

A Big Boast in Big Letters

Galatians 6:14

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, January 22, 2017

Well, here we are, all together at last. You are all sitting there, and I am standing up here. And before we begin, I just want to say, “thank you” for waiting on me. As you know, we adopted our second son back in August, and we had to wait to get his birth certificate and Social Security Number before we came here. You waited on all of that and I just want to say, “thank you.” Your patience allowed us to bring Jason home, and move to Chilliwack all within a few months and we are so, so grateful.

As we begin this important day together, I think we need to ask the question: what do we do now? Where do we go from here? Okay...we are all together now. We are a church. We have a people. We have a pastor. We have By-Laws, a Constitution, a church name, a place to meet, all the ingredients for a church. But, what do we do with them? Let me say it another way: now that the ball is rolling, what do we do with the ball? Now that the wheels are turning, where do we steer them? Where do we drive the car?

To answer that, I have another question for you - a very practical one. If you had an MP3 recorder hung around your neck, and if it went to work with you, and if it went to the store with you; if it accompanied you on your errands and at the house with your family; on the farm, at the office, at school, in the nursery, what would it say about you? What would it reveal about your priorities when we hit the “play” button?

Can I take a guess at what that recorder would reveal about some of you? Can I take a guess at what some of you prioritize? For some of you, it would reveal that you boast in your kids...you boast in your kids. Not a bad thing to do. There are certainly worse things to boast in than that. But, some of you spend most of your time talking about your children or your grandchildren and their achievements, their trophies, their good grades, and their after-school activities. You love to tell people how smart your kids are, and how athletic your kids are, and how good looking your kids are, because after all...they are your kids! And you love to post pictures of them on Facebook and see how many likes you get. I am guilty of that. My son Jason just sat up for the first time this week, and you’ve got to put it on Facebook. You have to tell the world. But in short, you boast in your kids, you boast in your family. That is what the MP3 recorder would tell us about you.

Let me take another guess at what the recorder might reveal. For some of you, it might reveal that you boast in your job. You boast in what you do for work. You spend all your time talking about your boss, or your latest promotion, or the challenges you face at your company. You love to tell people how difficult you have it at work or how easy you have it at work; how much money you make or when you are getting time off, or when your next vacation is. But in short, you boast in your job. You boast in what you do for a living. That is what the recorder would reveal.

Can I take one more stab at what that recorder might reveal? Can I take one more try at this? If

we put a tape recorder around your neck and had it record everything you said and then hit play...it would reveal that you boast in your hobbies. You boast in your hobbies.

You love to talk about what you do for fun. You talk constantly about your favourite TV show, or your favourite movie, or your recent hunting trip. Just about every time you get into a conversation, you go back to how your team is doing and how many games you watched and who you are going to get in next year's draft. You are like the man I saw who was buried with a tombstone that said, "St. Louis Cardinals" on it. Or the relative I have that always talks about NASCAR during people's funerals. Every time I see him when a loved one dies, he wants to talk to me about a race that he just went to. In short, you boast in your hobbies. You boast in what you do with your free time.

Now let me just say that there is nothing wrong with talking about your family. You should be proud of your family. You should talk about them. They are wonderful, and the world needs to know that and Facebook needs to hear about it. There is nothing wrong with talking about work. We should take delight in our work as Solomon says in Ecclesiastes. And there is nothing wrong with talking about your hobbies. You should enjoy a little R&R. That's all well and good. But, there is something wrong. There is something terribly wrong with calling yourself a Christian and never, ever boasting in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Galatians.

