

Part 13: Live Like You've Seen It

Tyler Velin | Galatians 6:11-18

January 18th, 2025

Each year, the eyes of the global fashion industry look to the annual Met Gala to set the stage for the year's most popular trends. In 2018, the theme of the Gala was, "Heavenly Bodies." The world watched in wonder as celebrities like Rihanna, Kim Kardashian and Katy Perry walked the runway decked in gaudy crosses adorned with diamonds. The cross had gone mainstream.

One fashion magazine described the allure the cross has long had in the fashion and jewelry world saying, "There's beauty in its ambiguity...Sometimes it's a statement of faith, sometimes a statement of style, sometimes of power, sometimes of rebellion." Another designer said this, "I'm not [a believer], but I love the cross. I love how it looks on the wall and on the body. I have always had a little vintage one I planned to give my daughter."

The world Paul wrote Galatians to could not be more opposite than our own. For them the cross was not a fashion statement, it was cultural suicide. Our own world sees the cross as a vanity icon devoid of meaning, Paul's world saw the cross as vulgarity unfit for the civilized person.

Both fail to see the cross as Jesus taught it and as Paul has so defended it in the book of Galatians. And as he draws this letter to a close he asks an old question even into our modern world: "What do you see in the cross?"

In a court case, cross examination comes before closing arguments. But for Paul, his closing argument is nothing but his cross examination. That's the title of our sermon this morning.

Paul is holding up the cross as the means by which we examine ourselves, others and everything in this world. The book of Galatians is one of Paul's smaller letters, yet it floats like a butterfly and stings like a bee. And today this lightweight book lands the heavyweight punch. One 16th Century theologian called Paul's final words in this letter, "pure flame."

This flame is tender enough to bring sight to weak eyes, and yet it is hot enough to burn away the blinders of sin that so often hinder us. Because if you see the cross like this—you see everything differently.

Perhaps you've heard the song before, "smile like you mean it." Well, today our main point is similar, "**Live like you've seen it.**" Dear Christian, have you seen the cross of Jesus? If so, live like you have.

Paul's cross examination draws us to look at four things today: **Look at the ink cross, look at the stink of cross, look at the glory of the cross, look at the life of cross.**

Paul begins his letter where he began it. Read with me, **Galatians 6:11**, "See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."

Horton the Elephant once boasted, "I said what I meant, and I meant what I said, an elephant's faithful, 100%." Paul opened the book of Galatians reminding the Christians of what he first preached to them

about the cross of Jesus, and now he closes his letter reminding them of all he just wrote to them about the gospel.

Paul's argument hasn't changed, his defense hasn't shifted, he's not drawing our attention to himself—but to the frailty of his word. This is our first point this morning: **Look at the Ink of the Cross.**

Remember the context of Galatians is that these believers are terrified that they have fallen out of favor with God. They lack confidence in the gospel because the false teachers are placing a Christian's confidence in outward appearances.

To correct this Paul doesn't boast in his own appearance, but he does what any good apostle would do—he direct us to the message of the cross and says: if there's confidence it's not in the eyes of men but in the word of God.

Here, Paul's personal concern and his apostolic ministry is seen as he grabs the pen from his typist and says: "Look it's me Paul, but don't look at me—look at my words. Look at what I've written to you."

Paul gives to them, and he gives to us today where we must look if we are to see the cross sufficiently and savingly: we must look to the word of God. That's how the Christian sees—we see through the word.

None of you saw Jesus with your eyes, and that's likely the case for these Galatian Christians as well. But remember what Paul already said to them in chapter 3: "Was it not before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly displayed as crucified?" No! They weren't there. But the Christian sees Christ most clearly in the preached and written word of God. To receive Jesus by faith through his word is the only way we can see Christ confidently.

Our world is not short on words about Jesus. Our world isn't short on opinions about the gospel. But do you know God's words about Jesus? Do you know Jesus' words about the gospel? Jesus is at the heart of the whole Bible, and when we begin to see him there we begin to see everything clearly.

We must learn to see and understand the cross of Jesus not through culture, not through your own imagination, not through speculation and what seems to make sense—we must see it, and we can see it only through the testimony of God's word.

