jesus who gave himself on the cross for me? am I pointing to the cross by my words and my deeds by my speech and by my life?

let's go back to the very beginning to the biblical definitions of the word boast and see how this understanding of boasting in the Lord works to boast in the Lord is to praise him for who he is and what he has done for us in the gospel of his son Jesus Christ to boast in the Lord is to talk about God about the ability of God to save even the worst of sinners to boast in the Lord is to describe one another in biblical categories as brothers and sisters in Christ fellow sinners saved by grace loyal yoke fellows to boast in the Lord means to rejoice in him for the joy of the Lord to be our strength and our song to boast in the Lord means to aim to know Jesus Christ and the power of his resurrection spirit every day to boast in the Lord means to rest for our salvation in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross and in the resurrection salvation what shall this mean in practical terms for the life of our fellowship

I largely leave to your own application the one who boasts in the Lord controls his critical spirit but I cannot help but think it shall result in a renewed dedication to what have been called the ordinary means of grace which are in their widest definition the word preached both publicly and studied privately prayer both together as a congregation and on our own as Christians and the sacraments baptism of the Lord's Supper our call is not to self sufficiency to the bravado of me hyping you up every Sunday morning and saying you can't do it our call is that we can't do it but that our God can do it and will do it as we plead with him to fill our empty hearts and our empty pews

Oswald Chambers author of the daily devotional my utmost for his highest writes for the 7th of August God can accomplish nothing with the person who thinks he's of use to him Chambers goes on it is not a matter of our equipment but a matter of our poverty not of what we bring with us but of what God puts into us Chambers wants to remind us of the very point that Paul's making here I mean Jeremiah's making here in Jeremiah 9 23 and 24 and Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 10 17 let him who boasts boast not in his successes in his abilities and his achievements his wisdom power and wealth but let him boast in Jesus Christ and his gospel