

Deuteronomy 1-3

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Preachers: Matt Coburn, Nick Lauer

[0 : 00] Good morning, again, we want to welcome you.

Glad you are here. Today we are going to finish a series. We've been looking since January at the book of Galatians. And we have finally come to the end for those of you who have been here. It has been a rich book and I hope that as we look at it finally one more time today, you will be reminded of all the rich things that we have seen from it.

And if you were here visiting today, do not be afraid. The richness of even just these last eight verses is worth feeding on today. So if you want to turn with me in your pew Bibles, page 975, we're going to be in Galatians chapter 6.

And we're going to begin by reading the passage together. So Galatians chapter 6, verse 11. See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.

[1 : 21] It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.

For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh.

But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And for all who walk by this rule, peace and mercy be unto them and unto the Israel of God.

From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers.

[2 : 28] Amen. Please pray with me. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Oh, Lord, what a great and merciful thing it is that you have not left us to seek for you on our own.

But God, you have revealed yourself to us. You have given us your word that we may know you.

And Lord, I pray this morning that by your spirit, you would make your word clear to us.

Lord, that you would give our minds understanding, our hearts understanding of you. And of what you have done for us in Christ.

Lord, may you turn our hearts towards you that we might not only understand, but respond in love and worship, devotion. Lord, this is a work that only you can do.

And we pray that you would do it this morning. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. A tale of two seminarians. One entered seminary zealous, passionate to serve God in ministry.

[3 : 39] He threw himself into his classes, reveling in the depths of theological and biblical knowledge that he was taking in. He took a role in his local church, working to start a new ministry there for young professionals.

He was a regular at the missions prayer meetings over lunch every Monday. He was learning to play guitar so he could play at the monthly prayer and praise nights that students gathered together for.

Others respected him for his gifting and his eagerness. And he saw it as a stewardship to serve others. He caught the eye of his professors for his scholarship and his pastor for his ministry work. After all that God had done for him, saving him at the end of high school, calling him into ministry during his intense discipleship in college, he was excited to set his hand to the plow with great hopes of making significant contribution to God's kingdom in the world.

Since early in his Christian life, he had always had a sense that God wanted to do something great through him. And he was eager to get on with it. In fact, he even secretly longed to live like those that he had read about in all those missionary biographies.

[4 : 50] And maybe to have someone write a book about him, too. And down the hall lived another friend. He also came to seminary eager to learn and grow. He participated in the prayer meetings, worked hard in class.

But he was slow to put himself forward to lead, even though he was gifted to do so. His involvement in a local church was teaching children's Sunday school to a group of fourth graders. And daily, he cried out to God about the growing awareness of his sinfulness and his inability to study, to serve, to teach, even to walk with Jesus.

His inability to please God by what he did in his own effort. His life was characterized by a growing sense of how little he had to offer to the ministry. And at moments of brokenness, he wondered how God could ever use someone like him.

He was confident God had called him, but unsure of what it would look like in the future. He knew his weakness, and so he knew how much he needed God. It never crossed his mind that someone would write a book about him.

He was just hoping that God would have mercy on him and find him useful for his kingdom. What is the essential difference between these two men?

[6 : 08] The difference is that the second man understood the gospel, and the first one did not. Now, that may sound like a strong statement, but it's true.

And it's true because I was that first man. I had come to faith, understood that Jesus died for my sins, grew in my Bible knowledge, was committed to God's mission to take the gospel to the whole world.

But though I never would have said it, deep in my heart, I had a sneaking suspicion that God was lucky, fortunate to have me on his team. I was ready to boast about all the great things that I was going to do for God.

And that is why I didn't really understand the gospel. Because the true gospel is not about what we do for God.

It is about what God has done for us. It is such a simple statement, so clear and yet so hard for us to really grasp.

[7 : 17] Most of you are not seminarians, nor is your vocation going to be ministry. So, can you see yourself in those two portraits? Maybe we can help a little bit. Maybe we can think about it together.

Our passage this morning brings in, introduces this language of boasting. You see it in verses 14 and 15. And to start, boasting in our culture almost always has a negative connotation.

It almost always has a sense of exaggeration, of saying more than what is true. And it is often something where when we boast, it is because we are being self-promoting.

Because we are making ourselves look better than we really are. But this is not, in fact, the biblical idea of boasting. This word doesn't actually have all those connotations.

Instead, as John Stott says, to boast is to glory in, to trust in, to revel in, to live for.

[8 : 20] The object of our boast or our glory fills our horizons, engrosses our attention, and absorbs our time and energy. In a word, our glory is our obsession.

