

Ephesians 2:9b 10-29-17

Boastbusters: Soli Deo Gloria

So this is what we call *Reformation Sunday*. It is the Sunday closest to October 31, which, in 1517 was the day Martin Luther nailed his 95 complaints against the church of his day on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, in modern-day Germany. One result of the Reformation is that the gospel of grace through Jesus Christ was restored to the church and to the world and that gospel has revolutionized my life, probably your life, and, really the entire world. That is why we dedicated all four Sundays in October to some major themes of the Reformation which the Spirit of God, working in Martin Luther ignited half a millennium ago. Ben spoke to you about the preeminence of Christ in salvation. My three messages have been drawn from Ephesians 2:8-9. Today we look at verse 9 again, specifically the last phrase. It is a short verse, but oh so significant in the light of many popular misconceptions about the way of God's salvation. When you see the gospel for what it really is you will find there is nothing more beautiful. Let's go hunting today for the glories of the gospel of grace. **4-9** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; 9 not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Verse 9 instructs us by way of the negative. It tells us two things about God's salvation. First, we read what it is not –*not as a result of works*. Secondly, we read what it is unto or designed for *so that no one may boast*. Just as the first part of this verse is designed to protect us against any misunderstanding of the way of God's salvation, so too does this latter portion. In verse 8 we are told that salvation is by grace through faith. In verse 7 we are told it is designed to glorify the grace of God forever. Verse 9 gives us two clarifying negatives. It says to us, "Hey, if you understand salvation to include any works at all you don't understand it. And if you understand it to include anything at all that a person could boast about, then you misunderstand it." Our text for today is a purpose clause. It speaks to the question of design and intent. And it tells us that God designed salvation with the specific intention that it should bring no glory to man and it should bring all the glory to Him. We can expect that God's design of our salvation will perfectly match God's purpose

in it. And it does. His purpose is what? When you are looking for purpose, look for the words “that” and “in order that.” We find them in verse 7 *so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* We see there that God’s goal in salvation is to show off the surpassing riches of His grace, to bring glory to Himself and to keep it from who? From any man. And so He designs salvation so that it is totally by grace, a free gift of God and leaves not the slightest ground at all for human boasting. Do you see that? If so, let’s say together, “Thank God for the Reformation.”

Now, this particular addition to apostle’s thought -- this addition in verse 9 can serve you as a test. What is your idea of yourself as a Christian? How have you become one? Does your idea of how you have become a Christian give you any grounds for boasting? Does it, in any way, reflect credit upon you? Our natural human pride looks for something like that, for a way to gain credit for self. Most of us have habits of life and speech that are carefully designed to make ourselves look good. With kids this is obvious, with adults these can be camouflaged. And this evil within us tends to pollute our thoughts about religions and God and salvation. Our text can serve to test our thinking. Do our views on salvation leave anything there for which we can take credit? If so, then you are in the grip of a serious misunderstanding.

There are three very popular delusions about these things. The first is that of liberalism which says that our do-goodism, our niceness, our service to mankind is what saves us. That can’t be it, says Paul, because then you would have all kinds of ground for boasting. You essentially save yourself. The second popular delusion is that of sacramentalism which marks a number of churches and other religions. This delusion says that our willing participation in certain ceremonies, or sacraments of the church contributes to our salvation. But again, that can’t be right for under this system there is the inclusion again of my own activity and effort and there is the essential involvement of religious works which Paul excludes in verse 9. The third popular delusion is that of something called *Arminianism* which says that we don’t contribute in the way of works or in the way of sacraments, all we contribute is faith. Now that is coming very close to what the apostle teaches because faith is the one thing required, but it fatally misunderstands the origin of faith. The Arminian view is that faith may be generated from within myself. The biblical view is in verse 8 where we find that even your faith is not of yourself it is what? It too is the gift of God. You can’t boast about your works because they don’t count, and you can’t boast about your faith because you

aren't responsible for it. God is. God is responsible for the whole thing. That is how Hebrews 12:2 could say that Jesus Christ is the author and the finisher of our faith. It is all of Him. All of Him. We contribute nothing. I love those words of Toplady that we sang last week: "Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress, helpless look to thee for grace. Foul I to the fountain fly, wash me Savior or I die." There is nothing we can do for ourselves, and nothing that we did do for ourselves. It is all of the Lord. And that is exactly how God wants it because He intends to receive the praise.

