

Boasting Excluded

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[0 : 00] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us.

We're glad that you're here. And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we become convinced that there's no one so good.

They don't need God's grace and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

This morning, we are continuing our series in the book of Romans, but we're also finishing it in one sense. I warned you last week that we are going to make it to the end of chapter three and then we're going to pause.

Okay, so we will not return to chapter four of Romans until perhaps summer or fall of 2025. And so I'm about to tell you for the last time this year about the letter to Romans.

[1 : 08] Romans is a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD. It is called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it is written to the churches in the city of Rome.

This letter to the Romans is about the gospel. It is about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul's hope in writing this letter is that these people in these churches would be established in the gospel.

And as he does that, Paul makes many applications and explores many things, but he constantly returns to and is focused on the mission and the unity of the church.

And while there are many spokes in the book of Romans, they always return back to the hub of the gospel. Last week, we took a look at verses 25 and 26, understanding the wrath of God and his goodness as our Father, how he is bringing evil once and for all to an end.

And now we look at the very last verses of chapter three of Romans, the point that in a sense Paul has been driving to after his explanation of the gospel in verses 23 and 24, which is that if it is true what he's told us in chapter one and chapter two and chapter three, that's true, then what we need to do, what we must do is rely and trust on God alone.

[2 : 45] That's how Paul ends this chapter. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me to Romans chapter three. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phone.

You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse five tells us, every word of God proves true.

He is a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Romans chapter three, starting at verse 27. Then what becomes of our boasting?

It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also. Since God is one who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith, do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

[4 : 03] By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law. I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and we thank you as we do every week that you have called us to worship you and you've spoken to us in your word.

We confess this morning that we are easily distracted, that our hearts are attracted to many things, that often we lose the plot and forget what you've told us in your word, the hope that you've set out for us in the gospel.

And so we ask for your help again. We ask that you would pour out your Holy Spirit in a special way among us now to open our ears and our eyes and our hearts, that you would help us to see and understand clearly what you have for us in Romans chapter 3.

And we ask that you would use it to transform us, to make us more and more into the image of your Son. And we ask these things in his mighty name. Amen. In 2009, Jeanette Walls came out with her book called *Half Broke Horses*, in which she tells the story of her grandmother named Lily, Lily Casey Smith, who grew up in West Texas in the early 1900s.

[5 : 44] And her book opens with a story from Lily's childhood, when Lily was 10 years old. So this is around 1910 or 1911. And there is a flash flood in the month of August.

And so they're in West Texas. This flash flood happens. And Lily realizes that her and her two younger siblings will not be able to outrun the flood.

And so they're stuck in this cow pasture. The water is coming too fast. Lily is the oldest, takes responsibility for her younger siblings. They find a cottonwood tree, and they climb up into it just in time.

As they make it onto the branch of the cottonwood tree, this six-foot wall of water hits the tree. And so they realize they've just made it in the nick of time. Now, that's just the first step, right, to make it up into the tree.

They have something that's actually more challenging, which is that night is coming. And for them to survive, they must stay awake. Because what happens if you're sitting on the limb of a tree and you fall asleep?

[6 : 55] You're going to head into the water, right? The six-foot wall. And so Lily, as the oldest, takes responsibility for her two younger siblings and goes to work.

She has them switch places on the branch when their arms begin to get tired so they can have new muscles holding themselves up. She keeps her siblings awake by quizzing them with all the things that they know.

She quizzes them on their multiplication tables. She runs through presidents and state capitals with them. She runs through the definition of words, anything that will help them make it through the night.

Her youngest sister, Helen, at one point says, I can't hold on any longer. And Lily says, yes, you can. You can because you have to.

And so these three children miraculously make it through the night. The next day, the water recedes, just in time for another conflict to begin.

[8 : 01] They make it down the tree. Lily and her siblings make it to their childhood home, where their parents, as you can imagine, are worried sick to receive them. Her mother comes running out of the house, and we're told this.

She sank to her knees, clasped her hands in front of her, and started praying up to the heavens, thanking the Lord for delivering her children from the flood.

It was she, the mom, who had saved us, she declared, by staying up all night praying. And so she says to her children, you get down on your knees and thank your guardian angel, and thank me too.