Many hundreds of years before Paul wrote this--the prophet Isaiah wrote to the people of Israel who felt as if they had no idea what to believe. Their enemies loomed against them boasting that their idols would tear Israel's God apart and dismantle his people. Their Kings, fearful in the flesh, looked to other nations to try and secure their borders. Who would they trust, how would they survive, where is our peace? There was controversy, conspiracy and chaos at every turn. But God spoke through his prophet Isaiah and he said this: **Isaiah 8:16-20**, "Bind up the testimony; seal the teaching among my disciples. I will wait for the Lord, who is hiding his face from the house of Jacob, and I will hope in him. Behold, I and the children whom the Lord has given me are signs and portents in Israel from the Lord of hosts, who dwells on Mount Zion. And when they say to you, "Inquire of the mediums and the necromancers who chirp and mutter," should not a people inquire of their God? Should they inquire of the dead on behalf of the living? To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn."

We will be tempted, in the face of today's pressure to stand in the comfort of today's counselors. But God's true shepherds, and God's true sheep know where to flee--we know the large letters that bring us the security we need: to the teaching, and to the testimony.

God's final and full revelation, God's sign and seal of his love for you and your endurance and life is in nothing but the cross of Jesus. If you want to see that cross--read God's word. The eyes of truth see by the light of the word.

These false teachers didn't deny the cross. They just refused to accept the cross as Jesus taught it. So they ended up keeping the language of the cross but emptied it of meaning.

We stand in a similar crisis today. Richard Niebuhr spoke prophetically of our own day in 1937 when he said that many Christian teachers will proclaim: "a God without wrath who brings men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross."

And why would such men do that? Because a God with wrath, saving men sick with sin, into a kingdom not of this world, by the merit of a criminal's cross is not the most appealing message.

But it's the power of God. The power of God and the power of men are always at odds with one another. That means that if you want to sniff out false teachers, pay attention to how comfortable they are talking about the cross. Paul says, **Galatians 6:12-13**, "It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ. For even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law, but they desire to have you circumcised that they may boast in your flesh."

Be careful, Paul says, of men who do not preach the cross--because such men are those who avoid the cross. Why? Because it is offensive to them. Here's our second point: **Look at the stink of the cross.**

For these men, the cross wasn't to be denied--but it was to be avoided at all costs. Why? Because the cross condemned them. The cross reminded them that they had faults, that they weren't good enough to merit God's salvation. Their salvation then was not in seeing the cross, but in making sure they never had to see it.

Because if we aren't quite certain that the cross saves us, then we always have one eye on man as the source of our salvation. And if that's the case we need to bury the cross. Why? Because the cross calls us sinners before God and makes us look weak to men.

And if our acceptance by God is based on our performance, or if our salvation is tied up in man's affirmation of us--then we should get as far away from the cross as we can.

It's this fear that drives the false teachers in Galatia. They want you to accept the gospel of circumcision, the gospel according to human labor, because they want you to think that they are good looking in the flesh.

Why do they want to look good in the flesh? So that they won't be persecuted for the cross. Paul draws a direct line there. A life shaped by faith in the cross is not a life that is well received by the world.

I remember when I was in college some friends and I road tripped to Yosemite National Park. The campground we were going to stay at was at the foot of El Capitan--the massive rock wall which drew elite rock climbers from around the world. Because it was a highly sought after campground, they took no reservations. But we were cheap, and camping was cheaper than a hotel. So we arrived sometime in the middle of the night, and camped out. In the morning, we were given a spot and we set up our tent. Our tent was the kind of tent you buy at Costco. It not only fit the five of us, it could have fit fifteen of us. But as soon as we had set it up we looked around and realized a crowd had gathered to watch us. It was only then, amidst snickers and stares, did we realize that this campground was not a Costco campground. It was filled with those world class climbers, all of whom had small, sleek tents, built with the technology they would need to camp out on the face of El Capitan itself.

While we were humiliated. We looked silly.

