



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

September 10, 2023

Pastor Jerome Enderle

15<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

First Lesson: [Judges 16:22-31](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 121

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Galatians 6:12-16](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Matthew 16:21-26](#)

### **The Church is Militant: First the Cross, Then the Crown**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ: Amen.

One trait of our sinful human nature is that we tend to brag or boast. We brag or boast when the team we vividly and totally support is doing well or is on a winning streak. We may brag, we may boast, when our children or grandchildren get great grades or earn a scholarship to an elite college or university. We may brag that our income or our car is better than our siblings to friends or that person that we feel we are always in competition with. We may even brag or boast about our church attendance and the time, talents and treasures we use to support our church or our school. Yes, bragging and boasting is a trait of our sinful human nature that we all have and that we tend to exploit on a regular basis.

But in our text from the Apostle Paul's letter to the Christians in Galatia, he tells us that there is only one thing, one thing that we have any reason to boast about. Today we focus on that one thing. We boast in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. To fully understand these closing words of Paul in his epistle to the Galatians, we first have to take some time to discuss his visits to the cities of Galatia and his reason for writing this letter in the first place.

Paul had visited the cities of Southern Galatia on his first missionary journey. [Acts 14](#) records his mission work in the cities of Derbe, Lystra and Iconium. Following the council in Jerusalem is described in [Acts 15](#). Paul revisited the cities, delivering to them the decisions of the council. For the sake of their Jewish brothers and sisters in the faith, Gentile Christians were urged to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, not buy or serve meat that they had purchased at the meat markets associated with the idol temples. They were to abstain from what had been strangled (i.e., wringing the neck of a chicken).

Jews wanted all the blood drained from the animal before they would call it clean and kosher. They were also to abstain from sexual immorality. Nothing in the decision from the council of Jerusalem said anything about the rite of circumcision or keeping the ceremonial laws.

From Galatia, Paul then went on his second missionary journey. He went up to Macedonia and then on to Greece. In each of these cities where Paul had first come, he always presented and proclaimed the Gospel of God's grace in Christ first of all in the Jewish synagogues. Many of the Jews with synagogue-trained ears reacted violently to Paul's teaching that people are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and Paul was driven from the synagogues. A minority of the synagogue worshipers, however, accepted the message of God's grace in Christ and opened up their homes as centers for that life-giving liberating Gospel to be preached. These house churches became the centers of thriving Christian congregations. Most of the converts in Galatia were Gentiles. Yet the teaching and leadership positions in the churches continued to be filled by the capable nucleus that had come from the synagogues.

Not long after Paul left, a problem developed within the churches in Galatia that demanded his urgent attention and therefore, the letter. Other Jewish leaders had come to Galatia and challenged Paul's apostleship and his preaching. They challenged the local leaders regarding salvation purely by grace without keeping Jewish customs. These newly-arrived teachers claimed to be Christians. They didn't deny Christ's perfect life of obedience nor His innocent suffering and death on the cross. Rather, they asserted that the way Gentiles receive these blessings from this Christ was by the time-honored method of becoming part of God's chosen people. The Gentiles should be circumcised and become proselytes (converts to Judaism). These people urged Gentile Christians to believe in Jesus AND to keep all the Old Testament ceremonial laws, especially that of circumcision.

Paul viewed this problem that had developed in the churches of Galatia as nothing less than a frontal attack on the Galatians' faith and life in Christ. Therefore, addressing this problem in the [first chapter of Galatians](#), he wrote: ***I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!*** Here Paul reminds that it was grace (God's undeserved love) that moved Jesus to give Himself for their sins, to rescue them from sin, death and hell. They had been rescued, but now they were in danger of reverting back to captivity under the Law. They had been freed, but now they were toying with the idea of giving up their liberty. Yes, of giving up the freedom that they

had in the Gospel of Christ itself! What could have led them on such a foolhardy course of action? Paul could only draw one conclusion. ***Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ.*** Teachers advocating acceptance of Christ on Jewish terms were referred to as Judaizers. Examining Paul's letter leaves little doubt that such Judaizers had joined the churches in Galatia, confused them, and thoroughly upset the simple faith of the Gentile Christians.

With this background in mind, we can now proceed to the words of our text, where Paul writes: ***Those who want to impress people by means of the flesh are trying to compel you to be circumcised. The only reason they do this is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.*** Judaizers were Jews who believed that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah, the Christ. Believing in Jesus as their Savior, however, put them in a very bad light with their fellow Jewish countrymen. Those countrymen looked at faith in Jesus as undermining the Law of Moses, the very underpinnings of their national, social and religious life. When confronted and opposed by their friends or relatives that were Jews, they wanted to defend themselves by saying "Oh, no, no, no. We didn't let Gentile Christians bypass the Law of Moses. We made them adhere to the Law of Moses by forcing them to be circumcised."

