

If You Must Boast, Boast Of The Lord

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[0 : 00] Father, we have partaken of the bread and wine in obedience to the command of Christ. Now we would partake of your word that our minds and hearts and spirits may be nourished.

We may be unashamedly those called by you to be the servants of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. We're looking at 1 Corinthians chapter 1 verses 26 to 31 on page 156 of your Blue Pew Bible.

So, we are following through the fall a series of studies on the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians. Corinth was a city which had been destroyed in war, had been rebuilt in 46 B.C. by Julius Caesar.

[1 : 14] It was a shipbuilding and commercial center, we're told, by those who know such things. It was a very religious place. It was the capital of a province of the Roman Empire.

It was the scene, you'd be glad to know this morning, of sort of Olympic Games only every two years, and they were always held in Corinth.

They had a temple of Aphrodite with a thousand priestesses who were sacred prostitutes. A Corinthian became a description of one who lived a dissolute life.

A name for a prostitute was a Corinthian girl. The oldest non-religious building that archaeologists have found was in Corinth.

It was a colonnade 80 feet by 100 feet and contained 33 taverns. So that it wasn't unlike the thing that makes Vancouver go around.

[2 : 34] It was a port city like ours. The American sailors apparently liked the beer and the girls in Vancouver, and I guess that went for ancient Corinth as well, for traveling sailors.

And in the midst of that setting, a church was established. And it's to that church that Paul writes this letter. And he writes the letter because he has some very practical problems to deal with. How you handle celibacy, virginity, how you handle marriage, how when the cheapest meat in the city was that which had been offered to idols, how women were to behave in sacred assemblies, how women were to behave in sacred assemblies, what to do about the ecstasy of speaking in tongues, which had taken hold in that congregation in a strong way, how to sort out the personal issues of discipleship in a city which was very religious in its orientation, and that religiosity was very much interwoven with sexual activity.

So that there are a lot of parallels between that city and ours, and that's why I want you to look at, to have that background, which I know you've all heard before, but I want to remind you of it until you have it indelibly impressed on your mind what kind of a city it was.

Look at chapter 1, verse 26. There you have it. For consider your call, brethren. That means look at your community.

[4 : 35] That means look around you and see who else is in church. Look at the people that are here. If you know some of them, try and make some assessment of them.

How many of them are what Paul describes as wise, powerful, and of noble birth?

I think that is one of the great hang-ups of the Anglican church, is its sense that it was called to minister to the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth.

And I think one of the problems of this church is, while Paul says not many of you were wise, powerful, or of noble birth, there are Sundays when you can look around here and see quite a few people who are wise, powerful, and of noble birth.

There was a lady who, I don't know, was probably Lady Robottom, we will say, who was the Countess of Syringapotam, we will say, who also was wonderfully converted to Christ.

[5 : 56] And part of her testimony was, Thank God for M. By which she means that it doesn't say there, there weren't any who were wise, powerful, and noble birth.

There weren't many. And she was glad to count herself among those that were called of God in spite of that. Well, if you have people like that, then you'd see what God has to do with them. What God has to do with them is to shame them. So that part of the ministry of the gospel is to shame the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth.

So that they come to the place where Paul came to when he recognized that he was no longer ashamed of the gospel because he knew what it really was.

And the ministry to the Anglican Church has, to the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth, must be first to shame them.

[7 : 05] And you know, as I do, how almost totally our social structure builds around the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth.

You know how our conversation centers around the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth. You know when we strike a committee to do some significant job in the church, the first people we turn to are the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth.

Nothing ever gets done. But we still go back to it again and again because that's the way we think. That's the way our society works. That's why we send our children to school. That's why we try and get them the best jobs. That's why we look up their heredity to see if they're actually related to William the Conqueror.

All those things are in order to establish for our children, by the time they're 25, that they are wise, powerful, and of noble birth. We send them to school in order to learn that.

[8 : 23] We want that so deeply embedded into them that when they walk down the street, people will look at them and say, there is someone who is wise, powerful, and of noble birth.

We give them such a car as might indicate that too. Those are the things that make our society work. Those are the people whom our society rewards.

Now, Paul says that when God wanted to do something, he didn't call many of them.

He called some, but he didn't call many. And the reason was, I suppose, because he had to bring them to the place where he had to shame them.

And the way that he shamed them was by bringing things to pass, by bringing into existence out of nothing something which was not dependent upon wise men, powerful men, or men of noble birth.

[9 : 34] To bring something out of nothing which was built rather on the other three things that God is able to use.

The foolish, the weak, and non-persons. Those are the ones that God is able to use. And it happens over and over again.

Remember in George MacDonald's stories, you know, the curate's awakening, the proud young curate of the parish was converted by, I think, a butcher, a storekeeper, a dwarf, and his niece, who all lived on the edge of poverty.

But it was a kind of graphic demonstration of how in that community, the real activity of the kingdom was in the hands of the foolish, the weak, the non-persons, the people who humanly didn't count. And it creates for us this enormous problem. And that is that so much of our life we want to count for something.

