

**Title: The One Thing That Matters****[Slide 1]****Text: Galatians 6:14-18****One Boast****Angela's Story:**

It's something we experience every day. It comes –always unexpected and mostly unwanted. It's called *chaos*. So just what is this thing called *chaos*?

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*Chaos: When meaningful predictions cannot be made; the system appears to be random.*

**[Slide 3]**

Of all the chaotic things that happen in our world, none is more terrifying than a bolt of lightning. A lightning bolt is a spark – a very big spark. It can be up to 5 miles long and carry up to 100 million volts of electricity. As it travels through the atmosphere, it heats the air to 52,000 F.

A woman named Angela is featured on a National Weather Service webpage that tells what happens when you get struck by lightning. Angela has been struck *three times*.

- The first time was in Oak Ridge, TN, back in 1995. The lightning came through a window while she was walking through her living room. It hit her in the stomach, burned her arm and blew a hole in her shirt sleeve. Then it went on to fry the family TV.
- 10 years later lightning struck Angela again – this time in Flagstaff, AZ. She was on a landline phone and suffered a ruptured ear drum. In fact, most people who are injured by lightning are *inside a building, talking on a landline phone* when they are struck.
- Two years later she got hit in her right hearing aid. That strike resulted in tinnitus and some serious PTSD. Talk about chaos!

The chances of being struck by lightning are actually very low – 1:12000 over the course of your lifetime, unless you're the Angela of the NWS website! But we experience chaos in a host of other ways. It may be a health emergency that comes with no warning and upends our world. It may be a sudden loss or betrayal. It may be a pink slip that sends us into the chaos of unemployment and financial catastrophe. Whatever the case, we find ourselves in a situation where "meaningful predictions cannot be made; the system appears to be random." Chaos.

### **The Cross:**

In the deepest spiritual sense, *chaos* is the *anti-creation* force that opposes God and His Creation. It is the force conquered by God when He spoke the world into existence. It is the force conquered by Jesus when He rebuked the wind and calmed the storm. It is the last enemy that King Jesus will defeat when He establishes His rule in His world.

Paul had at one time been swept up into the chaos of this world. Trying to tame what he perceived as the evil and chaos of the Christians in Jerusalem, he had become a monster, spewing hate and dragging innocent people off to prison or death. But then he personally met the Messiah he had opposed.

This Jesus *had not gone to war against chaos and evil*. Instead, He had done the unthinkable: He had allowed the lightning bolt of all of this world's chaos and evil to land upon Himself as He hung on the cross. Just as a lightning bolt is dissipated once it goes to ground, in the same way, Jesus neutered the power of chaos and evil, sin and death, by drawing its strike to Himself and taking it to ground. That is why Paul says he has learned to boast and trust in nothing other than Jesus' Cross. The world, and all its chaos, is dead to him – has no power to hurt or destroy him. Jesus took the full brunt of its strike.

### **[Slide 4]**

*Galatians 6:14 NIV*

*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.*

### **[Slide 5]**

On January 21, 2014 a massive lightning bolt struck the statue of Christ the Redeemer that stands over Rio de Janeiro. Paul would have appreciated the photograph of the lightning strike. It pictures what Jesus alone could do to put to an end the rule of chaos and evil in God's good world.

### **One Boast:**

Like Paul, you and I live in a world filled with spiritual and relational chaos. Like Paul, we will feel a powerful temptation to engage the chaos. We will want to have the last word in an argument. We will want to pass judgment on the "evil doer." We will want to fight back, be the victim, defend ourselves. We will, in short, want to *boast* in what we can do, in our strength and godliness.

Paul tells us to take the other path. He challenges us to join Jesus in dying to the brokenness of this world. He reminds us that the evil of this world shot its wad when it landed with full force on Jesus as He died on the cross. There is *nothing* we can do to improve upon Jesus' victory! There is but *one boast: the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

### **One Reality**

#### **New Creation:**

So what does a world freed from chaos look like?

