

Boasting in the Lord (1)

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[0 : 00] and glory. I would love to say that I don't have a problem with boasting, but then I guess I'd be boasting if I said that. In general, no one likes a boaster, someone so full of themselves that they don't have time for anyone else.

I this. I that. I the next thing. Pass the man by. It's more interesting to watch paint dry than to listen to a boaster boasting. Early on in my ministry here, there was a young man who used to criticize my public reading style. He suggested that he would like to show me how to read the Bible in public property. Now, I'm always happy to oblige anyone who wants to read the Bible in our public worship, and please feel free to approach me if you would like to read the Bible in public worship. I would love you to try. But this young man really was so full of himself that I decided I'd teach him a lesson. So I asked him to lead the public reading of Scripture at our next Sunday evening service. And the chapter I chose for him to read was 1 Chronicles 9.

He was so confident of his own ability that he did not even read the chapter beforehand. And when Sunday evening came around and it was time for him to read 1 Chronicles 9 in front of the whole fellowship, he quickly became tongue-tied. Having slogged his way through all the complicated names in that chapter, he sat down, red-faced, and never again criticized my, or to my knowledge, anyone else's public reading style. Go check that chapter of Scripture out for yourself, 1 Chronicles 9.

In general, no one likes a boaster, and God most certainly doesn't favor the man or woman who is full of themselves. And yet, in Jeremiah 9, 23 through 24, God invites us to boast.

He commands us to boast. He orders that we become boasters. Just make sure you're boasting in the right things. If you're going to boast, don't boast about yourself. Boast about him. Don't be full of yourself.

[2 : 36] Be full of Christ. Be full of Christ. Who Christ is. What Christ's done. As the Apostle Paul commands us in 2 Corinthians 10, 17, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.

And so the title of this sermon, boast freely. Boast freely, but not in yourself and your achievements, but in Christ and his gospel.

Now, you may be wondering if after so many years of being minister here in Glasgow City Free Church, and today is my 17th anniversary, 17 years anniversary of being minister here in Glasgow City, I have finally taken leave of my census.

Let me assure you that there is a method in my madness. I am afraid of a creeping tendency within evangelical circles to boast in ourselves, in our successes, in our abilities, in our achievements.

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.

[4 : 02] 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 the prophet here is making in Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24, and Paul's making in 2 Corinthians 10, 17. Let him who boasts, boast not of his own successes and his abilities and achievements, his wisdom, his power, and his wealth.

Let him boast in the Lord and the gospel of Jesus Christ. And so the method of my madness is precisely this, on this my 17th birthday, as your servant, to guide you back to where your true successes, abilities, and achievements are to be found.

Not in yourselves, not in each other, but in the God whose church this is. Brothers and sisters in Christ, freely boast in Christ.

not in what you bring to Christ, but in what Christ puts in you. Not in your fullness, but in your poverty. Because as Chambers says, God can accomplish nothing with the person who thinks he's

of use to him.

[5 : 30] It is only when we come to God in poverty that he fills us. And coming to him in our failure, he'll grant us success.

In knowing and understanding him better. Now perhaps you don't share my fears concerning this creeping tendency within our circles to boast in our successes and our abilities and our achievements.

Well, the dominant theme of Jeremiah 9, 23 through 24 is obviously boasting. And more specifically, that in which we boast. We don't boast in ourselves. We boast in God and his gospel. The word we translate as boast and the context in which these boasts are made allows us to describe what boasting is in a number of ways.

Yes, to boast means to be full of oneself, but practically, what does it mean to boast? Well, the Hebrew word is one with which we are all familiar.

[6 : 32] It is the reflexive form of the verb to praise. Hallel. Hallelujah. It is the reflexive form of that verb. And so, in the first instance, to boast means to praise oneself.

To praise oneself. As opposed to being occupied by the praise of God, here's a man who is filled with self-praise, self-admiration, self-worship. He looks at himself in a mirror, rather like Narcissus, and congratulates himself on his achievements and his successes and his abilities.

In the second instance, to boast means to talk about. To talk about. So, you should speak to a boaster and you won't get a word in edgeways because all he wants to talk about is himself.

He wants to tell you about what he's done and who he is. In the third instance, to boast means to describe by. To describe by.

It's an attitude which wants to describe others in terms of their success and their failures, their gifts, but not really their godliness so much, their breadth, but not their depth.

