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Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: 1 Corinthians 13:4
Title of sermon: Love is No Bragger
Series: What Matters Most - #4

1 Cor. 13:4: ⁴Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

If you would, turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 Corinthians chapter 13. We've started this series, and we are just going to slowly make our way through this text, asking the question, What does love look like? Paul is writing to this church that was beyond imagination gifted, and fractured in the most unbelievable way. Kind of like our national scene -- and it seems to me a lot like churches. And now, I want to show you the most excellent way, where the title of the series, What Matters Most, comes from. Verse one, he says, "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I'm only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have faith that can move mountains, but I don't know how to love people, I'm nothing. And if I give all that I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames but have not loves, I gain nothing."

So, what does love look like? Well, love is patient. It's kind. And tonight, we want to focus on this line. "It does not envy, it does not boast, and it is not proud." There's a story -- it's kind of a story built off of the Scriptures of three gentlemen who had all experienced a healing by Jesus Christ. They had been healed of blindness. And they decided, because of their unity in Christ and the experience that they had had of healing, that they wanted to come together and have a conference and kind of gather together and strengthen their friendship with each other, and so, these three individuals came together. The first one, Bartemaeus, started, and they wanted to have testimonies of how they'd been healed, because testimonies always build up and encourage. And so, Bartemaeus started this off, and he said, "Oh yes, I was healed. I was outside the city of Jericho, and I cried out, 'Son of David, have mercy on me!' Jesus came up to me, and He said, 'What is it that you want?'" And -- kind of like, "Jesus, take a look at me!" "But, I said, 'Might you help me, find mercy on me, that I might see?' Jesus looked at me, and He said, 'Go your way. Your faith has made you well.' I immediately, instantaneously," Bartemaeus said, "began to see. I've come to the conclusion that if you have faith in Christ, He can heal your blind eyes."

Well, the other two guys were a little -- not quite as excited about it as Bartemaeus was, because -- well, the next guy got up, and he goes, "Well, I too -- I was a blind man, and I came up to Jesus. But -- my story is different. You see, Jesus -- He spat in my eyes. I thought it was kind of disgusting, but He was the Rabbi. I mean, it's like -- you know, so He wants to spit in my eyes. And then He touched my eyes with my hands, but -- unlike Bartemaeus, my healing wasn't instantaneous. In fact, when I opened my eyes, I began to see people, and they looked like trees. To be quite honest with you, I was a little discouraged, because I thought -- 'I'm only partway healed.' But Jesus came back, and He repeated the same thing, and then I could see everything. You see, I've come to the conclusion that Jesus heals men. He does. He heals blind people. But the way He does it is that He spits in their eyes, and it's always two stages."

Well, the third guy gets up. And he says, "Well, my story's a little different than that. Jesus used His saliva, but, strangely, Jesus was there, and they told me about this. I could hear what He was doing. He put together some mud, and He spit into the mud. Now, I gotta tell ya -- the next thing He did kind of offended me, but He's Jesus! I'm gonna let Him do what He wants to do. And He took that mud, and He packed it onto my face." See, this is before facials were popular. "And He packed it in there, and it was the strangest thing. And He kind of moved it around, and then He said, 'I want you to go to a pool, and I want

you to bathe in the pool of Siloam. I want you to bathe in there and I want you to clean all the mud out. And as soon as I went to the holy water, I could see. I've come to the conviction that Jesus can heal you in the application of mud and holy water."

By the end of the conference, these three guys, they weren't speaking to each other at all. In fact, they began three separate denominations. It was tragic. The first denomination was the Spitites. The second was the Mudites, and the third was the Bartemites. They all had separate sacraments. I mean -- they do. Sacraments are things that are holy in a church, and for the Spitites -- well, it was saliva. It was a strange church to go to, but they would spit in their hands, and they would rub their face, and it was kind of like a holy cleansing. Well, the Mudites, it was even worse. When you came in to the church, they had a pile of mud out there and you grabbed it. It was a part of their liturgy -- strangest church in the world, but it grew all over the place. And the Bartemites, well, they just -- as long as they were connected to Bartemaues, they felt like they were holy.