The book of Galatians has been called the "Crucifixion Epistle" because the word "cross" is mentioned 7 times in the book. You see it over and over again as you read the letter. The cross is mentioned in 2:20. We see it again in 3:1. It is found in 5:11, 5:24, 6:12, and it is mentioned in the verse that I want to talk to you about this morning, Galatians 6:14. Over and over and over again in his letter, Paul points the Galatians back to the cross. It is almost as if their heads were being turned away to other things. So Paul grabs them by the chin and he points them back to the cross. And just to show you how he does this, if you look up a few verses with me to Galatians 6:11, it says,

11 See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand. 12 Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. 13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh. 14 But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Paul usually dictated his letters to a scribe and signed the end in his own handwriting. We do the same thing today, because it proves that it's from us. Even if we type a letter, we always sign it at the end. Paul does that here, and he gives the Galatians something like an extended signature. He mentions his own handwriting in verse 11 and then goes on to write 7 more verses, all the way to verse 18. It's almost as if he started signing and he couldn't stop. He just kept going, but he starts it off by saying, "See with what large letters I am writing to you..."

Writing materials were very expensive in the First Century, so no one wrote in large letters. It was very unusual. In fact, scribes often wrote in small letters with no space in between them. They would write from the top of a letter down to the bottom, and on the front and the back to save space. But here Paul says, "See with what large letters I am writing to you." In other words, while the rest of this letter was written in the small cramped handwriting of a scribe, Paul writes these verses in big letters - real big letters for all to see. You could look at this as if Paul is writing it in capital letters to get their attention. He was writing it in bold, and it seems like he is doing it to tell the Galatians, "Wake up!", "Pay attention!", "Listen up Galatians! I am only going to say this one more time!" And, what does he say? That's what I want to talk to you about this morning.

If you are taking notes this morning, in Galatians 6:14, we are going to see *A Big Boast in Big Letters*. That is the title of our sermon this morning, *A Big Boast in Big Letters*. While many of us boast in our children and our jobs and our hobbies, Paul tells us that we need to boast in something else entirely. He tells us that our church needs to boast in something else entirely. When we are together or when we are out in the community, when people say, "Tell me about Grace Fellowship Chilliwack. I hear that you started a church. I hear that you called a new pastor. I hear that you have By-Laws now and a Constitution; a place to meet and all that stuff." When they say all of that to us, we need to focus on something else entirely. And what is it? What is the one thing we need to boast in?

Paul tells us in 5 phrases, and the first phrase is, "But." "But." If you look in verse 14, Paul starts verse 14 with the word, "but" to pit it against everything he has said so far. If you would read verse 12 with me. After talking about his large handwriting, Paul describes the false teachers in Galatia this way: "Those who desire to make a good showing in the flesh try to compel you to be circumcised, simply so that they will not be persecuted for the cross of Christ."

In the Roman world of the First Century, Judaism was a tolerated religion. A *religio licita*, because the Romans tolerated the Jews. They left them alone, and they left the Christians alone as long as they were considered Jewish. As long as Christianity fell within the umbrella of Judaism, it was safe. It was well protected. But, the second that Christianity began to stand out...the moment that it began to separate itself from that, the tolerance would end and the persecution would begin. Paul refers to that here in verse 12 to say that certain people in the church, certain false teachers, are trying to get you to be circumcised so they won't be persecuted. They want to make you Jewish so they won't be attacked. They want you to change so they will be safe. In other words, they said, "If you really want to be godly, you need to look like us. If you really want to be a Christian, you need to do what we do." And Paul takes this a step further in verse 13: "13 For those who are circumcised do not even keep the Law themselves, but they desire to have you circumcised so that they may boast in your flesh."

In other words, the false teachers want you to be circumcised so they can brag about it. That's their whole motive in doing this. They want you to be circumcised so they will look better...so they will be praised. It's not about you, it's all about them. It's not about your benefit, it is about theirs. They desire to have you circumcised so they may boast in your flesh.

I have been a Christian for some time now, and I can't tell you how many times I have heard someone say, "If you really want to be godly, then you need to do *this*. If you really want to be a Christian, then you need to do such & such." You hear it time and time again in the church. "Sure you can read your Bible and pray and love the saints, but, that's not enough. You need to wear a WWJD bracelet too..."

