

**'IT'S ONLY BRAGGING IF YOU CAN'T BACK IT UP'**

*How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, ...who say to Zion, "Your God reigns!" (Isaiah 52:7, NIV)*

**D**ID THAT TITLE GRAB YOUR ATTENTION? If you've heard this declaration before—and as someone who hangs around a game like golf, you almost certainly have—I'm guessing you have an opinion about it. Maybe, in your finest display of piety, you're inclined to say, "Bragging can never be good." You might be right.

It is hard to separate the difference between admirable confidence and distasteful chest-pounding. The line can be fine. But here's one thing we know for sure: far better to hear a person talk boldly of another than of himself.

The apostle Paul wrote that he was willing to boast, but he was very apologetic about making much of himself, as he once had to do to shush his Corinthian critics. No, Paul's preferred boasting was pointed at Jesus, and the cross on which Jesus died. Of these, Paul was willing to talk all day, and loudly at that! Why? Because he knew that in lauding Jesus, he was on firm ground.

Talking of Jesus should be a matter of confidence for us all. We too should find ourselves standing surefootedly when we speak of his deity, his activity, and the efficacy of his work. In him alone are we offered salvation. But the world makes it hard to take this strong stance. "How is your God any better than anyone else's?" they ask, the notes of challenge on their voice. "And who makes you an expert in theology? You're no better a person than I am." It's a tough crowd.

When you're discouraged in the well-doing of talking about Jesus, you must remember two things: who he is and what your message says.

We have already noted that Jesus stands alone. "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved," Peter told the council of religious leaders. And rightly so. Only Jesus has borne the sins of humanity, innumerable in their quantity, immeasurable in their weight. Only Jesus died and rose again, conquering death as well as sin. Remember this always and speak.

And then there is our message. It is not a listing of grand qualities. We need not argue our own worth or nobility. The good news is good because it proclaims the greatness of God. Remember this too and say with all gusto, "Our God reigns!"

**Opening questions** How would you describe what it's like to hang around a boastful person? What helps you discern between allowable self-confidence and bragging?

**READING** Isaiah 52:5-10; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Galatians 6:14

**A powerful message (Isaiah 52)**

In what ways is God mocked in our time? How can a healthy proclamation of who he truly is combat this? What should the core of our message be?

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**Proper boasting (Jeremiah 9)**

What line is established here between proper and improper boasting? The repeated word *boast* in this passage might also be translated *trust*. What do you find important about this interchangeability?

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**Boasting in the cross (Galatians 6)**

To what extent is it correct to say that we should never boast? Why was the cross Paul's object of boasting? Why should it be ours?

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