

Galatians 6:14

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 16 September 2007

Preacher: W.D. Graham

[0 : 00] I'd like us to look together now at the passage we've read in Galatians, Paul's letter to Galatians, in chapter 6, and to look there particularly at verse number 14.

Galatians, chapter 6, at verse 14, on page 1172, where we read, May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world. The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Those of you who are familiar with J.R.R. Tolkien's books, *The Lord of the Rings*, will be familiar with the expression, the fellowship of the ring. Referring to those who were caught up in the great saga of keeping the ring out of evil hands. But today I want to centre our thoughts around something rather different and refer to another fellowship.

[1 : 48] What we might call the fellowship of the cross. The fellowship of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To the writer of this text, the Apostle Paul, the cross of Jesus Christ was, it might seem very strange to us, but it was, strangely, an object of boasting.

Something to take pride in. Something to be pleased about, even. It sounds rather odd.

Yet, when we look closely at what Paul means by the words that we have here in our text, when we put them into the context of the whole book that he wrote to the Galatian Christians, we come to see that here, around the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the very heart of the Christian faith.

And I want us to, so to speak, gather there for a little while this morning. One of the problems Paul had in dealing with the situation of the Galatian Christians was their pride.

[3 : 39] They had become very boastful people. They took their religion very seriously. They were proud of it.

They were Christians. Indeed, they called themselves Christians Plus. And it was the Plus, the Add-ons, as it were, that had become very important to them.

And the Add-ons to their Christian faith were the keeping of the old Jewish rituals, very especially the rite of circumcision that Paul mentions in this very chapter.

And they were proud of their achievements. Boasting was very much in vogue among them.

And Paul was horrified by it. Boasting about ourselves, or about our achievements, about what we offer to God, is the very antithesis of Christianity.

[5 : 19] And that is what prompted Paul to say to these, to write to these people, and to say, may I never boast, except, in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

You see, if we are caught up with ourselves, with our own goodness, with our own religious achievements, then we have no eyes centered on the Lord, on what God has done for us.

There's no room in our hearts to glory in what Christ has done for us. we become self-righteous, indeed, ungodly people.

And that's what Paul wants us today to guard against. He says, you've got plenty to boast about.

Indeed, you have something in which to glory. he says here. Something that should absorb all your devotion and your attention.

[7 : 06] And that's something which he tells us also in 1 Corinthians in chapter 1 and in verse 23. Was to some people a stumbling block, to other people it seemed like foolishness, absolutely scandalous the words could refer to.

And that something, says Paul, is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. He uses the full divine title for Jesus here to emphasize the importance of what he's saying.

And Christian people form a fellowship of the cross because they, if they're in a right mind, they join with Paul and they view the cross in an entirely different light from other people.

So let's look at what Paul means by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is, in the first instance, a symbol of our Lord's humiliation.

humiliation. Our Lord's humiliation. In Paul's letter to the Philippians in chapter two, in a very well-known and wonderful passage about the person of Jesus Christ, we read there that Christ, although he was in the very nature God, that is, he was truly, truly divine.

[9 : 17] God in the flesh. He humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross, which was the epitome of scandal.

we become so used to the words. They may fail to make an impact on us, the impact that they should.

We should be horrified when we think of crucifying the Lord of glory, as Jesus is called in Acts. And the people who first read the words of Paul, the very physical grotesqueness of the death, the depths of humiliation implied by crucifixion, it would have horrified them.

It was a humiliation indeed, for the Lord of glory to become a man, even the perfect man that he was, but for him to become an accursed man, hung on a tree of shame, shunned by the Father, abused terribly by evil men, bearing shame and scoffing rude, as the hymn writer puts it, that was humiliation beyond our understanding.

[11 : 10] In the first congregation of which I was a minister in the church, I had an elderly gentleman who was a Jew, and he was converted to Christ as a young man about 19 years, and when he told his mother, who was a widow at the time, she threw him out of the house and she put a notice in the newspaper, my son Julius is dead, mishummit, and a cursed one.

Jesus was thrown out of society and hung on a tree, and a cursed one.