Anybody remember those things? Did they ever make their way into Canada? When I was in high school, everyone wore a WWJD bracelet to school. It was a little red and white bracelet that said, "WWJD" - "What Would Jesus Do." That's how you witnessed. That was how you knew who the real Christians were. They wore that bracelet. "If you really want to be godly...then you need to eat organic food." That sounds a little more B.C.ish, doesn't it? You can't eat processed food and be a Christian. You have to eat organic. You have to take care of yourself, and you have to do yoga. When I first visited Vancouver, the guy at the Rental Car place said that everyone in British Columbia has sushi in one hand, coffee in the other...and they're doing yoga.

So, you have to do that to please the Lord. And, you have to wear a coat and tie to church, and you can't have long hair if you are a guy or wear pants if you are a girl. And, you have to read Christian books and listen to Christian music, and you have to worship with piano and organs. You can't play the guitar.

Or, there is the flip side to all of this. And that is, if you are a real Christian, you have to do the opposite of all these things. You have to be culturally relevant. You have to listen to as much secular music as possible and read secular books. You can't wear a coat and tie, you have to wear jeans and a t-shirt. You have to have long hair and a tattoo, and you have to blog about it. Always blogging about it. You have to tell the world how much of a rebel you are.

Now I hope I didn't offend everybody in the room just now. That wasn't my intention in saying that. I don't want to get you all mad at me in my first sermon! But, I do want to point out that none of that stuff saves you. Do you see that? Grace Fellowship Church...Do you see that? None of that stuff gets you into heaven. You can wear a coat and tie and go to hell. Does that make sense? You can wear jeans and a t-shirt and go to hell. You can listen to Christian music and you can read Christian books. You can worship to piano and organs and guitars and drums, and be lost because...it's all external! It's all on the outside, not the inside of you. It all focuses on the actions, but not the heart. So, you shouldn't boast in it. That's what Paul is saying in Galatians 6.

The false teachers were saying that in order to be saved, you had to change the outside. You had to look differently. You had to act differently. Don't worry about your soul...don't worry about your inner man, what's important is your flesh. What's important is your body. And Paul says that is a lie. You can't just do a bunch of stuff and go to heaven. It doesn't work that way. You can't just wash the outside of the cup, you have to wash the inside too. You have to have a brand new heart.

And that leads us to the next phrase that we are going to look at this morning. The first phrase is in verse 14, "But." The false teachers want you to get circumcised so they can brag about it, "But."

The second phrase is in verse 14 (and I will go through this one pretty quickly) is, “may it never be that I would boast.” That’s the next phrase. If you read on in verse 14 Paul writes, “But it may never be that I would boast...”.

Here Paul pits himself against the False Teachers. He says that, whereas the False Teachers want to brag about circumcision, I want to boast about something else. Something else entirely. And he says this with the Greek phrase *me genoito*, “May it never be!” The King James Version has “God forbid!” Other versions have, “Absolutely not!” This was like putting it in bold and underlining it. It was like putting in capital, capital letters. “It is impossible to me,” Paul says, “to think of boasting in anything but this one thing. God forbid!” he says. The word “boast” in Greek meant “to praise” or “to honor” something. Our English word carries the idea of pride, but that wasn’t the idea here. It meant to hold something in high esteem. To cherish it. Paul wanted to cherish one thing and...what was it?

That leads to our next phrase. Read on in Galatians 6:14: “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Paul wanted to boast in the cross. He wanted to cherish, and adore, and lift up the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is staggering to think about. It is hard for us to wrap our minds around how repulsive the cross was to a First Century audience. We have crosses on our buildings and crosses around our necks. We sing songs about the cross and paint pictures about it, but they didn’t do that back then.

If people today were crucified on crosses, we wouldn’t do that either. Because in Paul’s day, crucifixion was about the worst possible way a man could die. There were quicker ways to die, and there were more popular ways to die. But crucifixion was the worst way to die, because it was the longest. It took a long time to crucify a man. If you remember, Jesus’ crucifixion took several hours, which shocked Pontius Pilate. Most crucifixions took days to finish. Some took as long as a week. I won’t go into the details, but when people were crucified, they were usually made to carry the horizontal beams of the cross through the streets of the city, to humiliate them and to embarrass them. And as they passed by, they had a sign attached to them which told what you did, and people would throw rotten vegetables or manure at you to taunt you and humiliate you further.