[7 : 49] In the fourth instance, to boast means to rejoice in. To rejoice in. And so, in Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24, for example, is someone boasting in their wisdom, in their wealth, in their power.

That's where that person's joy is found. He loves nothing more than reflecting upon, speaking about, and boasting to others about his wisdom, his power, his wealth.

In the fifth instance, to boast means to aim for. To aim for. Again, going back to Jeremiah 9 here. To boast is to have one's highest ambition as the acquisition of wealth, of wisdom, of power.

that's what the boaster lives for. And when he has achieved them, he'll consider himself a success. And then lastly, to boast means to trust in or rest upon.

This is what we place our faith in. It's that foundation in which we rest before God.

[9 : 08] it's our rock. Can you perhaps begin to see, therefore, why I'm getting nervous about the creeping influence of boasting within the evangelical church?

All six definitions of boasting are proclaiming loud and proud our achievements as churches. The how-to-do sections of church bookstores can't keep up with demand.

We describe each other not necessarily in biblical terminology, but according to the speak of the world around us. Our joys unto the Lord, it's in our abilities, our successes, our failures.

We're aiming for all the wrong targets. For all the world, faith in Christ is replaced by faith in today's great leader.

to all these, Jeremiah shakes his head and he says, let not the wise man boast in his wisdom. Let not the mighty man boast in his might.

[10 : 22] Let not the rich man boast in his riches. but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness upon the earth.

For in these things I delight, says the Lord. Jeremiah says to us today, by all means boast, but boast in the right things, not in the wrong.

Do not boast in yourself, boast in the Lord. So after that rather long introduction, let me invite you to examine with me the heart of biblical piety through the spectacles of these verses in Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24.

First of all, boasting in all the wrong things and second, boasting in all the right things. Now I want us to deal with the first of these headings this evening and then next Sunday evening deal with the second.

So tonight we're looking at boasting in all the wrong things. We all know we have our fill of people in this world who want to boast about how smart they are, how powerful they are, how rich they are.

[11 : 40] We've got our full of them because the world is full of them. It's sad to say the church is also full of them and we've had our fill of them also in the church because they're boasting in all the wrong things.

Their achievements, their successes, their abilities, not in the steadfast love, justice and righteousness of God, the humility of knowing and understanding God and his gospel. Rather than considering each one of these three in abstract, wisdom, power and might, wisdom, power and riches rather, I thought we'd personalize them and show them at work in the lives of individuals and how boasting in these things leads to disaster.

So first of all, Solomon and his wisdom, second, Uzziah and his power and third, Hezekiah and his riches.

First of all, King Solomon, King Solomon, according to 1 Kings 4.29, King Solomon had wisdom and understanding beyond measure and the breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore.

[12 : 58] In our own day, we talk about needing the wisdom of Solomon when faced with a difficult choice. Well, Solomon had wisdom in government, wisdom in science, wisdom in leadership, wisdom in the arts, wisdom in military strategy, wisdom in economic policy.

He was the wisest man to have ever lived. We have read our way through the book of Proverbs on Sunday morning, many of which are the so-called wise sayings of King Solomon.

The problem for Solomon was that though he was the wisest man who lived, he let the wisdom go to his head. We learn from 1 Kings 4.34 that people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon and from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

To cement political and economic alliances with these nations and kings, Solomon married their princesses and in doing so introduced foreign religion into the life of Israel.

In so doing, he exchanged the wisdom of God for the foolishness of religious pluralism and for all his achievements he ended up his life in foolishness and idolatry.

[14 : 21] He boasted in his wisdom. He trusted in his wisdom. He rejoiced in his wisdom all the time forgetting that the wisdom in which he was boasting was God's gift to him.

Now I am committed to the scientific endeavor. You know that I value every aspect of the pursuit of God's truth in God's world.

Far from being anti-intellectual I live, breathe, and will die for academic freedom. However, if we should think that human wisdom is worth boasting in, we're deceiving ourselves.

For all of Solomon's wisdom, he was a fool because he should have listened to himself when in Psalm 127 verse 1 he wrote these words, unless the Lord builds the house its builders labor in vain, nissi dominus frustra.

Or again, the fruit of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The wise man who does not boast in the Lord is, for all his learning, a fool.

