

Title: “Works that Boast Jesus”

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Galatians 6:1-2

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Service Readings: Is 66:10-14, Gal. 6:1-10, 14-18, Luke 10:1-20

The works that we do are works given to us by God and are aimed to point others to Christ.

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

The first part of the first verse of our Epistle reading resonates with me. In Paul’s letter to the Galatians he says, “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness.” There is a freedom in this verse that I can get behind. I’m actually good at this. From my vantage point, I can watch over all those around me and with great efficiency pick out where my brothers and sisters are spiritually failing. I can point it out and even help restore him in a spirit of gentleness. I am probably so good at it I could write an entire book – or at least a sermon. Like a backseat driver or a Monday morning quarterback I, quite simply, have got this.

But, as so often the case, I can’t stop reading where I want. I can’t “end it here” or remove it from the larger context. I have to go on; I have to read on. And so, when I do, I hit a wall like a car speeding on a highway. “keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.” Wait, what? Keep watch on myself... for what? I’m not down on the field actually *playing* the game. I’m not the one in the *driver’s* seat. I’m the one watching from afar, doing what I do best – pointing out other people’s failures! What does Paul mean that I should keep watch on myself?

Unfortunately, he answers that question. And it is an answer that completely challenges me.

² Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. ³ For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself. ⁴ But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbor. ⁵ For each will have to bear his own load.

Bear one another’s burdens. That’s not what I signed up for. I like the “point out other’s burdens,” instead. But that’s not what Paul says. He actually argues against it. He says “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

And just like that I am removed from a position of casting judgement and placed into a position of receiving it. Once acting the judge, I have now become the accused with the real judge seated on his throne. And this is a frightening place for me to be. For when the verdict is read, the punishment that *should* be handed down will be truly unbearable. This is where we all stand, in judgement, and it is what Paul reminds his readers in the overall letter. He reminds them and us that that we have *all* been caught in our own transgressions but instead of a punishment being inflicted on us, it was

inflicted on God, himself. In perfect obedience, and in spite of being tempted by Satan, he perfectly fulfilled the law of God and restored us in a spirit of unequal gentleness. And because he suffered the punishment, we still stand before the judge, but no longer have to fear the verdict – for it has already been handed down, the punishment already inflicted, and the transgressions already atoned for. We have been restored and the judge is looking upon us in love. Quite simply, we stand justified before God, but not because of what we have done but because of what Jesus has done on our behalf. And faith in these completed works of Jesus is what gives us this confidence to stand before our judge.

And so in this letter Paul reminds them, and he reminds us that we have been justified by Christ alone, that it is not of our efforts in any way. And it is with that realization that we respond; we respond to that perfect work of love by performing works of love. But they are not any works; they are works that have been chosen by God for us to complete. They are works that challenge us to be selfless with our time and resources. They are works that encourage us to rely on and trust God as we complete them. But they are also works that we must guard ourselves from boasting about. We must never allow them to point to anyone other than Christ Jesus.

And so, the question becomes this: how do we do that, exactly? Paul teaches that we do it through sacrificial giving, sacrificial serving. We do it through bearing each other's burdens sacrificially. We place the needs of our neighbors before the needs of our own. It means giving and serving not for the benefit of ourselves and not even for the benefit of the recipients immediate needs, but for the glory of God the Father. This is the key. This is the true motivation behind our service to others. We serve in a way that leads the recipient to the cross where they come face to face with the only one who is worthy of judging them and worthy of meeting all of their true needs. It is, you see, viewing the work you do as a *means of proclamation*.

Here's what I mean... Pastor Mark likes to talk about kingdom values and this morning I think that the value most highlighted in this letter is one of service. But the goal is not found in the *result* of that service. Sure, it is noble to bear each other's burdens, to guide someone in restoration after a transgression. But that is not where the work should end. Instead, the true end, the true motive should be found in the proclamation of Gospel, the good news of Jesus' work. The point of serving others is to point them to Christ. Paul says as much in his letter. He writes in verse 15:

¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

What he says here is that even our works, that which we do for our neighbor, must not only be directed away from ourselves, but the acts themselves must not serve as a distraction for the real motivation of those works – and that is to preach Jesus crucified. For works that fail to boast Jesus are works that boast of ourselves and therefore are not works at all. Isn't this what Jesus modeled for us time and again as he did the work of his Father? Every act of physical healing was coupled with the forgiveness of sins. He pointed not to the restoration of the body as the goal but to the restoration of the soul. And this is what we are to do as well. Bear burdens, be of service to others so *that* we can point them to the saving work of Christ.

Now, I'd like end with a simple challenge for you. In our Gospel passage this morning we find a very similar message spoken by Jesus himself. As he sends the disciples out into the world he instructs

them. And later, after they return and report back all the good that they had accomplished he reminds them that the point of sending them out is not about the work that they accomplish but that this work leads others (including themselves) to Jesus and the salvation that he offers. And so my challenge to you this morning is to reread the Gospel passage and identify this idea. And then reflect on your own work that God has called you to do. Can you identify where your service points people? Is it to yourself, the work, or is it to Christ? And if it is not to Christ, what might you alter so that your service *does* point to him?

Please pray with me.

Lord,

These hands were made for service and I have turned them over for your use. Continue to use them, continue to use me, and continue to encourage me to proclaim the Gospel as part of my service to my neighbor.

Amen.