It's a terribly apocryphal story if it wasn't so tragically lived a thousand times over. It's lived every day -- of people who have gathered, and their experiences with Christ are very different, and out of that, they make a church, they make a doctrine, they make a policy. And the next thing you know, they have a denomination. And the denomination is over a certain practice of foot-washing, a certain way you do foot-washing, a certain way you take communion, and -- church history is replete with stories just like this. It's a conference that tragically leads to disunity. And that's the story of the church in many ways. If you go around the United States of America and all around the world, there are 125 different or separate baptistic denominations. At one point, there was one. If you go to Cody, Wyoming, there was a Baptist church. Now there are eight. Probably since I've left, a few of them have died, and probably by now, five or six more have split off. Now, if Cody was the size of LA, I'd say that's not a bad thing. Church is growing. I don't know what Cody is, but -- you know, you can search on Google -- it's probably only about 15-18 thousand, something like that. In the summertime, it's much bigger. They don't speak to each other. I've gone and probably been in most of those churches. That used to be a region that I traveled in, and I've met with elders in every one of those churches, and each of the churches -- "Oh, my best friend goes to that church, but we don't speak anymore." Huh.

See, Paul is writing to a church, and he's writing to one that is experiencing the Spitites, the Mudites, and the Bartemites. Read back in 1 Corinthians one -- "Some were Apollos, we -- Apollos is our teacher, he's our leader!" "Oh, the Apostle Paul!" And then the really spiritual ones, because you've got to always pull Jesus in there -- "No, we're of Jesus." And people are forever reclassifying themselves, tragically to separate themselves and to distinguish themselves as some ways more elite. And you can see it today. It's as common today as anything. What used to be a common word used is no longer, it's gotten rid of, because it's old hat. The fact is, Paul is writing to this group, and he says that there is a church, a community of believers, and that life is to be shared. When people hear that, there are oftentimes a couple of responses to hear that we are going to share in our life together. We're going to share in communion together. We're going to experience the body together. And for those who have had a sordid past -- a difficult past, a painful past -- they hear the biblical community and it just rises up within them, almost kind of a natural knee-jerk reaction, because they haven't experienced the church quite that way. They've experienced the church as something that maybe has wounded them.

Others, when they hear the idea of community get a little weird and feared, and, you know, kind of freaked out, because they think that we're gonna start asking everyone to sell all that you have, go build a commune down in Scio and, you know, share everything in common. When I was a kid, a high school sponsor from our church, he left the church and he joined a commune in another state, and he would periodically come back, and -- I mean, it was weird. It was kind of scary, to be honest with you. He couldn't own anything, particularly. He had to ask for permission to ever come back and see Mom and

Dad. Now, this is a grown man with a wife and multiple kids, so it's not -- we're not talking about a 16-year-old, we're talking about a 40- and a 45-year-old. And some people, when they drive through the Amish country, they say, "Well man, if that's biblical community, I don't want any!" And so, whenever we hear these comments or these concepts of biblical community that's a shared life, like Paul prays in Ephesians 3, "I pray that you together would understand the height and the depth and the breadth of the love of Christ," sometimes people react very defensively. And sometimes, fearfully. But the reality is -- we cannot deny that God has called the church to be together. He has. Anyone that denies that, anyone that denies that the church is the gathered body of Christ and it should gather on a regular basis, and share in things like communion, and do things like a discipleship -- anyone that denies that simply has not read the Bible. You can't -- you cannot come to any conclusion when you read the book of Ephesians, when you read Colossians, when you read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, when you read the Corinthian books. There is a gathering of the church, there is a discipline within the church, there is a disciple-making in the church. But we realize when we come to the church here in Corinth that we need more than spiritual gifts to hold us together. We do. This is one of the most unbelievably gifted churches. If you were to take all of the churches in the New Testament, I think Paul would argue this is probably the most spiritually gifted church that he knows of. And he documents it. He documents it all the way through the book. But he also recognizes that you can have all the spiritual gifts in the world and that's not gonna hold you together. They were doing some of the strangest things in the world. They were suing each other. There were some who were just immoral. They were looking down upon each other. They had created a kind of a caste or a class system within their own church. Spiritual gifts were all over the place, but it was kind of turning the worship service into a crazy kind of chaotic kind of situation. And Paul was trying to tell them, "You need something more." And that's why he writes chapter 13.