Now, Lily is completely put out by this. She says this, The way I saw it, I was the one who'd saved us, not mom and not some guardian angel.

No one was up in that cottonwood tree except the three of us. Then Lily goes to her talk to her dad and says, There weren't no guardian angel, dad.

[9 : 13] She explains how she had been the one who got them into the cottonwood tree. She was the one who figured out how to have them switch places. She was the one who ran them through what they knew to keep them awake.

Her mom wants credit for her prayers. Lily wants credit for her work.

And is there any space or room for God in the midst of that? Romans chapter 3, verses 27 through 31 asks one piercing and critical question.

Who do you give credit to for your life? Who do you give credit to for your life?

For your success? Who do you believe deserves the thanks? Lily has a lot of clarity on who should be thanked.

[10 : 25] Lily's mom has tremendous clarity on who should be thanked, although they have different answers. This passage raises even further a question, not just who do you thank, can you thank yourself?

That's what Lily and her mom are arguing about. Okay, there was this flood. Everyone was saved.

Who gets the credit? I think if we're honest, many of us feel that story, even if we don't say it out loud.

Yes, I know as a good Christian, I'm supposed to give thanks to God, right? I'm supposed to recognize his sovereign work in the world and that everything that I have comes from him.

And what about my credit? What about what I did? Sure, I'll thank God.

[11 : 34] I want my due too. That's what Paul's getting at here in verse 27. He asks this question, then what becomes of our boasting?

And he's asking this question because of everything that's come before in the book of Romans. Remember, I've told you that chapters one through three are driving in one direction.

Paul has been moving, while it may not have seemed this way, in a straight line. So when he says what becomes of our boasting, he means what becomes of our boasting in light of everything that has come before?

What becomes of our boasting in light of the fact that chapter one, the Gentiles or the non-religious deserve God's wrath? What becomes of our boasting in light of chapter two that the Jews or religious people also deserve God's wrath?

What becomes of our boasting in light of chapter three that our only hope is in the gospel. If the gospel is true, can we congratulate ourselves?

[12 : 46] That's what Paul's asking. If the gospel is true, can we pat ourselves on the back? If the gospel is true, can we take credit for our salvation?

If the gospel is true, do we look down on people who haven't made it as far as we have? What becomes of our boasting?

And the answer, the answer to the question, can we pat ourselves on the back, is this, no. No. Bet you didn't see that coming.

Verse 27, it is excluded. There is no room for anyone but God and God alone to receive the credit.

If you're rich, or at least well off, who do you thank for your wealth?

[14 : 04] If you're successful, or at least you've done good enough, who do you thank for your accomplishments?

If you're healthy, or at least healthy enough, who gets the credit for your lifestyle? When the doors are closed, and all hearts are exposed, what do you really believe is the foundation of your life?

when the truth comes out, what will we see as our real North Star?

And what do our hearts and lives and minds reveal about our anchor?

Remember, I repeated this many times in the book of Judges. Psalm 127, Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.

[15 : 24] Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. I didn't quote the second part, though.

Same psalm. It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil, for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Who gets credit for your life? During the book of Judges, I also told you about Psalm 20, verse 7.

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord, our God.

And we just sang this a few minutes ago, right before the sermon. To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus. All the glory evermore to him.

[16 : 31] When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat, yet not I, but through Christ in me. Then what becomes of our boasting?

It is excluded. of course, Paul here is ultimately discussing more than wealth and accomplishments and health.

Ultimately, what he's discussing is salvation. Those who've been redeemed by God, who've been bought by him, who've been purchased at a price. You might ask this, Christian, why did God redeem you?

Did God redeem you because you were smart enough or cunning enough? Why did you end up at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church worshiping God with his people?

Was it because you lined up the right things in the right way? Was it because you figured out some secret that other people were just not smart enough to figure out?

[17 : 54] Is it because you made the sacrifices required to live a holy life before God? No. Paul tells us it's this and this alone because and only because God had mercy on you.

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. Why though? Why is it that boasting is excluded?

Paul goes on to answer that. He says, By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. And here the word law is used differently at different times in the book of Romans.

In this instance he's using law to mean a principle. And so we could read verse 27 in this way. By a principle of works? No, by the principle of faith.

