

Where Is Your Boast?

Text	Jeremiah 9:23-24
Readings	Jeremiah 8:4-12, 9:10-24; 1 Corinthians 1:10-2:5
Theme	People are not to boast in their own achievements but rather in the Lord.
Purpose	To discourage trust in our own resources and direct us to know the Lord and his love, justice and righteousness.

We all have things we are proud of.

Maybe you take special pride in something you have made – a piece of furniture, a dress you have sewn, a cross-stitch you did.

Or maybe you take pride in something you can do well – play the piano, manage your farm or business, or success in your sport.

Or maybe you are proud of a particular achievement – you came first in maths, you received special recognition at your workplace, you were given a notable award.

There is nothing wrong with taking some pride in any of these things as long as we do not *become proud*. You see, you could take that pride too far and you could begin to rely on what you have done or achieved; you could begin to trust in that achievement or that ability.

You could begin to rely on what you do well, rather than relying on God.

You could boast in your achievements, rather than boasting in the Lord and in what he has done for you. So today we want to consider this question: Where is your boast? What are you boasting in?

We ask that because the people of Judah, in the days of Jeremiah, did not boast in the Lord; instead they boasted in what they had and what they had done.

The prophet warned them about God's judgement, but they thought they were safe. They trusted in their wisdom and strength and riches. Nothing will happen to us, they said, we'll be okay.

Often it is the same with us – we too boast in our own achievements and rely on our own resources.

The Lord warned them, and us, **don't boast in these things**. Don't rely on them.

Don't boast in **your wisdom**.

In Israel there was a group known as "the wise". Many of the sayings of the wise, especially those of Solomon, were collected together in the book of Proverbs.

These wise men included people like the scribes who were supposed to know the law of God. The problem was, as time went on, that the wise men forgot that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10) and they relied on their own wisdom and understanding. They boasted in what they knew and could figure out by themselves.

This was even more so *in Babylon* at the same time where there was also a large group of “wise men”. They included “magicians, enchanters, astrologers and diviners” (Daniel 2:2). They drew their wisdom from the pagan world of omens and evils spirits.

And then there were the wise men in the *first century AD*, those challenged by the apostle Paul; “Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age?” (1 Corinthians 11:20). Paul was referring to the large group of Greek and Roman philosophers who tried to work out the meaning and purpose of life by the power of their own minds, by their own rational thinking, by their own logic and reasoning.

There are also people *today* who claim to be wise, who boast of their wisdom: the “so-called” experts and consultants; the lecturers at university; the academics in their research institutes; the psychologists and counsellors; the professionals in their field.

But the prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul warn all who claim to be wise; “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom”. These people do not know as much as they think they do. God will “destroy the wisdom of the wise” and frustrate “the intelligence of the intelligent” (1 Corinthians 1:19). There is a limit to all human knowledge. We are not as smart as we think. True understanding is to be found in a “knowledge of the Holy One” (Proverbs 9:10).

Nor should you boast in **your strength**.

This was written in a day and age when many men were soldiers and were fighting battles. Men valued physical strength and power, and ability with a sword and spear and bow.

That pride is reflected in Psalm 20:7 – “Some trust in chariots and some in horses...”

This still goes on today among the nations of the world; they trust their military might and strength and power. They look to the size of their army and the number of tanks and battleships and fighter planes and nuclear warheads for their security.

This same attitude can be seen in the church when we begin to rely on our own strength rather than on the Lord. We can depend on our efficient organisation, on our structure, on having everything well-managed, on a church programme, on lots of activities. We can boast of our own strength in the church rather than relying on the Lord.

And this is a trap for the individual too. Many in our society are fitness freaks, spending long hours at the gym, working out for that perfect body and that athletic physique and that healthy heart. And yes, it is right to be healthy; but it is also possible to boast in and rely on your own strength and health and fitness.

Don't forget that your health and strength and fitness and power can be taken away from you at a moment's notice. You could have an accident on the way home that leaves you a cripple; you be struck down with sickness in your sleep tonight; you could catch a disease that leaves you weak and helpless. "Let not the strong man boast in his strength."

Nor should you boast in **your riches**.

There were those in Israel who were very wealthy. They lived in luxury and extravagance. Jeremiah condemned King Jehoiakim for this lifestyle, building "his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice... He says, I will build myself a great palace with spacious upper rooms.... 'Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar'", asked Jeremiah (22:13-15).

The same goes on today. The Lord does not condemn wealth in itself, but he does condemn waste and extravagance. He condemns those who spend freely on themselves but who are miserly to others. He threatens judgements on those who live in luxury but who are not generous to the poor and the needy in society.

The Lord warns the rich not to boast in their riches because that too can pass away.

The proverbs remind us that money can grow wings and fly away!

Think of how the wealth and possessions of hundreds of thousands of people was swept away in that terrible Tsunami that swept across the Indian Ocean on Boxing Day 2004.

Think of how we can lose all our accumulated wealth in a house fire, or a stock market crash, or in the collapse of a bank or an insurance company.

Remember the warning in the parable of the rich fool – whose life was required of him just after he had accumulated his fortune.

Rather than boasting in your wisdom or your strength or your wealth you should **boast in the lord**.

The most valuable thing in all of life is to **know the Lord**. "...let him who boasts, boast about this: that he understands me and knows me, that I am the Lord." (verse 24).

This is genuine wisdom. This is the way to be truly wise. Solomon had expressed that in the book of Proverbs some 300 years earlier: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom and a knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.” (Proverbs 9:10). The apostle Paul echoed this 700 years later; “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 1:31).