You can see God's purpose at work in His saving activity when you consider how God saves and whom God saves. How does He save? Do you have it down? Say it with me: *By grace, through faith*. The one requirement He makes of us is faith. But in Romans 4 Paul argues that this very requirement proves His point. 4:**1-2** *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.* See that? Paul says, "If it can lead to boasting it must be wrong." This excludes any human works. **3-4** *For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.* He says, "If you do something to get it, then you've earned it." But just believing is not a work at all, and it is not even something you do, because, as we have seen, it too is the gift of God. Faith is not something you can feel proud of. When you come to me and say, "Pastor, I am giving you a gift, and you stick a present in my hand." Do I somehow think well of myself because I believed you when you told me that? Ridiculous. I couldn't help but believe it because the evidence was persuasive. There is no merit there for me. There is no hint of merit there for me, only merit for the Giver. How God saves – by grace through faith alone - insures that He, not we, get the glory.

Secondly, who God saves serves the same purpose. We really don't know why exactly God chose to save the ones He did, but I Corinthians 1 gives us some unusual insight into that. 1:**26-30a** *For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, 29 so that no man may boast before God. 30 But by His doing you are in*

Christ Jesus. How did we get in Christ? By our doing? No, by God's doing and God's choosing. And He chose the ones He chose to insure that nobody could boast. You can't look at the membership of the body of Christ and conclude that, "Well, God chose us because we are just of finer stock, better breeding, higher moral quality." In fact, Paul notes that there is a noticeable absence of the social upper crust. Some yes, but not many. Why not? God's election served the purpose of securing His glory and preventing our own. For several years I coached in a youth basketball league. One Sunday a year I participated in the selection of teams for the upcoming season. And do you know what kind of players I would pick for my team? I would pick the best ones I could find. Do you know why? Cause I like to win. Really I like to have fun with my teams and I find winning is a lot more fun than losing. So I would go for the best players I could pick, like everyone else. For seven of nine years my teams won championships and they won because we had the best players. If we had not won, with the guys I had, I would have looked bad. But consider this. If I wanted to really show off as a coach. If I wanted to really prove to the world that I am an awesome basketball coach and if I had ultimate confidence in my ability then I would go to the tryout and choose a bunch of rag-tag no-talents. And after I lead them to victory everyone would say, "Wow, Coach, you are really something." You see, that is what God did. Look at the twelve disciples. They were called ignorant and uneducated men. With Jesus, the raw talent is irrelevant. Like He told Gideon, "I can win with many; I can win with a few. In fact, I like to work with the likes of you just to show off how good I am." Isn't that neat? God's purpose is that nobody is going to boast about themselves. Everybody is going to marvel at God's grace. So, the salvation God designed glorifies no one but Himself.

Now, one application of this to us is that we must make sure we are not found trying to steal the glory that belongs to God. All glory goes to Him. *Soli Deo Gloria.* We don't take credit for ourselves, not even in our own thoughts. Romans 3:23-24 *For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.* He goes on and asks 27 *Where then is boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith.* The gospel won't allow you to boast. If you want to boast, then look for another religion. Become a Jehovah's Witness, a Muslim, a Mormon and work your way into heaven. But, when you come to Christ you sign a contract that says, "Jesus gets all the royalties, all the praise, all the glory." The only boasting on judgment day is going to be among the

damned. The only people talking about what they did will be the goats who spend eternity in the outer darkness. In Matthew 7 Jesus mentions people who will say, **7:22** *Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?* “Mr. Jesus, look at what we did for you!” And Jesus will just look at them and say, “I never knew you.” You see, it’s not what you do, but who you know. Paul says the same thing in Philippians 3. Look at this Scripture would you. And remember that the man who wrote this. The man who said, “That no one should boast” That “boasting is excluded.” This was a man who, before His conversion, knew a great deal about boasting. There was never a more self-satisfied person than Saul of Tarsus. He was proud of himself in every respect, proud of his nationality, of his tribe, proud of his upbringing and his education, proud of his religion and morality and knowledge. In Philippians 3 he tells us about it. **3** *We are the true circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh.* That is how he came to think. But this marked a dramatic change. **4-7** *Although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: 5 circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; 6 as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. 7 But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ.* There in verse 7 he says all these things he mentions were, past tense, were gain to him. They were the things he boasted in, gloried in, trusted in. They were his identity and salvation. But he came to see, by the grace of God, that all this stuff was irrelevant. He says he came to see them as loss. And he says that he learned it isn’t what you do, it isn’t what you know, but it’s who you know that really matters. **8** *More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ.* Look back at verse 3. What does the Christian do? He puts no confidence in the flesh. Nothing he has done, is doing or ever will do is the cause of His confidence. Christ is. Paul says the believer glories in what? In Christ Jesus.