Before you were crucified, they would also strip you of your clothes and crucify you naked. We see pictures of people being crucified with clothes on, but that is just our way of making it acceptable. They were crucified nude back then, and their arms and legs were pinned down so they couldn’t do anything to help themselves. To breathe, you had to push up on your legs because the weight of your body put your lungs at an odd angle. So, once you were on the cross, you would basically hang there until you suffocated to death - until you became too weak to live. So, it could take days to die. And once you were dead, it wasn’t over because they would leave your body up there to rot and to get eaten by vultures and ants. It was absolutely horrible.

In fact, it was so bad that the Roman author Cicero in the First Century B.C., writing about a hundred years before Paul, said, “To bind a Roman citizen is a crime, to flog him an abomination, to kill him is an act of murder, to crucify him is – what? There is no fitting word that can possibly describe so horrible a deed.” He goes on to say, “The very word ‘cross’ should

be removed not only from the person of a Roman citizen but from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears. Indeed, the mere mention of it is unworthy of a Roman Citizen and a free man.”

Cicero, writing around the same time as Paul, said that crucifixion was too awful to talk about. “You shouldn’t even mention it,” he said. The pain was so bad that a word was created in Latin to describe it. This word: “excruciating.” Has anyone ever had excruciating pain before? Pain that was too terrible for words? That word comes from this one, “ex” – out of, “cruciating” – the cross. Pain that could only come from the cross.

It might also be worth mentioning that the oldest surviving painting that we have of a cross comes from a house in Rome. And on it, you see the picture of a man being crucified with the head of a donkey. And beneath him is another man with his hands lifted up in worship and the words, “Alexamanos Worships His God.” The idea of worshipping a crucified man was so stupid to the ancients that they compared it to worshipping a donkey. They compared it to worshipping a farm animal. So, you can see why Paul’s statement would have shocked the Galatians. They knew what it meant to be crucified. They had seen crucifixion before. Some of them might have had friends and relatives who were crucified. And yet, Paul says that he wants to boast in the cross. Cicero wouldn’t speak of it, the Romans made fun of it, but...Paul wanted to boast in it. Why? What could possibly make a man want to do this? Why would a sane man like Paul boast in the cross?

That leads us to our next phrase, which is this: “...through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” Read all of verse 14 with me:

But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Here is why Paul boasted in the cross. Here is the climax to this verse. Paul boasted in the cross because it got rid of his sin. He cherished it because it made him right with God. “World” in this verse is another way of saying, “the worldly system,” or “the system under Satan.” It is another way of saying “evil.”

At the cross, Jesus died so that Paul could be freed from the power of evil. Physically speaking, crucifixion was the best way to match the hatred that God had for sin. Just as the Romans had perfected a shameful, humiliating, degrading form of torture, so God the Father used a shameful, humiliating, degrading form of torture to crush His Son for us, to forgive us, to punish our sins on Him, to punish “the world” on Him, so to speak. That’s why Paul boasted in the cross. That’s why he kept talking about it.

If you think about it, Paul was a righteous man before he became a Christian. He had a lot to boast in. He kept the Law, he followed the Ten Commandments, he was circumcised, he was a Pharisee. He was everything the false teachers wanted the Galatians to be, but it meant nothing to him because it couldn’t save him. It meant nothing to him, because it couldn’t make him right with God. It might make him look better, but it couldn’t make him be better. Only the cross could do that. Only the cross could change him from the inside out.

And, here is how this applies to us. Here is what it means for you and me. We often look at the Christian life as if “here is an unbeliever.” (Walk to one side of the stage). And “Here, is a believer.” (Walk to other side of the stage). But that is not true. We should look at the Christian life as if here is an unbeliever (scoot over to the right), and here is a believer (scoot over to the left). And the only thing that separates them is the cross (point to the middle).