Paul says these Judaizers are hypocrites. ***Not even those who are circumcised keep the law, yet they want you to be circumcised that they may boast about your circumcision in the flesh.*** The Judaizers were circumcised and they demanded that the Gentiles put themselves under the Mosaic laws and regulations by being circumcised as well. These Judaizers were like the Pharisees of Jesus' day who didn't keep the ceremonial law themselves. Of the Pharisees Jesus had said, "They do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy loads, burdens that are hard to carry, and place them on people's shoulders. But they will not lift a finger to help them. They do all their works to be seen by people."

These Judaizers wanted to insulate themselves from persecution and they wanted to look good in the process. They wanted to boast that they had brought Gentile Christians into obedience of the Law of Moses by forcing them to be circumcised. But the Apostle Paul would have none of that. In our text, he writes: ***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. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.*** Paul returns one last time to the core issue. He has consistently made this point. Human obedience, accomplishment and merit can't help us before God! There is nothing we can do to save ourselves or even contribute to our salvation. Accepting circumcision doesn't help, nor does refusing to be circumcised. Nothing we do can improve our status before the righteous and Holy God who hates and must punish sin.

Sinners from birth, we are indeed lost and condemned creatures. We are blind, at enmity with God, dead in our transgressions and sins. Such a situation requires a complete change, or as Paul says in our text, ***what counts is the new creation***. That, dear friends, is what happens when sinners like you and me come to Spirit-worked faith in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. By faith we exchange our own filthy rags for the glorious garment of Jesus' perfect righteousness. Clothed with that, we are assured of the forgiveness of all of our sins. We are at peace with God. We are assured of an eternity of bliss and glory with our Savior God in heaven. Until that time, we spend our days on this earth in cheerful service to the Savior God who gave this all by grace, freely, as a gift.

While all this had come to the Galatian Christians, it has come to us today because of Christ and His cross. So it is well for us today to resolve with Paul and say, "Far be it for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Believing in the cross of Christ brings great blessings. The blessings Paul requests for his readers when in our text he prays: ***Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God***. When Paul speaks of following this rule, he isn't talking about some fulfilling of a legal requirement, like circumcision. Following this rule means believing by faith in the law-free Gospel that gives wonderful blessings to lost and condemned sinners, who are now blood-bought sinners, as a free gift of God's grace and all who so trust in the cross of Christ, or as Paul says, ***the Israel of God***, God's people. They are the real Israel, not those who by circumcision place themselves under an outdated law fulfilled the moment that Christ died on the cross.

So how do the words of Paul, written nearly 2,000 years ago, apply to us 21<sup>st</sup> Century Christians, members of Morrison Zion Lutheran Church? Well, may we always boast in the cross of Christ and boast in it alone. May we never boast about who we are, what we have, or what we have done. May we never boast in anything but the cross of Christ; certainly not boasting that we are better or more deserving than other people, better or more deserving of other Christians.

So members of Morrison Zion Lutheran Church; don't boast because you understand and can explain the reason why we perform infant baptism when your Baptist friend cannot. Boast that you, your children, and your grandchildren have become members of God's family by means of water and the Word. Don't boast that you understand and can even explain the reason for closed communion when your Methodist friends are upset because they can't commune with you. Rather, thank God that you know that in, with and under that bread and wine you receive Christ's body and blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins, to help you amend your sinful life, to help you live your life in service to your Savior God every day. When a friend or a relative accept what science has to say about the origin of the world, don't boast because you know that God created the world in six natural, consecutive, 24-hour days. Thank God that the Holy Spirit has led you to believe that the Bible is God's inspired and

inerrant Word and that everything it says, from Creation to the End Times, is true, real and accurate. Certainly don't boast that you worship at Bible class and church, that the use of your time, talents and treasures in support of your church or your school is better than that of a fellow member's. Thank your Savior that He has led you to see the importance of placing God, His Word, His work and His will as a priority in your life. And even when that unchurched friend or relative scoffs at the idea of Jesus being the Son of God, the Savior, the only hope of forgiveness and heaven, remember that you still have no reason to boast. Remember it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith, not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.

As the Apostle Paul has clearly shown us from the words of our text this morning, there is only one thing, one thing that we have any reason to boast about. Today in closing, let's join the Apostle Paul and say, "Far be it for me or you to boast in anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." Amen.

***And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*** [\(Philippians 4:7\)](#) Amen.