Brothers and sisters, the way the people think about the cross today is silly. But they do not think the cross is silly. It is non-offensive. It is emptied of meaning. This was not the case in Paul's day and age. The Latin word *crux*, which means cross, was as culturally inappropriate and offensive as the f-word might be in our own world. It was not fit for civilized society. It was a sign of shame, corruption, debased desires and social blight. Cicero, who wrote even before the birth of Jesus, wrote, "Let the very name of the cross be far away not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes, and his ears."

In fact, one of the earliest depictions of the cross was not found at the local Claire's Jewelry store, but instead depicted a person on their knees before a cross, on which was hung a man with the head of a donkey. The author captioned the piece as this: "Alexamenos worships his God."

The cross presented in scripture is utter folly to the world. It stands against everything this world holds dear. It presents weakness as strength, self-denial as self-gratification, restraint as rejoicing, generosity as gain, faith as sight, the invisible as the eternal and the crucified, maligned, mocked, spat upon and rejected man on the cross as the King of the whole world.

Paul didn't say it here, but he said it to the Corinthians, to the world the cross is the fragrance of death. Our world has chosen to make the cross mean nothing in order that it might not mean something. But if we align ourselves with this cross, we align ourselves with the man of the cross. We put up our tent, and we suffer the stares and the stabs of those around us.

If these men could make following Jesus about looking like upright law abiding citizens--then the cross and its weakness could be avoided. But the cross cannot be avoided. And while you may avoid the persecution of the cross in this life, you cannot long avoid the judgement of it. Time moves forward and it moves forward to the day in which we stand before the man of the cross--a man who didn't stay there, a man who rose again, and a man who is coming to judge the world. Avoid him now if you want, but one day you will stand before him.

These men preached circumcision in hopes of avoiding the folly of the cross--but they also did so in hopes of gaining the comfort of the crowds. That's what Paul says in verse 13. Here, it's probably the conscience of these men which Paul is speaking of. Deep in their heart, they know they don't match up to God's standard of righteousness. And instead of turning to the cross for comfort they turn to the crowds. They buy the age-old idea that still remains today: "safety in numbers."

If they could convince enough people they are right—then they will feel right. But you will not be saved by what other people think of you. There is no safety in numbers. There is no confidence in numbers.

But the cross points us to where we might find all of that. And that's when the stink of what the cross says about us becomes the sweet aroma of what the cross says about the God who set out to save us.

Paul says this in **2 Corinthians 2:15-17**, "For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ."

We have two choices when confronted with the cross—we can either doubt it and spend our lives trying to avoid it—or we can believe it and hide the whole of our life inside of it.

For Paul, the cross is his greatest glory. Here's our third point: **Look at the glory of the cross.**

Here's how Paul views the cross: **Galatians 6:15-16**, "But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

If we view life, happiness, respect, success and comfort through the eyes of the world--the cross is something to be avoided. But for Paul, the whole of his life is not to avoid the cross--but to make sure he boasts in nothing but the cross!

The grammar here is emphatic. Paul uses a tense that is only used 60 times in the New Testament. He says, "far be it from me," which carries the weight of saying, "may it never be," or as the King James Version translates it, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."

I love that language: "God forbid." Brothers and sisters, what kind of "God forbid" prayers do you offer in life? At the bottom of your prayers at the bottom of your pleadings--what are you asking God to withhold from you?

It is not wrong to pray that God would withhold disease, death and danger. Godly men and women have prayed those prayers often. And yet, when we pray those prayers, and if they go unanswered--have you lost your hope? Is God's hope to you only in that he would keep you from worldly lack and suffering in this world?

I want you to hear me clearly, God cares about you. Suffering and sin are not part of God's perfect world. One day, he will damn all suffering and sin, all pain and tears to Hell. Do not think that God likes suffering or that he enjoys making a Christian's life as miserable as possible.

Nothing could be further from the truth. You are right and good to pray to God that he might spare you from such things. And yet because he is after your joy, it is sometimes in his kind care to afflict us in such a way where we are forced to rejoice and to enjoy what is won for us in Jesus and that alone. When the glory of the world is far from the Christian, our only comfort is Christ—and that's Paul's whole point.

Paul's greatest concern is not avoiding suffering in this world. His greatest concern is that he might avoid suffering in this world and in so doing miss out on the Savior of the world. His prayer is "Let discomfort of any kind befall me--only never let me lose the comfort I have in Jesus."