[10 : 44] We want to have something of which we can boast. And yet, God has to shame us by accomplishing his purposes through the foolish, the weak, the non-persons.

That's how he does it. Well, if you look at the passage again, you'll see three sets of three things. And it's the sort of backbone on which the passage is built.

The wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth. The weak, the foolish, the non-persons. And then it ends up with Christ being our wisdom, our righteousness, and our sanctification.

So that's what's happening. Now, the, it's very difficult. I mean, people have told me this past week that they don't like going to coffee hour after church.

And, I'm sorry to tell you that it's part of your responsibility. It's part of the worship. It's part of you communicating to one another. But if you're going there to share stories about how wise, powerful, and of what noble birth you are, then, indeed, you are wasting your time.

[12 : 11] And the coffee, I expect. What we go there for is quite a different purpose. And that is that God has called us, God has done something which, which we, we have to learn to understand.

See, what, what God did in the beginning was God created out of nothing all that is. When the Bible opens, there is the darkness and the chaos and God's word of creation brings the whole of, all the whole of the creation into being.

And in the same way, God works among us and takes the foolish, the weak, the non-persons, the nothing, and creates a community of those who know God.

God. Now, it's always been assumed that the wise knew more about God than the foolish, that the strong knew more about God than the weak, or else they wouldn't have been strong, that the influential were influential because they had a hotline to God, but that's not the way it's going to be. It's something which God is going to do entirely of and by himself. What God wants to do among us is not dependent on the wise, the powerful, and those of noble birth.

[13 : 50] It's something which God must do out of nothing. He must create things that, he must take things that are not to bring crashing down all the fabric and all the structure of our conceits and of our boasting and of our self-accomplishments.

All those have to come crashing down in order that God can build what it is his purpose to build.

Now this passage points directly to the great non-event of history which is the cross of Christ.

It's become an event of great significance as you know. But to many people it's a non-event. If God wants to do something that's not the way to do it. If Christ is really somebody why does he end up on a cross?

Why does God do such a foolish thing? Why does God demonstrate himself to be so weak? Why does God submit to the powerful people?

Why doesn't he zap them? God because the weak and the foolish and the non-person that's what God does and that's what it is his purpose to do among us and we have to be shamed into the place where we recognize and acknowledge that and that our relationship to God we as a community before God have nothing to boast about nothing whatever we have something for which to be profoundly grateful but we have nothing to boast about it's once upon a time I had a great and significant friend who came from one of the great families of Britain and I went to school with him and we were both in theological college and we were taken down to High Park Corner in London and we had to stand on a soapbox and give our testimony to the rather unenthusiastic crowd that gathered there and he held everybody's attention by telling them that when he was a young boy in his teens he had been summoned to a birthday party at

[16 : 15] Buckingham Palace and the father and mother of two young princesses had welcomed him at the front door and he had put his hand into the father's hand who was King George VI and then with great grace he said but I counted a far greater thing that I have put my hand and my trust in Jesus Christ people heard that that's hard for us to understand humanly speaking that you have a double PhD in astrophysics that you are a chairman and chief executive officer of interplanetary investments and that you're fourth cousin to the queen counts for nothing because God has chosen to demonstrate his power and that he should be the one in whom we glory and God has provided for us Jesus Christ he is to be our wisdom our righteousness and our sanctification the purpose of that is our redemption because that's the project that God is working on he's redeeming us to redeem is to buy back from somebody who claims possession and the work of God in your life is to buy you back from those institutions and those things of which you boast humanly to pay a price for you that you might know that the fundamental reality of your life is that

God has called you to belong to Jesus Christ and to live in obedience to him God is working to buy you back from all those things in which humanly you may boast but which ultimately count for nothing to buy you back that you might find your wisdom your righteousness and your sanctification in Jesus Christ that you might find the source of your life in him I was talking to somebody who worked in Fellowship House last year and they said that among those very important people who gather for prayer and Bible study in Fellowship House in Washington D.C.

the motto is Jesus Christ and nothing else that's the basis on which God's work is established and that's why we give to him praise and that's why this passage ends by saying let him who boasts boast of the Lord that is that's the thing that we are to take pride in and that's the thing that God must humiliate us must shame us until we will not boast in anything else we may give thanks for all these human attainments and we may be effectively able to use these attainments to bring other people to the feet of Christ but our boast is to be in the God who has in Christ been the source of our life and made him our wisdom our righteousness our sanctification as the basis for his work of buying us back from our worldly commitments and aspirations and boastings to being disciples of Jesus

Christ and to boast not in ourselves but in him alone as we begin our prayers I'd like you to turn back to hymn 71 and then I'd like to sing it but I just want to sing one verse of it and I'd ask you just

to kneel and sing that verse quietly and then David will lead us in our prayers hymn 71 will sing quietly kneeling sing of Wonderful Thou art, my majesty of pride, How beautiful my earthly seat, in depth of burning heart.

Father, we come before you and seek to know you in a very personal way. We come rejoicing that we have been able to share in the cup and the bread as symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, that we have been bought back.

[21 : 57] We thank you, Lord, for that great gift.