Ah, let’s transition in our thinking just now, but we are in a good place to do that. We have seen that there is no ground for boasting about what you have done. The gospel supplies no basis for pride or any thoughts at all of personal superiority. We move next to see that the gospel supplies every ground, every reason, every basis to glory in or boast in our Savior. It is all designed to make

Him look wonderful -- and it does. Now, let's face it, every one of us needs something to boast in. I mean, we all need something to make us feel significant and special. I heard of a little boy in his back yard, playing with his baseball. He decided that his boast would be in his baseball skills. He said, "I am the greatest hitter in the world." Then he tossed the ball in the air, swung at it and missed. Then he did it again, "I'm the greatest hitter in the world." Whiff! A third time he does the same thing and misses again. This time he stares down at the ball laying on the ground beneath him and says, "I am the greatest pitcher in the world!" We all need something to boast in. But sometimes God says for us to alter what that ground of boasting is. My point is this. Christians do boast. Christians ought to boast. Paul's point in Ephesians 2:9 is not that we should glory in nothing, but that we must not glory in ourselves and our own accomplishments. Christians glory in what? The answer is in our name. We glory in Christ. We are the Jesus fan club. Now, you all know what it means to glory in another, to boast in someone else. You parents do this with your kids. You boast about them, glory in them. You want everybody to know that is your little girl playing the flute in the band. Sports fans glory in their athletic heroes. Some of you used to live and die with Terry Bradshaw and Jack Lambert and the Pittsburgh Steelers. You gloried in your heroes. You loved to hear them praised. You loved to talk about how great they were. You boasted in them, gloried in them. You found significance in your connection with them. How about you? What is it with you? You can tell what people glory in by how they decorate their homes. You can tell what you glory in by what you like to talk about. You can tell what you glory in by what you like to sing about, by what is on your T-shirts and bumper stickers. What do you want to be associated with? Some sports team? Some company? Some cause? These are the things we believe make us who we are. They make us special, significant. They become our boast. What is it for Christians? Philippians 3:3 gave us the answer. We glory in Christ Jesus. David wrote in Psalm 34:**2a** *My soul shall make its boast in the Lord.* We love to speak of Him, sing of Him, hear of Him. This is to be true of not only what we do in this place, but what we do on the job and in the neighborhood around men and women, boys and girls who don't have what we have, who don't know the One we know. What matters to us is not our noble deeds, but just our knowing Jesus. The Christian believes that what makes me special is that Jesus Christ, King of King, Lord of Lords, gave His life to make me His. Everything else fails to compare. The difference between the Christian and the non-Christian isn't that the non-Christian glories in his wealth or social status or ability and the

Christian glories in His religious work and moral qualifications. Oh no. The Christian boasts in Christ Jesus alone, and our goal is to make Jesus famous. We want everybody to know who He is and what He has done for us. God forgive us when we fail to do that. Galatians 6:**14a** *But may it never be that I would boast **14b** except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.* When you have this kind of attitude, it will control your thoughts. Test yourself here – do you think of yourself as superior to others? Do you look down on those who aren't as with it as you? Your thought life is the best test of where you are on these matters. But much, so much is also revealed by your words. This boasting in Jesus, this Christ-centered pride and delight is something that must and will come out of your mouth. It is the heart and soul of Christian worship. When we sing we cheer for Christ. We glory in Him. And that worship reveals our hearts. Those of you who still boast in self, who still think you are in control, you are sufficient and good – you will have little motivation to praise. But if you know Christ, if you boast not in self but in Him you will have the spirit of John Newton who wrote Amazing Grace and of Isaac Watts who wrote those great words: *When I survey the wondrous cross, on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride. Forbid it Lord that I should boast save in the death of Christ my God.*

My dear brothers and sisters - that is the spirit of the Reformation which we celebrate this month and we celebrate it because we celebrate Christ who becomes ours by grace, through faith, unto good works, unto faithful witness and unto everlasting worship. Because Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith, the sole sufficient Savior of lost sinners, we adore Jesus, brag on Him, worship Him, bear witness for Him with Brother Martin, with John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, Philip Melancthon, John Knox, Thomas Cranmer and a whole host of faithful martyrs and fathers in the faith who have passed down to us this good word of grace. Let's wrap up then by singing the brilliant song of brother Watts which someday I hope we will sing together with all the saints of the church in the presence of the only true Hero of the church – our Lord Jesus Himself.