There are 15 phrases in this text, and we've been slowly moving our way through them. And tonight we want to look at another thing that Paul says, What does love look like? In this one, he's going to look at it in the negative. And he's going to say, if you allow these three things -- envy, boasting, and puffed-up arrogance -- if you allow them, they're going to disqualify all the beautiful gifting that is in this church. When I look around at our church, I think it's phenomenally gifted. There's a generosity in our church that staggers me. It does. Every year I look at what our church generates, I look at the sacrifice and the mission work and the missionaries that we support, and as much as I see all of that and I'm thrilled, I realize that it can all be wiped out if we don't get a handle on this text. We can be the most generous church, we can be the most giving, we can be the most gifted -- we can have a vision that will reach the world for Christ, but if we don't know how to love the person sitting in front of us -- not put up with them, not -- you know, "Hey, good to see ya" -- love them. And love the ones that tick you off, too. If we don't know how to do that, all of our gifting gets thrown out the window.

And so, Paul talks to them, and he says, "You have to get some things straight. Number one, you cannot let envy touch your heart." What is envy? Well, it's the sin of comparison. It's that little thing that creeps in, and it's terrible, and it begins to kind of compare your life, and it looks at something that somebody has -- can be a beautiful wife and glorious children, and it can be a lavish home, it can be a marvelous business. It can be something as simple but profound as health. But it's looking at somebody else and having some form of comparison which leads to either jealousy or outright resentment. It seems so easy. It comes. But it's insidious, because it comes into us and it begins just on the very simple plane of just comparing your life to somebody else. And it might be as simple as, "Well, God -- we raised our kids in the church. Why are mine all divorced and that person who attended church fifty percent of the time, their kids are all missionaries. What's up with that garbage?" And it begins as a comparison and it moves to kind of an indictment, but almost always it finishes with an accusation -- "God, why'd you let me down?"

There's a story -- it's a legend that was told about the devil who was crossing a Libyan desert one time, and he came across some people trying to tempt a holy hermit to sin. They were coming, and it was kind of

sport to them to try and get to this hermit, who had committed his life to holiness and separation. And they found him out there in the middle of the desert, and so -- they were tempting him with all kinds of lavish things -- the lust of the eyes. He stood up within that just -- he wasn't even moved by it. They were a little frustrated, so they took another angle at him. Because his righteousness kind of indicted them. And so, they figured, if we can get this guy to sin it's gonna make us feel better about ourselves. People do that all the time. So they went after him in another way, and they kept trying these different ways. Well, the devil came and whispered in their ears, "He's a holy man. And sometimes you have to do special things to reach a holy man." They went up to him and they said, "Sir -- we just wanted to let you know that your best friend just made bishop of Alexandria. We thought you should be the first to know." And the devil could see the jealousy that flushed through his face, and the next thing you know, this holy hermit was filled with rage. Why? Just the simple mention that his good friend had been promoted.

See, that's what envy does. It gets in-between friends. It gets in-between families, families that have been attending the church for 20 years together. And all of a sudden something happens and we get to a certain stage in life, and whatever it is -- how our kids turn out, where we're living, how we're gonna retire -- it doesn't matter. And the devil begins to get in and begins to work. I think in some ways, Facebook has been the greatest aid to sin in the world in that way. I cannot tell you how many times people have gone on and said, "Well, do you know that they're taking their fifth vacation this year?" "Really. Who's counting? You?" "Well, I don't know, man. I'll tell you what -- they take so many vacations. Do they ever stay at home?" And it just goes on and on. And they'll look at the person, and they just bought a new house. And all of a sudden, that wife, who just saw that her friend bought a new house, goes home, she's furious at her husband because, it's a Monday night, and they're going to the Dave Ramsey class. And all of a sudden, she doesn't want to go! And he's like, "Last week you were all excited about going to Dave Ramsey! Why don't you want to go?" "I'm sick of Dave Ramsey. Who said Dave Ramsey's right? I mean, Dave Ramsey says, 'Cut up your credit cards,' and so-and-so, they're godly, and our pastor -- have you ever seen our pastor's wallet? The guy has four credit cards! And Dave Ramsey -- our pastor doesn't listen to him. Why do we have to?"