How would your prayer life be different if we prayed like that? How would our attitudes change in the face of adversity if we took such a stance? What kind of invincible joy would come if we pray as Job did, "Though he slay me, I will hope in him."

As one of my wife's favorite artists puts it: "You take this world, it's joys and it's fleeting pleasures. But give us Jesus, our future hope and our greatest treasure."

This is how Paul views the cross. I pray it is how I view the cross. And it is this cross-eyed life that fits us to understand the tension we face on this side of glory.

Paul says, "far be it to boast in anything except the cross, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

The cross divides. To be alive in Christ, is to be crucified to the world. What does that mean? Well, remember how shameful and abase the cross was to the world--that's the way Paul looks at the world and how the world looks at Paul. Paul expects the world to see his hope, his life, and his joy as worthless, pitiable and miserable.

William Shakespeare's Sonnet 29 captures something like this. He opens saying, "When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes, I all alone beweep my outcast state." He acknowledges that the world views him with disgrace. He begins to be tempted to change this--he wants to be like one "rich in hope," featured like others possessing many friends. But then he remembers why he's such an outcast: because of his love for his lover. Turning from the scornful gaze of his critics he gazes on his lover, "Happily, I think on you, and then my state...like a bird at day arising...sings at hymns at heaven's gate. For your sweet love remembered, such wealth brings, that then I scorn to change my state with kings."

In other words, when life is hard, and he feels like he's missing out--he remembers what he has in his lover and he wouldn't exchange his life with the world's wealthiest king. Why? Because the riches of his lover, and the joy of being with her are worth it.

Shakespeare's language, and our longing for such a love as this are at the heart of Paul's cross-eyed vision. He is fine if his love for Jesus makes him look less--because his glory and his boast is in the cross which confirms all of it. He is less. He is a sinner. He couldn't do it. But Jesus loved him and gave himself up for him anyway.

And now, those worldly markers: circumcision, uncircumcision, rich, poor, educated, uneducated, single, married, kids, no kids, home-owner, renter none of those are anything--because he is a new creation.

Those things cannot give us life--but Jesus has. The cross makes us new not by conforming our external life to the standard of life in the world, but by giving us new life according to the standard of the God who made the world.

This is Paul's hope--and look in closing at how we ought to view it as well: **Look at the Life of the Cross.**

Galatians 6:16-18, "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God. From henceforth let no man trouble me: for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen."

"Listen," says Paul, "This world will test your peace." This world will examine your hope at every corner. If your hope is in your beauty, you will age and it will be tested. If your peace is in your health, it will fail. If mercy lies in the hope of your friends forgiving you--they may move away or die before you ever get that. But if you walk according to this rule--this rule of the cross--this standard of life we have by grace through faith in Christ alone--the rule of faith which was the heart of Abraham's promise and the hope of all God's people both Jew and Gentile--you have peace and you have mercy.

If you want it, here it is. Earlier, Paul warned false teachers of preaching any other gospel. But here, Paul warns believers of walking with any other gospel. No cross, no confidence. No Jesus, no peace. No faith, no mercy. But here it is--walk in it. Trust that it has won you to God.

Wear it, and love it. Wear it and know the runways of this world might never accept it. Wear it and know it will be seen not as diamonds but as despised. Wear it and know it will not bring you in the multitude of many friends--but like Paul your body may be marked by the wounds of persecution. But wear it and know that this, this is your life.

This is your hope. And nothing else in this world can touch it. Learn to walk with such a humble hope in a badge not of this world. Believe that those who walk with the limp of grace will one day leap with resurrected legs.

Look at the cross and see it for yourself. And boast in it. Glory in it.

What does the world see in you? And what do you see in the cross?

I want to close by reading two verses from an old hymn--I pray it would shape our lives and frame our hope:

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand;
The shadow of a mighty rock
Within a weary land...

Upon the cross of Jesus
Mine eyes at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffer'd there for me;
And from my stricken heart, with tears
Two wonders I confess:
The wonders of redeeming love,
And my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, your shadow
For my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than

The sunshine of his face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain or loss;
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.