Our boasting is the thing that we are obsessed with. And understanding this, what I hope you will see is that I actually believe God has made all of us to boast.

You may recoil at that and think, I don't want to be boastful. But biblically, I think you were made to boast. And the question is not whether you will boast.

The question is, what will you boast in? What will you glory in? What will you live for? What fills the horizons, engrosses our attention, energizes our lives, absorbs our time and energy?

And can you see how easy it is for what we do to become the focus of our lives? We want to raise great kids.

[9 : 32] So we spend time with them. We invest in their energies, in their activities, their schooling, their character. We want to be hardworking employees or students.

And so we work heartily. We spend lots of time engrossed in our work. And even for those of you who may find it's actually not easy for me to do a lot of things for whatever reason.

Maybe you can still see this impulse in you by how hard it is to do so little. How much of a struggle it is for you when you can't do very much.

What we do so easily becomes the thing that we boast in. And this is true in our spiritual lives too, isn't it?

We want to be moral and upright people, so we do the right thing. We want to be diligent in our Bible study, in prayer, in our church attendance, in our serving the poor.

[10:32] However, we want to find a place where we're going to be really good servants at church. And what I want you to see is that none of these things are bad.

It is not bad to do any of these things. It's so human. I see it in my three-year-old. I come home at the end of the day and Eli is standing at the door.

And do you know what he says to me? Daddy, come see what I do. Come see what I do, Daddy. Daddy, watch me do this. It is so much a part of our human nature that we focus on these things. But the question that our passage lays before us, and in fact, I think the whole book of Galatians lays before us, is what do we boast in? If we are always going to boast in something, what are we going to boast in?

Will it be in what we do, or will it be what God has done for us? So look with me in the passage.

[11:38] Let's start in verse 11. Paul is ending this letter, and he makes this statement, see with what large letters I write to you. It seems that Paul picked up the pen after probably dictating this to a guy who had better handwriting than him or something.

He picked up the pen and he said, I want you to hear this from me personally. And he goes on and he makes this contrast. He says, there have been false teachers among you, and I want you to see what they're like, what their life is, what their message is.

And then I want to contrast that with a different way. A way that I believe is the true gospel. So Paul is making this contrast.

And so that's what I want to look at today. I want to look at the contrast of what are the false teachers about, and then what is Paul about? And what does that say about what the true gospel is and what we boast in?

The false teachers, as we've learned before, the false teachers are about circumcision.

Circumcision because it's keeping the law of Moses. Because it's an expression of honoring God and doing the right thing so that God will accept you.

[12:50] You can see it in verse 12. Paul reminds them, these men came in and they compelled you to be circumcised. You see it in verse 13. They wanted to boast about your circumcision.

And it's what we've seen all the way through. Paul has constantly been making this contrast.

Chapter 1, he talks about a false gospel that they've deserted to.

Chapter 2, he fills it in a little bit by contrasting the works of the law. We see it in chapter 5, the works of the flesh. Over and over, Paul has been hinting at, pointing to.

We see it in chapter 5 most clearly when he says, if you want to trust in circumcision, like these men are exhorting you to, you can, but you can have no part of Christ.

The false teachers came in and they said, being a good Christian, being God's people, is doing the right things well enough. And the Galatians were in danger of believing this.

[14:03] And I think we too might be in danger of believing this. Why? Why would we be so attracted to this kind of approach to God?

Well, because I don't know if you're like me, but for me, there are days when I love to have a checklist. I want to know what I need to do today and be able to go through and say, check, I did that. Check, I did that.

Check, I did that. Check, I did that. And at the end of the day, I'm done. I have satisfied my checklist. The standard is clearly set.

I know it's something I can do. And it's what I end up spending my energy achieving. I can do this. I love that about life.

We even do it spiritually, don't we? I went to church, gave my money, read my Bible, helped the poor guy across the street. Whatever it is, whatever the opportunity, we have these checklists in our mind of what does it mean for me?

[15:09] What do I need to do so that I'll be okay as a Christian? And this then seeps into our soul in a way where we start to think, if God can give me a concrete standard of if I can just do these things, I'll be acceptable to God.

It then puts me in control. I have the power to make myself right before God. And not only does it do that, but it gives me an identity. It says, I know that I can be God's follower by doing the right things. Every social group has its rules. Do this, don't do this, and you'll be in with us. Gives us a place to belong. Rules are never printed.

They're always unwritten. But there's a checklist there, too. If you want to belong to this group, you've got to be against hormone-filled meat.

Or whatever it is. If you do these things, you'll be in with us. You'll find your place with us. And so, it seeps into our soul.