And so to understand that we have to understand the difference between works and faith. Works is a life in which you rely on what you have done and will do.

[19 : 09] If you live a life of works, you rely on what you have done and will do. By the way, if that's your principle, you can boast.

If your life rests on what you have done and will do, boasting should not be excluded. you should be able to boast in whatever you want to, right? Faith, very different.

A life relying on what God has done and will do. Faith is the life relying on what God has done and will do.

And of course, if that's your principle, you can't boast because God is the one who has done it. You'll see this on page eight of your worship guide, clarifying this contrast for us between faith and works.

Faith is self-renouncing. Works are self-congratulatory. Faith looks to what God does. Works have respect to what we are.

[20 : 21] These two things could not be farther apart. Lower down on the same page. Works earn, but faith only receives.

Works earn, but faith only receives. You can have one or you can have the other.

You cannot have them both. faith. In fact, we also sang that earlier this morning.

Back on page six. I will boast ever only in the Lord my God, for I know his glory is my good.

Those are the words of faith, not the words of works. Paul goes on to explain this for us even more in verse 28.

[21 : 27] He says, For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. If you've been with us, you remember the concept of justification has two parts to it.

There's one part where justification is the theological term that means God makes it just as if we never sinned. He removes the record of our guilt. It also has another side to it.

Justification doesn't only make it just as if we'd never sinned. Justification also means that God gives us Jesus' righteousness. It's not just that he removes the bad things that we've done.

He gives us Jesus' record of the good things. One is justified. In other words, one is in right standing, right relationship with God, not based on anything you have done, but on Christ and Christ alone.

Justification restores our relationship with God, and out of that flows all our other relationships. Our relationship with others, our relationship with ourselves, our relationship with God's word, God's world, excuse me.

[22 : 41] Verses 29 through 30 go on to expand on that same basic point, and the basic point of verses 29 and 30 is that grace operates the same for every person.

Remember, Paul has this burden in chapters 1 and 2 to say, look, it's religious and non-religious people who deserve God's wrath. Here he's simply saying in these two verses, 29 through 30, religious and non-religious people, Gentile and Jew, they all receive grace in the same way.

it's not as if Jewish people are able to receive grace by keeping the law and that the Gentiles receive grace by not keeping the law. No, everyone needs God's grace, whether they're circumcised, that's the Jew, or uncircumcised, the Gentile.

That's why he says in verse 30, God is one. He's saying you can't split God up and make him operate in different ways with different people. people. No, his grace is the need of every person.

And so in those verses, he's simply expanding on what he's already said. He's shown us our need in chapters 1 and 2. He's told us the gospel in chapter 3. He's now saying, okay, here's the logical conclusion, no boasting.

[24 : 05] And no boasting because you're standing with God is based on grace, not works. And that standing with God based on grace, not works, is true or necessary for everyone.

I don't mean that everyone's received God's grace. I mean that is the way in which everyone must. If a person is to be in right standing with God, it must be by grace, never by works.

Now we've discussed one side. of boasting, of taking credit. I asked you earlier, hey, if you're wealthy or successful or healthy, who do you give credit to?

And you might have thought in that moment, well, I don't need to worry about that because I'm not wealthy, I'm not successful, and I don't have health. So I guess this doesn't apply to me.

I don't need to worry, right? Well, no, the temptation, no matter what our situation is, the temptation is still present to have a life based on works.

[25 : 13] One pastor points out the other side. He says the problem of boasting is not just when we take credit for the good things. The problem of boasting also happens when we're envious of what other people have but we don't.

Now that seems counterintuitive, but what he's saying is this, if we're mad at God that others have more than we do, what we're saying in a sense is that the world should work based on works.

Hey, I don't understand, I've worked longer and harder. Why did that person get it? Shows our hearts, right? Reveals us. We believe God should give us what we think we deserve.

If we're jealous and angry, when we see God's blessing in other people's lives, blessings that we desperately want, right? Think of the prophet Jonah.

He was mad that God had showed grace. We revealed our hearts. We've shown that we have abandoned faith for works.

[26 : 25] What I'm saying simply is this. sometimes God's grace to other people offends us. And when God's grace to other people offends us, it shows we do not have a life of faith.

