

It's Time to Boast and Brag

Sermon based on 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

A friend of Cassius Clay, better known as Muhammad Ali, was tired of hearing the famed boxer boast about his physical prowess. His constant claiming "I am the best!" was wearing him thin. So to humble the proud boxer, his friend asked him how he did at golf. Ali replied, "I'm the best. I just haven't played yet."

Does it seem to you that some NFL players spend more time practicing their end zone dance or maybe even their trash talk than they do with their football game? Do you know a guy at work that just loves to talk about himself? Why do you think that is? The answer is pride. And we all have it. We all love to hear a word of praise for a job well done. We all love to talk about ourselves.

And the Corinthians had a lot of pride too. They loved to boast. They would boast of their knowledge, of their power, of their nobility, of all the great things they had done, and how wise they were to align themselves with the right leader.

But Paul reminds them that really didn't have much to boast about. They weren't that great. In fact, they had nothing to boast about before God. Paul recognized that this pride was really the opposite of faith. They forgot how much they needed Christ. So Paul wrote them to humble them and lead them to trust in God again; to remind them that though they were nothing, God in his grace made them everything.

And we in our pride need to hear that message too. Paul tells us that it *is* time to boast and to brag. But we shouldn't boast in our sinful selves, but rather boast in our gracious God. Listen once more to Paul's humbling words of God's grace as they're recorded for us in 1 Corinthians 1:26-31...

²⁶Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. ²⁸He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, ²⁹so that no one may boast before him. ³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. ³¹Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."

If the Corinthians thought they were pretty great, Paul knew how to remind them of what they once had been. He writes, "***²⁶Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.***" In a sense Paul says to them, "If God wanted the wise and powerful, then why in the world did he call you?" Very few of the Corinthian Christians were statesmen or nobles. Few had great wealth or a great amount of influence. Not many were scholars in any sense of the word. In fact, most people thought of these Christians as pretty dumb.

Not long after Paul wrote these words, a man stood before a wall in Rome to draw some graffiti. He wrote a simple sentence, "Alexamenos worships his god," and illustrated it with a picture. On the left is Alexamenos standing with his hand upraised to praise his god. On the right is a figure stretched out on a cross. But in the drawing the figure stretched out on the cross doesn't have the head of a man but the head of a donkey. With this drawing, the graffiti artist showed what he thought of Alexamenos and those who worship Christ. You might as well worship a donkey as believe in a crucified Jesus as your Savior!

The Corinthian believers weren't thought of too highly by society. By the world's standards they were fools. Sound bad? Worried these Corinthians might have a low self-esteem? Well, the truth is it wasn't

low enough. In fact, the Corinthians self-esteem couldn't get too low, because not only did they have nothing to boast about before others, but these Corinthians had even less to boast about before God. What did God think of them? Paul tells us in verse 27...

27 But God chose the foolish things of the world... God chose the weak things of the world... He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not... Even though the Corinthians boasted as if it was to their credit that they were saved, Paul reminds them that they were nothing. They had no reason to boast in themselves. On their own, they were completely sinful and corrupt. There was nothing good in these Corinthians that could win God's favor or cause him to love them.

And even if they were the wisest scholars on the face of the earth, their wisdom could never figure out how to save themselves from hell. Even if they were the most powerful rulers, their army could never defeat God in his wrath. They were doomed to hell because far from being of a noble birth, they were born completely corrupted by sin. On their own, they were nothing. They certainly couldn't boast before God. No one could. And Paul reminded them of that fact. He wanted them to stop their foolish boasting and bragging in themselves, to see that they could never rely on themselves, and to rely on God and to boast of his grace instead.

And are things much different today? Not really. How many movie stars put their trust in Christ for their salvation? How many politicians or famous musicians? How many college professors? How many wealthy, powerful, or wise put their trust in him? Paul's words still ring true today, don't they? By the world's standards not many Christians are wise, not many are influential, not many are of noble birth.

And Christians today are still thought to be fools who might as well worship a donkey. Do you really believe that the entire Bible is true? Do you really believe a book written thousands of years ago could be without errors? Do really believe that Jesus could do miracles? Do you really think that by believing what that book says, you'll have eternal life? How ridiculous!

And what's worse, today we still have the same sinful pride as those Corinthians. At times we think we're pretty smart. We think if we only work hard at it, we can make God love us by our sincere intentions. We think that we're pretty good people after all. But God shows us that we're nothing; not just in the eyes of the world, but in his eyes.

He tells us that we are born filthy in sin, that even our most righteous acts are like filthy rags, that we can never live up to his standard of perfection, that we deserve hell for our sins, and that no matter how smart or powerful we are, we can never save ourselves from his wrath.

Dwight Moody, once a prominent preacher and author, once said, "It is well that man cannot save himself; for if a man could only work his way to heaven, you would never hear the last of it. Why, if a man happens to get a little ahead of his fellows and scrapes a few thousand dollars together, you'll hear him boast of being a self-made man. I've heard so much of this sort of talk that I am sick and tired of the whole business; and I am glad that through all eternity in heaven we will never hear anyone bragging of how he worked his way to get there."

It's true that on our own, we are hopelessly trapped in our sin. We have nothing to boast about before God. So we repent of our pride and recognizing that we can never be saved by anything we do, we trust entirely in his grace...

Though the Corinthians were once nothing in themselves, though they had nothing to boast about, now everything was different. Though God saw them as nothings he still loved them. And he took action. Paul reminded the Corinthians in verse 30, *"30 It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus..."* God chose them, not because of anything they did, but entirely by his grace. And he sent his only Son to turn

everything upside down! He says, ***“³⁰It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.”***

In Christ, that is by faith in him, their status changed. They were no longer foolish, but had more wisdom than the wisest of scholars because they knew of God's grace in Christ who had become their righteousness. When Christ died on the cross, he paid for their every sin and gave them his perfect righteousness. They were declared to be sinless by God. Christ became their holiness, their sanctification. They were set apart to live holy lives of service to God in grateful appreciation for saving them when they were nothing. And Christ became their redemption. He bought them out of hell with his blood and would soon complete their redemption when he took them home to the glories of heaven.

What wisdom was theirs! They knew the secret to eternal life! What power! They could cheat death itself! What nobility! They were the sons and daughters of God! ***“³¹Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” Now, they could boast.*** They could boast in their new status and tell everyone of God's amazing love for them! They could boast in the middle of persecution and ridicule, “I don't care what you think. God loves me so much! Just look at what he did for me!”

And now we too can boast! We too, like those Corinthians have had a wonderful change of status. Everything has been turned upside down for us too! Not because of ourselves, but because of God's grace. Though we deserve to be damned, though we deserve to be in hell, God interfered. He sent his Son to be our righteousness! We have been declared to be without sin by his death on the cross in our place. Our sinful pride has been removed as far as the East is from the West! He has become our holiness! We are perfect saints who live to serve God in love! And he will be our redemption when he comes on the Last Day to take us to eternal glory!

Though we were once nothing, now, in Christ, we have everything! Though once we were foolish, now we are wise. We know the truth of God's Word which makes us wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:15) Though once we were weak, now we are strong. We can do everything through Christ who gives us strength. (Philippians 4:13) Though once we were lowly, in our baptism we have `been born again as the most noble sons and daughters of God!

Brothers and sisters *in Christ*, it's time to boast and brag, so brag away! But don't boast in *your* wisdom, *your* strength, or *your* riches, because on your own, you're nothing. Instead, boast in the Lord! Boast that by his grace, he has given you Christ, your righteousness, your holiness, your redemption. Amen.