[16:30] And so, suddenly, what we do becomes the thing that justifies us. That gives us an identity. And ultimately, Paul says, that's the thing that we boast about.

That's the thing that we live for. That's the thing that we glory in. What I do. And it's so easy to do this.

I do this. I really want to be a good father and a good husband. I really want to be a good pastor. Just this week, as I'm preparing this sermon, I realize how easy it is for me to think that if I do my job well, if I get up early with the kids, if I go play with them when I get home, if I work hard to prepare this sermon, I'm going to be okay.

My checklist can be checked off. But you know, when I buy into that, it pushes me into performance. I want to look better on the outside than I am on the inside.

That's what Paul says about the false teachers, too. He says, they care more about the externals than the internals. In fact, they've become hypocrites. They want to build their boasting on what you're doing, not what they're doing.

[17:54] Performance, self-promotion, hypocrisy are often the results of a gospel about what we do. But today, I proclaim to you that Paul says there is another way.

There is another boast to boast in. There is a better message of good news than boasting in what we can do. Look with me at verses 14 and 15, chapter 6.

I want to read this again. But far be it from me to boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. And as for all who walk up, we'll just stop at 15.

Circumcision, but a new creation. Paul's boasting is what God has done. What God has done for us.

[19:04] He looks to the cross of Christ and the new creation to say, this is what I will boast about. Why does he point to the cross? That sounds like an almost silly question, isn't it?

Because, of course, the cross is central to our thinking as Christians. And we actually wear it all over the place. We put it hanging on a pretty little necklace and put it around our necks. We imprint it on the front cover of our Bible. We have crosses all over the place. And I think because of that, we miss the impact that a first century audience would have had when they hear Paul saying, I will boast in the cross.

Because there is no analogous symbol. I racked my brain this week thinking, is there anything analogous to the cross in the kind of reaction it would elicit from those who hear about it, from those who see it?

And I don't think there's analogous symbol. Because the cross would have brought to mind the shame. Here, feel the weight of this.

[20:16] The cross would have brought to mind the shame that ought to be heaped on a sexual abuser. The cross brings to mind the gruesome violence of the killing fields.

The cross brings to mind the condemnation that we reserve for terrorists and mass murderers. The cross was an ugly, ugly symbol that you would never have wanted to be identified with.

Because if you hung on the cross, all of that shame, gruesome, violent condemnation was yours.

How can Paul boast in this? Oh, friends, it's because it is at the cross that God has done for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Jesus takes the shame of our sin. The shame that we should have had and would have before a holy God apart from Christ.

[21:27] Jesus takes the gruesome death that our sins deserve. The beatings, the crown of thorns, the nails piercing his hands and feet.

Jesus takes the condemnation for our sins, the abuse, the mockery, the anger that our sin would elicit from our neighbors if they knew what we were really like deep in our hearts.

Jesus takes the wrath of God. His anger and hatred against sin. God does this in Jesus at the cross.

Do you remember? Do you remember what Paul has told us in Galatians about how wonderful this is? Turn with me back to chapter 2, verses 16 and 17.

Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

[22 : 38] Skipping down to verse 20. For I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives within me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Look in chapter 3, verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written, cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

So that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles. So that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

This theme has been a rich theme throughout the book of Galatians. And Paul is saying, I will boast in the cross of Christ because it is there that I drink from the well of forgiveness, of God's love shown to me when I didn't deserve it.

It is there that I find freedom from shame and guilt. Freedom from performing and trusting in my own works. Freedom to be obsessed with God.

[23 : 53] There is a warning in chapter 5 that goes with this.

I've mentioned it already but I want to read it again. Chapter 5, verse 2. Look, I, Paul, say to you, if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.

I testify again that every man who accepts circumcision, every man, I testify to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ. You who would have been justified by the law. You have fallen away from grace. Paul is simply reminding us, I boast in the cross because I can't have it both ways.

I can't trust in myself and what I do and trust in Christ. I have to choose which one I will do. And Paul says, oh friends, the cross is so much greater.

[24 : 59] What God has done at the cross is a much greater boast than anything you will ever do. And he's not done because he says, not only at the cross has God done all of this in our justification, but he has made us a new creation.

He says, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything but a new creation. Now some of you are thinking, wait a minute, the whole book has been about Paul saying circumcision is not right.

Don't submit to it. The verse I just read, you can't buy into circumcision. How can Paul say it doesn't matter? Because it matters in what you boast in. These false teachers were saying you must boast in your circumcision.