When we're filled with resentment, when other people get what we think we deserve, that's the language of someone who operates by works.

Now remember, I've been telling you as we've gone through the book of Romans that what Paul teaches, Jesus taught first. You may be familiar with the parable in Matthew chapter 20 of the workers in the vineyard.

They're hired to work in a vineyard, but some, here's the catch, are hired to work for part of the day. Some are hired to work for the whole day.

So they line up at the end. The people who've only worked a little bit get paid first. So they receive their pay. The people who've worked all day look and they see what those people are getting paid and they say, wow, you know, if someone who worked half a day gets \$2, then obviously I'm going to get \$4.

[27 : 43] They come to the end and everyone has been paid the same. The folks who worked longer complained that look, this is not fair.

How dare you, referring to the master in this parable, but really to God, how dare you give us all the same when some of us have worked more than others?

The master replies in this way, am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or do you begrudge my generosity?

So the last will be first and the first last. Do we understand God's grace enough to be okay with that?

Or do we think that what we've done in this life has earned something from God or proved something to him?

[28 : 52] If we believe that, we are still in the grip of boasting. What becomes of our boasting?

It is excluded. all of this talk about different amounts of work receiving the same pay, though, raises a fair question, a complication.

It's what Paul gets to at the end. If we are operating not on the principle of works, but on the principle of faith, does that not mean that it does not matter what I do?

If everyone is getting paid the same at the end of the day, man, that's good to know. I guess I'll sit on my hands a little bit.

I guess I'll do what I want when I want. I guess I'll take not one water break, but ten water breaks. I'll disappear to the bathroom every hour. If that's the principle, I'll take advantage of it.

[29 : 55] If we all get the same wages, then who cares? That's what Paul is addressing here in verse 31. Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?

In other words, if we're not based on works, why work? Why obey God? It sounds like we don't need to worry about that. And Paul says, by no means.

Absolutely not. And he doesn't just say absolutely not. He tells us why. On the contrary, we uphold the law.

And Paul is getting at this principle he explains in other parts of scripture, which is this, true faith overflows into obedience. True faith overflows into obedience.

In fact, it actually empowers and allows the only kind of obedience that's acceptable to God. If you obey outside of faith, what trap do you fall into? You fall into the trap of boasting.

[31 : 07] The only way to truly and fully obey God is to obey out of his grace. And so in his letter to the church planter Titus, Paul says this, the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.

Note what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say self-control and discipline and following the right regimen will teach us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions.

No, he says the grace of God training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passion. It is God's grace that allows and enables his people to truly obey.

True faith overflows into obedience. And so no, believers do obey. They do follow after God and his commands.

They do it for a different reason and from a different source. Obedience, not trying to earn salvation, that's the obedience that leads to boasting. That's the obedience that leads us to believe we have something that God owes us.

[32 : 37] No, obedience as a fruit of salvation, something that comes out of God and his work for us. That is what true obedience is.

In fact, that's the only way you can truly obey because any other way is an attempt to manipulate God. What is boasting except the principle that I can somehow get God to owe me?

True obedience comes out of love for God, gratitude for what he has done for us. what is it that God has done for us?

It's his grace in Jesus Christ. It's that justification that Paul has spoken about. It is that reconciliation with God in our relationship to him.

It's peace with God because of the work of Jesus Christ. That he's done two things for us. He's taken the punishment that we deserve in his death on the cross.

[33 : 45] But not just that, he's also given us his obedience, his correct and right and perfect record. That is the grace that leads us to obedience.

That is what takes us away from boasting and takes us to praise. Christ. Christian, who do you give credit to for your life?

Who do you thank for your success? Who deserves all praise and glory for your salvation?

salvation? Verse 27 asks it this way, then what becomes of our boasting? The answer is this.

What becomes of our boasting is, to God be the glory, great things he has done, so loved you the world that he gave us his son.

[35 : 01] Let's pray. God, we do praise you and thank you that we don't live on the tightrope of our own performance.

We don't worry about whether we've done enough. We don't need to worry about what you've given to other people. We know that you are a good and gracious father, that you operate on a principle not of works, but of grace.

We ask that you would remind us of that this morning. You drive it deep into our hearts, that it would lead us to praise and follow you. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.