We can’t boast about anything we have done. We didn’t initiate this relationship. We didn’t come to know God through our own efforts. No, he reached out to us and drew us to himself. The initiative came from him.

“I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew,
He moved my soul to seek him, seeking me;
It was not I who found, O Saviour true,
No, I was found, was found of thee”
(Psalter Hymnal 387)

This God has allowed us to know him as “the Lord”. “Lord” is our English translation of the Hebrew word Yahweh. This is God’s covenant name for himself. This is the name God used to describe himself in his relationship with us as his people. The central promise of the covenant is: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

The most important goal of life is to “understand and know” the Lord. These two words are very similar – reinforcing the same idea of a close, intimate, personal experience of God. This is more than knowing *about* God.

In chapter 8:8 the people of Judah claimed to be wise, “for we have *the law of the Lord*.” But the Lord rejected that claim and told them that they would be put to shame.

It is the same for us today. Simply having the Bible does not mean you know the Lord. Even knowing *about* the Bible does not mean you *really know* the Lord. There has to be more than that. You have to believe in him through the Lord Jesus Christ. There must be a genuine and living fellowship.

Is that true of you? Do you know what that is like? Many people are busy chasing after 101 other things and all the time neglecting this one thing that is most important.

We are reluctant to spend half an hour in reading the Bible and prayer to know God better, yet we easily waste an hour or two in front of the TV, or on computer games, or in text messaging! Let’s get serious about getting to know God better and investing time into that. Because to know the Lord is to enjoy the most important and worthwhile relationship in all the world.

If you know the Lord like this then you will also know something of **his character**: his kindness, justice and righteousness.

God's kindness is mentioned first because if it wasn't for this we would not know him. In his love and kindness he has reached out to us. The word used here is "chesed" in Hebrew. It refers to the covenant love that God has shown to his people. It has been translated as steadfast love, merciful love, unfailing devotion. God showed it to Israel again and again in his patience with their weakness and in his forgiveness of their sin.

He has shown it to us supremely in sending his One and Only Son into the world. "This is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God's justice and righteousness are also mentioned. These two attributes of God are closely connected together.

God is righteous in himself. He has no sin but has absolute integrity in all he is and in all he does.

Out of that righteousness he deals justly with all the people of the world. He restrains sin and evil and will punish those who do wrong. He rules wisely over all his people and over the whole earth.

These three qualities were seen in **the Lord Jesus** during his ministry on earth.

He was full of God's *lovingkindness*; he was filled with compassion for those around him; he went around healing the sick, raising the dead, curing those who had leprosy, giving sight to the blind, speaking kind words to those who were discouraged.

He was also *righteous*. He had no sin. He lived a perfect life. No one could accuse him of any wrong. He acted with complete integrity and absolute honesty in all he did.

And he was *just*. He hated injustice whenever he saw it and spoke out against it.

He condemned those who did evil and he stood up for the rights of the poor and the widow and orphan.

What is true of God's character, as it is seen in the Father and the Son, should also be true of **our character**. Anyone who claims to be a Christian must also show love, justice and righteousness. "What does the Lord require of you?" asked the prophet Micah. "To act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8).

Do you "love mercy"? Do you show God's lovingkindness to those around you?

Do you show that love by being patient when people bug you and irritate you?

Do you love others by not joining in the gossip and slander that goes on at school and at tech and at work?

Do you love others by being kind to those who are left out, to those who are on the fringe, to those not included in the group, to those who are weak, to those who are picked on by others? Do you show others the love that Jesus showed to those around him?

Do you act with justice and righteousness in this society?

Are you honest and straightforward in all your dealings – in your words, in your finance, in your actions?

If someone is treated unfairly at school or at your workplace do you stand up for them?

Do you defend those who are too shy or weak to defend themselves?

And what about us as believers in this church? What should we be doing about the injustice in society? How can we help the poor, the widows, the solo mums, the children who are neglected and alone and uncared for?

What can we do to fulfil our task of kindness, justice and righteousness in the earth and especially in our own community with all its social problems and needs.

We can't do everything, but we can do something, and God wants us to do his work in this world.

Don't get caught in the trap of boasting in your own achievements and efforts – in your wisdom and learning, in your strength and ability, in your money and wealth.

Make your boast in the Lord and in knowing him and his love and his justice and his righteousness.

And put these things into practice in your own life so that you prove that you really do know him.

Let's close with an example of one man who took this seriously. John Wesley was convinced that the people of Britain needed to hear the good news of salvation. Between 1739 and 1791 (some 50 years) he preached over 45,000 times. He travelled 250,000 miles on horseback, often on dangerous and difficult roads. He was often assaulted and time after time narrowly escaped death. He attacked the moral decay of 18th century England and sought to purge the soul of the nation. Together with George Whitefield he led one of the great revivals seen in the history of England.

Although primarily evangelists both these men were also deeply concerned about the needs of the poor and both were involved in social causes.

Through their preaching they inspired people to take up the social issues of the day and to do something in their nation for the sake of Christ.

Some have claimed that it was their influence that helped spare Britain from a revolution such as happened in France, and it was their influence that set the stage for the abolition of slavery later in the 19th century.

Today we too need to be people of word and deed.

We must be people who love God and who love our neighbour.

We must be people who boast in a knowledge of God and who prove that boast in love, justice and righteousness.

Will you be such a person?

Will we be such a people?

Amen.