If I could put an MP3 recorder inside your head (not just around your neck, but inside your head), you would have to admit that you are the most evil person on the planet. If that thing followed you around to school, and to work, and to the gym, and it recorded every thought, and every image, and every fantasy, you would have to admit that the evil is inside of you. The world is inside of you. The problem is not with your clothes, or your music, or your hair. The problem is with your heart. The only difference between you and the most evil person on death row is that he did everything you thought about. He lived out your fantasies.

Therefore, the only hope that you have is the cross, and the only hope that he has is the cross. It is all about the cross. We forget that...don't we? We like to think we are better than that. I think that's the reason we focus on clothes, and hair, and music so much. Because we forget what the real problem is. We forget how evil we are. It is because of this that the Evangelist, D.L. Moody, said, “No one should ever preach about Hell without a tear in his eye.” Why did he say that? Because you deserve to go there. We all deserve to go there. That should be our final destination. That is why the Puritan preacher, Thomas Watson, said, “The torments of Hell last forever and this word ‘forever’ breaks my heart.” Why did it break his heart? Because he was headed there. Because he should have gone there.

My friends, how could you ever keep from boasting in the cross, when the cross has kept you out of hell? How could you ever talk about music, and clothes, and yoga and leave this out? In Paul's words, “How could you ever talk about circumcision and leave this out?” The cross is what saved you, not circumcision. The cross lifted you out of hell, not music, or clothes, or yoga. So, boast in the cross. Brag about the cross. Lift high, and exalt, the cross.

And that brings us to a final phrase to this big boast, and we will close with this one.

Galatians 6:15

For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

Scholars believe that this verse summarizes everything Paul has said so far in the book of Galatians, and I tend to agree with them. As Paul is writing verse 15 in big letters for all to see, he gives one final warning to the Galatians. And that final warning is this, the outside doesn't matter. It is the inside that counts. For one more time, Paul takes the Galatians by the chin and he points them in the right direction. It doesn't matter what you do with your body. It matters what you do with your soul. It doesn't matter what you eat, or drink, or wear. It matters that you are a new creation.

As Charles Spurgeon said, “The Scripture does not say, ‘Ye must be improved,’ but ye must be born again.” The Bible does not say that you need to whitewash the tomb, it says that you need

to clear it out. You need to raise the dead. You can get an unbeliever to listen to Christian music and he will still be an unbeliever. Amen? Can I get an “amen”? You can get an unbeliever to homeschool his kids and they will still be unbelievers, if that is all that he does. Homeschooling doesn't save you. Neither does public schooling or Christian schooling. It's only the cross. You can get him to stop going to the movies. You can get him to stop drinking alcohol. You can get him to stop wearing jewelry, or her to stop wearing makeup and they will still be lost because it doesn't deal with the problem. It doesn't deal with the issue.

The problem is not that they have a bad wardrobe, the problem is they have a bad heart. The issue is not that they have a bad taste in music, the issue is that they have a bad soul, and the only thing that can take care of that is the cross. They are messed up on the inside and the only thing that can clean up that mess is the cross. They are evil on the inside and the only thing that can deal with that evil is the cross.

So, my friends, at the beginning of our time together, at the start of our new church family, let me take you by the chin and point you in the right direction. What are you boasting in?

As we keep the ball rolling, as we keep the wheels turning, what are you going to spend all your time talking about? The cross? Or something else? Jesus Christ, and His work at Calvary? Or all those things that I mentioned before?

Grace Fellowship Church, Jesus Christ has been crucified so that you could be made right with God. Listen to me. Talk about your families, I know that you love them and you want everyone to know how wonderful they are. There is no shame in that. That's a good thing. Keep doing it. Keep posting those pictures on Facebook. And talk about your jobs, and your hobbies. Enjoy them. Take great delight in them, but boast in the cross. Brag about the cross. Tell everyone about the cross. The cross is the only hope that we have of seeing Heaven. At the cross, Jesus died so we wouldn't have to. And afterwards, He rose so that we could rise in Him. May we make that the focus of all that we do here at Grace Fellowship Chilliwack.

I look forward to being your pastor. It is such an honor to be standing here today, but let me stand here with these words fixed firmly in our minds: “But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

Let's pray.