Where did that all start? It's turned into a full-fledged brawl on a Monday night and I got drug into the battle! Why? Because she was looking at Facebook and her friend bought a house, and she was mad. You say, "That doesn't happen." Can I just tell you the names -- no, I won't tell you the names. Yes, it happens all the time. Why? Because that's what the devil wants to do -- he wants to get in, and he wants to divide. And he doesn't even have to throw a bomb of some kind of doctrinal problem. All he has to throw in is a vacation, or a house, or a grandma showing off her little baby, and she's all proud of her baby, and somebody looks on there and she's furious at God, because her daughter is infertile. And if she was honest about it, she would tell you she took her phone and she threw it across the room. You can be the most gifted person in the world, but if you let envy take root in your soul, it can ruin your best friends. It can ruin a church -- it did here. But envy also is a liar. Have you ever noticed -- envy only compares your life to somebody who has one area of their life in your mind better. It never asks you for the full exchange -- it just simply says, "Wouldn't you like to have her vacations? Wouldn't you like to have his job? Wouldn't you love to have his paycheck?" What it doesn't ask you is, "Would you like to have her cancer also? Would you like to have her MS?" See, that's the root, and that's the evil of envy, is because it never compares the totality of a person's life. It just compares one area. And it gets inside of you, and the next thing you know, you hate someone.

Love does not envy. And it does not boast. Envy is wanting something that somebody else has. Boasting is being proud and arrogant of what you have. It's really just the other side of the coin. It's taking credit and it's telling people somehow that what I have is really the product of my good thinking. It seems to me that in our culture -- especially with talk radio -- is that boasting has become a virtue. Where people just tell you all the time why they are the brightest, the best, the most brilliant -- they should be the ones we lead all

the time with our credentials and we're forever setting people up. It seems like to me our culture is kind of almost built on the fact that the way we exemplify confidence is that we just applaud the person's great prowess. And the next thing you know, we're believing our own press. Oh, it can get into the church, and we start boasting about -- "Let me tell ya, did you see how many 'likes' I got on my Facebook? Did you see how many books I sold? I mean, I just -- it went out last week, and -- I can't believe it, but they're already asking for the next 50,000 copies!" And it's almost like boasting has become something that we kind of consider natural, and maybe even needed. I don't think God is asking us to be apologetic. I don't think God is telling you for a moment that -- "Well, tell you what, you should be embarrassed that you were born in the United States," or "You should be embarrassed, you should feel guilty that you live here." I don't think that false humility in that sense is what God is asking. He just simply says that when it gets into the body of Christ, boasting is destructive. It's a way of elevating yourself, but it's also a way of denying something very important.

God says we're saved by grace, and that not of ourselves. It is a free gift of God so that no one should boast. You see, when it comes to God, boasting makes no sense. It doesn't. I didn't save myself. I wasn't the one who gave me certain gifts, and -- God gave you certain gifts, and -- you weren't the one who said, "You know what, God? I'm gonna choose this gift, and I'm gonna use it this way, and it's gonna be to the glory of God AND to the benefit of me." None of that makes sense. Boasting really doesn't make sense, because it's really trying to suggest -- "God, I saved myself," or "I came to my conclusion, or the conclusion that trusting you is a wise thing -- but that was my decision" -- and the Scripture seems to be terribly obvious. In fact, the only boasting that Paul seems to exemplify, or lift up is what? Boasting of his weakness. "I've discovered," Paul says, "that when I boast of my weakness I actually benefit by focusing on the strength of God. In fact, when I am aware of my weakness it's then I am most aware of God's strength."

Love doesn't boast. I think over the last four years, one of the gentlemen that I've watched a lot -- I've really appreciated this guy, ever since he was Surgeon General. Ben Carson to me is an exemplary individual -- brilliant, yes. He's a brilliant surgeon. He was an acclaimed and a brilliant Surgeon General. And he served in the previous presidency -- Secretary of Housing. I thought over the last four years there were multiple times he could have utilized his incredible wisdom, strength, his background, to silence a lot of people. I never saw him do that. What I saw him do is, he spoke well of all sides. He spoke the truth. He represented the truth well. He was always willing to engage in dialog. But when he spoke, he never attempted to use his brilliance in a way to shame and silence another. See, that's what boasting does. It elevates yourself at the expense of another person. The way you can do it is through your achievements, through things that maybe God has even given you. I've watched Ben, and he's one of the guys that -- I tell you what, I applaud him. He's probably not perfect -- if you have dirt on him, you can keep it to yourself, because I like really appreciating him. But I've watched him. And I've watched him respect people that he could have easily silenced with his skills and background, and he never did. Paul says that does well in the body of Christ. It's a person who's not about promoting themselves, but seeing the good in other people.