And our larger catechism, when speaking of Christ's humiliation in his death, puts it in this way, scorned and rejected by the world, condemned by Pilate, and tormented by his persecutors, having also conflicted with the terrors of death, and the powers of darkness, felt and borne the weight of God's wrath, he laid down his life.

Why? As an offering for sin. And so, friends, if we are converted people today, we are those who are identified with Christ, identified with him in his death, we're part of the fellowship of the cross, and we can only marvel, not merely at such a humiliation of the Lord of glory, but that it was for us that he endured it all.

No wonder Paul's heart was full to bursting and with adoration, and with boasting in Christ and in the cross.

[13 : 47] That symbol of our Lord's humiliation was for us and our salvation.

salvation. And that is why in the second place we can see here that the cross is absolutely central to the Christian faith.

Two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke, tell us and do so very beautifully about the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But all four of the Gospels concentrate very fully on the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, making, as the late James Montgomery Boyce puts it, making Calvary and not Bethlehem the centre of Christianity.

the crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down that led the Son of God to the cross of Calvary.

[15 : 13] And we do not understand the birth of Jesus till we see it in that context. the cross is central to our understanding of what the Christian faith is because it brings us face to face with the reality and the magnitude and also the horror of human sin, your sin and my sin.

it's at the cross we get the explanation of everything Christian. It is there indeed that we find the gospel.

Amidst all the horror and the humiliation of Christ at Calvary there is the most amazing revelation of the very heart of God.

it's there that we find the wonder of God's saving grace. Upon that cross, says the hymn writer, mine, I at times can see the very dying form of one who suffered there for me.

And from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess the wonders of redeeming love and my own worthlessness.

[16 : 52] us. There's no salvation for sinners except they come by way of the cross.

It is central to the Christian faith because it's the means by which God in Jesus Christ brings redemption in all its everlasting fullness to all who come to receive his grace.

And that is why the cross is also and this is the third point I would make about it at this time the cross is the symbol of the amazing love of God.

The letter of Paul to the Galatians is full of references to the cross because it is as we've said the very antithesis of human pride and boasting in anything that we might imagine we could do to gain justification with God.

The cross reminds us of our sin and the terrible thing it is. But it shows us also in a way that just filled Paul's heart to overflowing it shows us the amazing love of God.

[18 : 37] In chapter 2 and verse 20 of this book Paul says I have been crucified with Christ everything that I am he's saying to us I just nail to that cross because it's worthless and sin ridden.

And then he goes on to say when he's speaking about the cross it's the cross of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

It is a love story from first to last. Jesus voluntarily gave himself.

Jesus voluntarily gave himself for me. Jesus voluntarily gave himself for me and therefore we can say he bore all the penalty of all the sin and he did it all because he loved me.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but should have everlasting life.

[20 : 10] God's immeasurable love. B.B. Warfield the American theologian has a very beautiful sermon on that text John 3 and 16 and he finishes that sermon in this way.

When the apostle uses the word world the point of its employment is not to suggest that the world is so big that it takes a great deal of love to embrace it at all but that the world is so bad that it takes a great kind of love to love it at all and much more to love it as God has loved it when he gave his son for it.

It is the vision of the consummated purpose of the immeasurable love of God.

have you been to the cross to experience that saving love?

What makes you boast today? Will you not join Paul at the cross for salvation if you have not found it already?

[22 : 05] Will you not join Paul if you have found salvation in Christ already and rejoice in you for all that he has done for all that Christ has done for us at the cross?

God willing this evening I hope to look at some other aspects of the cross of Christ but I would finish looking at it just now with a plea to any who have not yet come to Christ to meet him there and he promises that when you meet him at the cross the burden of your sin will roll away and you will be free in the grace and mercy and forgiveness of God in Christ Amen shall we pray our blessed Lord we do thank you indeed for the saving work of Jesus we thank you

Lord for the way in which that has been made known to us in the gospel and we thank you today for the wonder that that gospel has still its ancient power and that sinners are still received at the cross of Christ and when in confession and seeking mercy they come we know that through the blood of Christ our sins are washed away and we are secured for time and eternity through the saving grace of your love in Jesus may that be the experience of every one of us here today O Lord for your name's sake Amen