[15 : 39] A fool. How does this work in the area of the evangelical church? Simply this. It seems to me anyway that the evangelical church has developed a new expertise in programs, techniques, and know-how.

This is how to do, we're told. With a whole new vocabulary of evangelical language, these in-the-know gurus come across as perfect Christians compared to the rest of us.

We're told the church will already grow if you should implement these new programs and implement these new techniques. That the prevailing wisdom of how to do is what will see us not just survive as a church, but thrive as a church.

I don't wish to pour cold water on the enthusiasm of any believer, but I want us to remember that our cultures, philosophies, and fashions change every decade or so, and that what's here today will most certainly be gone tomorrow.

what does not change is the wisdom of God in working for the foolishness of things that we do, like preaching and prayer.

[16 : 57] We'll come back to this next week because I don't want to seem overly negative. What I do want us to do is to recommit ourselves to God's timeless measures of church life, and to use a word that Phil Stogner keeps on driving home to me, and it's just such a wonderful term, church life and church health.

I want us also to remember that if there should be any success in our church life at all, and health, it shall not be because of our innovation or how-to wisdom, but because of God's sovereign gracious blessing on our stumbling foolish efforts.

King Solomon, don't go boasting in your wisdom. King Uzziah, don't go boasting in your power. Don't go boasting in your power.

Well, King Uzziah was a descendant of King Solomon. He was one of the most powerful kings Judah ever had. He organized Judah in such a way that it became a genuine military power in the ancient world.

Surrounding nations began to pay tribute to Israel. The economic and military power of Judah thrived under his leadership. He was a very clever man and he invented machines which could be used against armies besieging Jerusalem.

[18 : 24] The capital city, Jerusalem, became an armed camp and Uzziah became one of the most powerful men in the ancient world. God. As you read through the account of his life in 2 Chronicles 26, you come across this fascinating statement in verse 16, rendered in the Holman Christian Standard Bible, which is the Bible I use for my own personal devotions.

When Uzziah became strong, he grew arrogant and it led to his own destruction. How had he become so strong?

We're told in verse 15 that he became strong because he was marvelously helped by God. God made Solomon wise and he made Uzziah strong, but in both cases, those to whom God gave gifts became proud and began to boast in them.

Uzziah held complete military and governmental power in Jerusalem, and so he thought that he also held complete power in the religion of the temple. But when he, a proud and arrogant Uzziah, marched into the temple and tried to offer sacrifices, he was struck down with leprosy and died in weakness and anonymity.

What do you think? That the God who created the heavens and the earth by the word of his power is intimidated by our human strength, the endless stamina of athletes and the physical endurance of strong men.

[20 : 01] We all want to be the best we can be and that's great. But if we should begin to rejoice, to boast about or to rely upon any aspect of our human power, then we're in for a shock.

During his playing career, the Rangers footballer, Fernando Rickson, had everything. Handsome, strong, and some say talented, although he played for Rangers, so that's questionable.

I remember seeing him in Morrison's cafe in Anisland and thinking to myself, he is a good-looking specimen of humanity. That was all until Fernando contracted a horrible illness man.

And for all the nobility and dignity he demonstrated, and he really, really did. No one can read the story of Fernando Rickson without being impressed with how dignified he was to the very end.

He died in weakness. And Isaiah says to us, even young men shall falter and fail. Uzziah boasted of his power and he ended his life in weakness.

[21 : 13] As far as I can tell, numbers is the chief indicator of strength in today's evangelical church. We aim toward being.

We talk about and rejoice in big churches. We have this expression, a megachurch. But we have to ask the question, what exactly is a megachurch?

And is a megachurch something in which to boast? You get tired of hearing pastors when I go to ministers' conferences. I get tired of hearing ministers talk about the size of their congregation.

Or when I came to my congregation, there were five people and now there are 5,000. It is not a virtue to have a small church. It is not a virtue to have a big church.

We aim, as Phil keeps on telling me, for a healthy church, which glorifies God by our dependence upon him, our worship of him, and our service for him.

[22 : 13] King David numbered his army and God condemned him for it. It is God who was with us who is the strength of this church.

Big churches can be entirely as unhealthy as small churches. And let's remember that at the end of the day, it's God who gives the increase, not us.

king king and king and king king Solomon, don't go boasting your wisdom. King Uzziah, don't go boasting of your power.