Finally, he says to this group of people -- love is not proud. How is that different than boasting? Boasting is about accomplishment. Pride -- Paul seems to associate it predominantly being proud is maybe in the area of knowledge. If you go back to chapter eight, Paul talks about a person being puffed-up, and what they were puffed-up with is knowledge. They were an individual that was using their knowledge to kind of inflate themselves over another person. A person who's puffed-up is a person who is trying to gain leverage over another person. A person who boasts is trying to distinguish themselves. A person who's puffed-up and proud is a person who's trying to use their knowledge to push another person down. Paul says that when that comes into the church, it begins to create kind of a caste system, where I have the

knowledge, I have the insight. You should listen to me. It becomes a thing of permission. It becomes a thing of authority. And he says it has no place in the church.

This past week, on Monday night, we ended up in the ER with our daughter, and -- it was kind of, you know, scary for a while. It's always scary when you go to the ER room, and she's just writhing in pain, and -- it was just not fun. And I'd signed up for Annie some months ago, this thing called MyChart. It's a pretty cool thing, to be honest with you. It's a little frightening, though, when you start getting the reports of the cat scans and everything that they're doing before a doctor or a nurse ever comes in the door. So, I'm reading down through it -- I understand maybe fifty percent of it. There are whole paragraphs, and I'm like, "Huh -- this is a lot of words. I have no idea what they just said!" The nurse comes in, and she goes, "Let me tell you what's going on." I said, "Man, I already known -- no, save your time, go take care of somebody else. I know she's got two hernias, one's strangulated. We're looking at surgery. We're all good." She kinda looks at me and smiles. She goes, "Oh, you have MyChart, don't you?" And I said, "Yeah. This thing's kinda frightening! It gives me information that I probably feel like I shouldn't have! But I do!" So, the surgeon then comes in. And he goes, "So, I hear you've been reading MyChart." "Yes! Am I in trouble?" He goes, "No." And I said, "Don't worry about it. I only understand fifty percent of it." He goes, "Well, you're doing really well. I think I only understand about forty percent of it."

Time out -- "I think I want to lower mine down to twenty percent. Is that okay?" Now, I don't think he was being falsely humble. I said, "What do you mean?" And he goes, "Well, I don't write all of that stuff. Sometimes they just put all kinds of stuff in there, and it's a lot of fancy stuff, but if you've got two hernias, one strangulated and we're going to surgery, you got what I got." And I looked at him, and it was amazing, because I did not lose one ounce of respect, nor did I question his skill and his brilliance. What I was taken with is his humility. And what I was taken with in that night -- middle of the night, it's one o'clock in the morning, and it's been just a long night -- and I was taken with his care of us, to not walk in the door -- the guy knows more in his pinky about the body than I know in my whole brain. But that wasn't his point that night. His interest was not proving how much he knew versus me. His interest was -- let's take care of your daughter. And I was so struck as to why Paul says, "Don't live with a puffed-up attitude in the body of Christ. Because it takes away from your ability to really communicate your care and love for another person." Because when you're interested in being puffed-up, you're not interested in their pain. You're interested in their perception of you." And I saw a beautiful example of a man who had no interest in making sure I knew how well trained he was. He had no interest in trying to suppress me. He had all the interest in caring for our daughter. And I thought, "Man, God, no wonder why in the body of Christ that is so critical."

Yes, she did have the surgery. Yes, they did a great job. No, she didn't have an infection -- they thought she had one. And yes, she's already walked a half-mile this week. She's doing great. Yeah, she's doing great.

Love is not envious. If envy wants what others have, love celebrates what God has given to them and to you. If boasting takes credit for what you have done, love seeks to elevate God's gift and God's role. If pride, if being puffed-up seeks to elevate yourself, seems to me that love seeks to elevate others. What I do know is that love protects community. It believes in it. As hard as it is sometimes -- love protects community. Why? Because it's a gift from God. It's where we grow. It's where we learn. It's where God does His greatest work. And for God to do His greatest work, we need to learn how to love as well as we can.

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