You must trust in it. It must be the thing that you do to be accepted. And Paul says, when you do that, it is to be condemned. But if you understand what it means to be a new creation, it doesn't matter anymore.

Circumcised, uncircumcised, it doesn't matter. In fact, Paul actually did that. He didn't circumcise Titus in Galatians 2. He thought that Titus would not have to be circumcised for the clarity of the gospel.

[26 : 18] But in Acts 16, Paul circumcises Timothy for the sake of the gospel. Paul had no horse in the race of whether you circumcise or not circumcise.

Because he says, there is a new way. The cross of Christ does a new creating work in us. And what a glorious thing it is.

2 Corinthians 5.17 says, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. Behold, the old is gone. The new has come. We've already read Galatians 2.20. It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

God has made us new as we join with Christ by faith. In chapter 4, verses 4 through 7, Paul says, But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son, born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those who are under the law so that we might receive adoptions as sons.

Adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the spirit of his son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave, but a son. And if a son, an heir through Christ.

[27 : 39] You who are orphaned by your sin have been adopted by your creator and your savior because of Christ. It is like he is making you new by bringing you in to a new family.

Not only is he bringing you into a new family, but he's giving you a new hope. That you will be heirs with Christ. And he's giving you a new dynamic by which you can live your life.

Because he's given you your spirit. His spirit to live inside of you. So that you no longer have to try, try, try, by the effort of your own flesh to be good enough.

But the spirit instead is given as a gift. To enable us in this new identity. To be God's man and God's woman.

Like a caterpillar emerging from a chrysalis. No longer seeks to try to be a really beautiful caterpillar or fly.

[28 : 47] But is made new and is a butterfly and simply spreads their wing to fly. So in Christ, God makes us a new creation.

How well do we get this? I want to read from Tim Keller.

I want you to hear and listen and think. Where do I fit in these dynamics? What's the difference between boasting in what we have done versus boasting in what God has done?

This is what he says. The irreligious don't repent at all. And the religious only repent of sins. But Christians also repent of their righteousness.

Moral and religious people are sorry for their sins. But they see sins as simply the failure to live up to the standards by which they are saving themselves. They may go to Jesus for forgiveness.

[29 : 52] But only as a way to cover the gaps in their project of self-salvation. But a Christian is someone who has adopted a whole new system of approach to God.

They realize that the entire reason for either their irreligion or religion has been essentially the same and essentially wrong. Christians realize that both their sins and their best deeds have all really been ways of avoiding Jesus as Savior.

A Christian says, though I have often failed to obey the law, the deeper problem is why I was ever trying to obey it in the first place. Even my effort to obey it is just a way of seeking to be my own Savior.

In that mindset, even if I obey or ask for forgiveness, I am really resisting the gospel. Setting myself up as a Savior. To get the gospel is to turn from self-justification and rely on Jesus' record for a relationship with God.

Friends, this is what Paul means when he says, Far be it from me that I would boast in anything but the cross of Christ. For what I do, circumcision, uncircumcision, whatever I do, it counts for nothing.

[31 : 16] Only that God, God can do something. God can make us a new creation through the cross of Christ. And it is in this that the gospel calls us to boast.

Keller closes by quoting a hymn. Goes like this. When he from his lofty throne stooped to do and die, everything was fully done.

Hearken to his cry. Weary, working, burdened one, wherefore toil you so? Cease all your doing. All was done long, long ago. Till to Jesus' work you cling by a simple faith. Doing is a deadly thing. Doing ends in death. Cast your deadly doing down. Down at Jesus' feet. Stand in him.

[32 : 17] In him alone. Gloriously complete. Friends, to cast your deadly doing down is to go back to the very beginning of the gospel.

It is to repent of anything that we think we have to recommend us to God. And it is to, by faith, throw ourselves onto the mercy of God by trusting in what he has done in Jesus Christ for us.

We are to repent of not only our deepest, darkest sins, but our most righteous deeds.

And we are to cling to, run to, boast in Christ and what God has done for me.

Oh, may the goodness of Christ fill the horizons of our lives. May it be the thing that we trust in and glory in. That the work of Christ be our magnificent obsession.

[33 : 27] This is the true gospel. This is the book of Galatians. This is God's word for us.

Let's pray. Oh, Lord, we thank you that you have done for us what we could not do for ourselves.

And, Lord, we confess how easily we slip into wanting to trust in ourselves. And yet, God, you, you have done it all.

Lord, I ask for, by your grace and by your spirit this morning, Lord, show us how and where we today may be trusting in what we do.

And, Lord, renew in us, Lord, our hope and trust in what you have done for us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

[34 : 37] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.