Paul gives us a glimpse in the verse that follows:

#### **[Slide 6]**

*Galatians 6:15 NIV*

*Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.*

The old battles over religious identity markers are part of that chaos-filled world. They were only ever meant to be temporary measures to help God's People find their way. But now God has defeated evil and chaos at its very core. Thus, no more need for "half measures." The New Creation has come!

Writing to the Christians in Corinth he puts it this way:

**[Slide 7]**

*2 Corinthians 5:17 NIV*

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!*

**New Creation in the “Here and Now”**

Did you ever remodel some part of your house while you were still living in it? Maybe you decided to repaint the living room, put in new flooring or remodeled the kitchen? If so, you know what it’s like to live somewhere in between the old and the new. There are plenty of reminders of what the house *used to look like*. But you’ve left that past behind. The old carpet is already on its way to the dump. That dingy paint is thankfully under a fresh coat of paint. New cabinets are sitting in their boxes, waiting to be installed.

This is the picture that Paul paints for us when he talks about *New Creation*. Because Jesus died on the cross for us and conquered Death when He rose again, the old world around us no longer owns us. It is no longer our sole reality. God has begun the remodeling, the re-creating of His Creation.

**One Reality:**

Paul says: Make God’s New Creation your One Reality. Live *that* story every day, because *that is who you are*. *You are part of God’s New Creation*. Don’t get swept up in the chaos of this old world. Remember, every time you hear the rumble of thunder that the lightning bolt of evil and death, hatred and injustice fell on Jesus for the final time.

When we are attacked or insulted, we can let the hurt go *through us to Jesus*. He is our lightning rod. We do not have to respond in kind, raining down our own thunderbolts of anger and rejection on others. Let evil go *to ground in Jesus*. Be grounded in Him. That is our new reality.

**One Identity****Last words:**

Paul’s last words in his letter to the Galatians affirm our *one new identity*.

**[Slide 8]**

*Galatians 6:16 NIV*

*Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God.*

Who are we? Nothing less than “the Israel of God.” We are part of God’s New Creation family. We are part of the people that He has brought to new life so that we can join Him in restoring His world.

The old way of understanding what it meant to be part of God’s Family required accommodating racial and ethnic divisions – all part of the chaos that contaminates our world to this day. But those divisions *went to ground* along with all of the evil and chaos of this world when Jesus died for us. Now the entire human race is welcomed into God’s Family.

Now we all can experience God’s *peace and mercy* – the hallmarks of His New Creation.

**The marks of Jesus:**

Paul goes on to make a very personal statement about the reality of living as part of God’s New Creation in this old world:

**[Slide 9]**

*Galatians 6:17 NIV*

*From now on, let no one cause me trouble, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*

Paul endured the hatred and chaos of his birth culture. His back was covered with the scars of numerous whippings. But for him, those scars were places where the lightning strikes of evil went through him and into Jesus. They were actually “the marks of Jesus.” No self-pity here. No lust for revenge. He bore these marks with pride.

You and I are called to do the same when evil strikes us. Make no mistake: hurt people hurt people. Evil words and actions leave a mark! But when we let that hurt and the evil behind it go to the Cross, then the scar becomes “the marks of Jesus.” No self-pity. No revenge. Just a very real reminder

that God has conquered evil once and for all. We need never again get swept up in its vortex.

### **One Identity:**

Your identity is what allows you to make your mark on the world. Every day you will choose whether to embrace the New Identity that Jesus gives you through His Spirit living in you, or to go back to the old way of thinking and acting. What you choose is what you will live. And how you live will determine what mark you leave. Will it be the marks of God's New Creation? Or will it be the old scars of chaos and evil – trading lightning bolts in a never-ending thunderstorm of strife and revenge?

Paul opens the door to God's New World, inviting each and every one of us to take the journey into God's New Creation. When we do, then we will experience the blessing with which he signs off:

### **[Slide 10]**

*Galatians 6:18 NIV*

*The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers and sisters. Amen.*

### **[Slide 11]**

I can't think of a better way to make my mark on the world.