King Hezekiah, don't go boasting of your riches. Don't go boasting of your riches. King Hezekiah was one of the greatest kings Judah ever had. He was a godly man and Judah returned to faith in the Lord through his leadership.

God blessed his leadership by defeating the vast army camped at the gates of Jerusalem, the army of Assyria. He was particularly known for his devotion to the restoration of temple worship.

[23 : 18] 2 Chronicles 31 is the story of how he organized contributions from all over Judah so that the worship of the temple could be conducted in glorious splendor.

God blessed his leadership to the extent that in 2 Chronicles 31 we read that the offerings for the temple were so plentiful that they were piled in heaps.

They were piled in heaps that was so much gold, so many riches. Where did it all come from? Where did it all come from?

In 2 Chronicles 32 29 we read God had given him very great riches. God had given him very great riches. Isn't it interesting?

God gave Solomon wisdom and he gave Uzziah power and he gave Hezekiah riches. We're beginning to see an interesting trend here that the good things God gives us can become a snare to us.

[24 : 23] In Isaiah 39 which fills in for us missing elements of Hezekiah's life, read that chapter by yourselves later on, the last verse in particular is very interesting. We learn that envoys from Babylon arrived in Jerusalem and Hezekiah took them straight to the treasure houses of the temple.

We read in verse 2, Isaiah 39 verse 2, Hezekiah received the envoys of Babylon gladly and showed them what was in his storehouses, the silver, the gold, the spices, his fine oil, his entire army and everything found among his treasures.

Hezekiah was It is no coincidence that less than a century later the Babylonian emperor, aware of just how much wealth was stored in Jerusalem, sent his army to the holy city and destroyed it all. Hezekiah's pride, which led to his showing these Babylonian envoys all the treasure in Jerusalem heaped in piles, led eventually to Jerusalem's destruction.

I'm sure I don't have to tell anyone here how fickle and temporary earth's riches are. We can point to hundreds and thousands of stories of how once rich people lost it all, of how people who once boasted in their wealth ended up with nothing.

[25 : 59] We have this expression, you can't take it with you, it's very true. Your money might buy you a better coffin and a bigger plot than the cemetery, but it can't buy you more life. Remember the words of Jesus in Mark 8, 36, what good is it for a man to gain the whole world yet lose his own soul?

But we see such boast in the evangelical church also. We have great people in our churches, we have great leaders in our churches, we have rich resources in our churches, what need then we have God?

We have amazing buildings, we have huge car parks, we have manicured church grounds, what need we have then of the Holy Spirit and the gospel?

We have a healthy bank balance, we can hire more and more workers, what need we then of the gospel? I'm not saying it's a virtue to be a rich church or a poor church, but how careful we must be not to fall into the trap of the Laerosean church in Revelation chapter 3, which said to Jesus, we're rich, we're wealthy, we don't need a thing from you.

To them, the risen Jesus says, you don't realize that you're wretched and that you're pitiful, you're poor, you're blind, and you're naked. You see, the world is full of people who boast in their IQ, in their BMI, and their bank balance.

[27 : 32] I'm afraid that the evangelical church may well be losing its way in this direction rather than boasting in the Lord, boast in the wisdom of its leaders, the growing number of people in attendance, the effectiveness of its buildings and programs.

Oswald Chambers wrote his devotional for the 7th of August, God can accomplish nothing with the person who thinks he is of use to him. It's not a matter of our equipment, but a matter of our poverty, not a matter of what we bring with us to God, but of what God puts within us.

Chambers wants to remind us of the very point that Jeremiah is making here in Jeremiah 9, 23 and 24 and Paul in 2 Corinthians 10, 17. Let him who boasts boast not about his successes, his abilities and his achievements, his wisdom, his power, his wealth.

Let him boast of the Lord. What about you this evening? For what do you praise yourself? yourself? Are you forever talking about yourself? How do you describe yourself? What is your primary aim in life?

[28 : 57] To be rich? To be powerful? To be wise? What would need to happen in your life to make you truly joyful? And finally, when it comes to the day of judgment, when you have to give an account of yourself to God, on what basis will you try to justify yourself?

I'm asking, what is your boasted life? Shall it not be the gospel of Jesus Christ, but our emptiness meets God's fullness, our guilt meets God's forgiveness, and our despair meets God's hope?