

GUILT

Guilt and shame, often linked together, really are two very different types of pain. Guilt relates to the wrong choices we make as sinners in a sinful world. It speaks to the fact that, when faced with a moral or immoral action – an ethically honorable decision versus an ethically questionable or clearly wrong one, that we chose the wrong, the immoral, the ungodly, improper one. That when faced with the high road and low road, we chose to the low path – the easy way maybe, the selfish way likely, but ultimately the wrong way.

Shame, on the other hand, relates more to the way we feel about ourselves due to the painful sinful world in which we live. The wrongful or misinterpreted actions of others, the fallen nature of the world, the brokenness of humanity all have their effect on our inner vision of ourselves. Things have happened to and around us that tie knots in our bellies, make us hang our heads in discouragement, or take root inside our minds yielding to turmoil, grief, despair or a sense of unworthiness.

Between tonight and tomorrow's worship services, we're going to consider how our Lord Jesus Christ tackled both of these issues as our loving Redeemer – how He climbed into our world and experienced both guilt and shame so that we can be set free from them.

Tonight, on Maundy Thursday, we consider guilt.

Take a seat with me, if you would, at the table with Jesus. Join the corps of the disciples as Jesus breaks bread and begins to reveal, more fully, His role as the Lamb of God.

Inside, you know that your calling is to be faithful to Jesus – to stand by His side no matter what the cost, no matter what the danger, no matter how it might affect your future. As your teacher and as the Messiah, you know that your life should be molded and shaped by His priorities, His plans, His self-sacrificial love.

But also, deep within, you can't help but think about yourself – your safety, your convenience, your desires, aspirations, goals, dreams. And maybe, just maybe, these don't always coincide with the vision of the One who sits before you. It's been easy to follow Him when these don't conflict – when His calling coincides with your desires.

But when conflict comes – between your reputation and walking in His way, between what you want to say and what He would have you say, between self-indulgence and self-sacrifice – well, you know full well that every day you face moments of decision – when you choose with Him or against Him. And sometimes, sadly, you choose against.

Simon Peter knew it. Bold as He was in His confession of faith, inside He knew that he also wasn't that crazy about putting his life in jeopardy, about persecution, suffering, danger, death. Were those two, the will of Jesus versus Peter's own desire, to be in conflict, the moment of decision would be faced. Peter thought he would be faithful, he thought he would stand strong even when others denied -- but would he? You know the answer.

The rest of the disciples knew the conflict too. In fact, at this very table they were faced with the challenge of pride; and soon they found themselves chattering on about who was the greatest among them. Jesus, the greatest at the table, takes a towel and washes feet, clearly showing that this line of thinking is not consistent with His own Maundy Thursday command to "love one another." But still their minds wander to places they should not go.

Judas, too, is faced with conflict. He must decide whether to walk out that door and share Jesus' location with those who wish to arrest Him, or not? He must choose between the idol of his own self-interest, or the face of the One who had displayed God's love in action.

Every mind, at the table, is abuzz with thoughts and feelings, but even more, with choices and decisions. And every day, some choices are in line with God's will, and others go a different, sinful way.

And then, Jesus speaks the words: "This very night you will all fall away on account of me." "Surely not I," you declare, along with the others. But then the moment of truth comes and the decision you make is quite the opposite of the one you wish you had made. With Peter, you deny. With the others, you forsake. And sometimes, even with Judas, you betray.

Maybe it's a lie. Maybe it's a word of gossip. Maybe it's your temper, your sexual urges, your indifference to spiritual things, your love of frivolity, your desire for material gain, your pride, your selfishness, your apathy toward the needs of others.

And when you face the moment of truth – the moment of decision. Will you go with Jesus, or will you know the guilt of betrayal by doing what you know to be against His will?

“Is it I Lord?”

“Yes, it is you.” For in your weakness, so often, you go with your own sinful pride and choose your own will over God’s. As Paul said in Romans chapter 7

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

But on this Maundy Thursday night, Jesus looks you square in the eye and declares, without flinching, “this is my body, given for you. This is my blood, shed for you.”

In other words, He declares, “I am ready to take up my role as the Lamb of God. For your guilt I will be punished. For your guilt I will shed my blood. For your guilt, I will pay the price. I will offer my very own body. I will shed my very own lifeblood.”

And then, with your evil choices and my evil choices loaded upon His innocent back, the Lamb of God steps out the door of the upper room, of His own accord, and heads out to the Garden of Gethsemane, knowing what will happen there.

And indeed it does.

Soon, the guards arrive, with swords and clubs in their hand. Some have been led by you and me to identify the Lamb of God as the Guilty One. Some watch as you and I forsake the Lamb of God by running away in self-preservation. And still some others see you and me, warming our hands over the fire as a young woman declares: “Aren’t you His disciple?” and we hang our heads in a feigned denial even though He has been so kind to us.

But none of this stops the Lamb. No. None of it. Because He knows us. He knows us full well. But more importantly, He loves us – loves us unconditionally.

So onward He goes.

Before Annas, the former High Priest and father-in-law to the current one.

Gavel Bangs: GUILTY.

Before Caiaphas: the current High Priest.

Gavel Bangs: GUILTY

Before Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor

Gavel Bangs: GUILTY

And Son of God becomes the Lamb of Price who takes your sin upon His pure white coat and offers His life as a ransom.

“Take, eat, this is my body, given for you.” “Take, drink, this is my blood shed for you.”
“I know you – every day in every way. EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY. And I’m still here with open hands bidding you to come and lay your sin on Me.”

The Lamb is always ready to cleanse you. The Lamb is always ready to feed you. The Lamb is always ready to open His home to you free of charge. And He is a gracious Host who never tires of seeing your face, no matter where you have gone.

GUILTY. (Gavel bangs) YES. For you He was.

And God accepted His payment. So you, my friend, are free. Free indeed.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.