

SHAME

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 that we regularly chose the wrong, the immoral, the ungodly, improper one. And last night we saw how our Lord Jesus Christ rescued us from that guilt by becoming the Guilty Lamb of sacrifice. Like the Passover Lamb of the Old Testament, He absorbed our sin and paid the ransom price so that we might be set free.

Guilty. Jesus deals with our guilt and offers us His own body and blood.

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.

Maybe it is pain from childhood. Alcoholism reared its ugly head in your home and weaved its web of anger, embarrassment, conflict, loneliness. You can still smell the stench of a loved one who frequently put down a few too many and wounded you with the reckless abandonment of intoxication.

Or maybe bullying and childhood tauntings made you lower your head in shame. That kid who mocked your idiosyncrasies, laughed at your vulnerabilities, exerted his superior strength, popularity, ability or intelligence to make you look small to your peers. He always got the upper hand, always seemed to get his way, always had some demeaning comment or vile threat to put you down.

Or maybe it was the shameful things that are done in secret – the things we don't talk about aloud but happen behind closed doors. One who was supposed to offer you a haven of safety and love but instead took advantage of your vulnerability and used you as an object. Your innocence was stolen, your childhood tarnished, your days that should have been carefree were instead engraved on your memory because of their horror or maybe blanked out because your

mind was protecting you. Or it could have happened later in life when someone took a relationship too far and stepped beyond what's appropriate with actions that were unwelcome.

Or maybe it has to do with some disfigurement, some disability, some weakness, some defect that made others open their eyes wide and look at you with disdain, with pity, with fear. A limp, a tic, the clothes you wore, athletic awkwardness, poor performance in school, isolation on the playground.

Or maybe it is also connected to the guilt of your past: a choice you made that spun your life in the wrong direction – a crime committed, a relationship mishandled, an addiction that has wrapped its tentacles around your life just as a cancer weaves its venom through a body. Perhaps you saw or did things in a war that have scarred your memory. Perhaps you have left scars on others and you wish you could re-live the moments or take back the words.

Or maybe it's a regret – something you never accomplished that you wanted to. A different choice you wish you had made – something that might have taken your life in a whole different trajectory, but now it's too late. The time has passed.

And you know the voices that chatter on within your head reminding you of the places you've been, the horrors you've seen, the words you have endured, the abuse you have felt.

And you know the baggage that's loaded up within your heart that has sometimes broken and shattered your spirit. The heavy load that you have carried, day after lonely day, as others seem to waltz their way comfortably through life while you are laden with ball and chain.

And you know the knots in your belly that come, as reminders of your pain rear their ugly head as history repeats itself in the way others treat you, in the way you are perceived, in the loneliness you feel (that you cover up so well) but that lurks deep within your spirit almost every moment of every day.

SHAME. It's the horrific consequence of a sinful, fallen, broken world. It's the byproduct of the collective guilt of others mixed with our own proneness to Satan's delusions and devices.

Let's face it, brothers and sisters, all you have to do is turn on the TV for just a few moments and you can see that pain is everywhere around us. There are many perpetrators and there are many victims. There are many who injure and there are many who are injured. And shame has a way of perpetuating itself as the sins of the fathers visit themselves unto the children to the third and fourth generation.

Tonight I had you put a knotted rope around your wrist to symbolize all those knots in your belly, the voices in your head, the baggage that you carry. It's been placed on you to hang there through this worship service as a reminder that not only do you come before God as a guilty sinner, but you also come before God with a history – a history tarnished by sinful people in a sinful, fallen world.

But, my friends, if there is any message that Good Friday offers to us, it is that Jesus didn't just come to carry our sins and bear our guilt – to be the Lamb of Price and to absorb our evil. No. Jesus also came as our brother in-the-flesh to understand what it means to carry crosses, to bear burdens, to endure hardships, scorns, sufferings, pains.

I took tonight's bulletin and I circled words and phrases from the biblical text that described the shaming of the Son of God. Here's what I came up with:

...they testified falsely against Him

...they spit at Him

...they blindfolded him and struck Him and said, "Prophecy"

...the guards took Him and beat Him

...they bound Jesus and led Him away.

...the chief priests accused Him

...Pilate had Jesus flogged and handed Him over to crucifixion

...they put a purple robe on Him and twisted together a crown of thorns while they mockingly shouted, "Hail King of the Jews.

...they struck Him on the head with a staff and spit on Him again

...they fell on their knees and paid mock homage to him

...they shook their heads and said, "So, you who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!

...they mocked him among themselves and said, "He saved others, but he can't save Himself. Let this Christ, this King of Israel come down now from the cross that we may see and believe.

...they heaped insults on Him.

...they cried out “Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down.

Do you hear the clear message from St. Mark about Jesus? If there’s anyone who understands shame it’s the one who was abused like this – who hung fully exposed before mockers and scoffers – who was the ultimate victim, despised and rejected by men.

If there’s anyone who knows how you feel it is the Man of Sorrows from whom men hide their faces, whom we esteemed not.

But even worse, Jesus cries out “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me” showing the entire world that, as the One who bears every sin, He, the Innocent One, is declared guilty by God Himself and experiences the wrath and scorn that sin itself deserves from His own Holy Father. As the hymnwriter put it:

Jesus whelmed in fears unknown,
With our evil left alone,
While no light from heav’n is shown
Hear us Holy Jesus.

So, you see, Jesus doesn’t just come for sinners – He comes for those who are weighed down, broken, beaten, grieving, mourning, scorned, rejected. He comes to gather every manner of pain and to take it to the cross.

And there it will be dealt with by the compassionate God who loves us enough to endure our pain and who was, Himself, powerful enough to blast through our pain and to emerge as the victorious Son of God.

The book of Hebrews puts it this way:

“let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Jesus says to the brokenhearted and wounded, “I know you. I really know you. I’ve been there. And I’m with you now to help you not grow weary and lose heart. Take your pain, and give it to me. Take your wounds and place them in mine. Let me untie your knots. Let me silence your voices. Let me pick up your baggage. Because, you see, I am not just another human who fell victim to the forces of evil and was overcome by them. No. I am the Son of

God who chose, willingly, to identify with you. And I took those wounds so that I could lift them up off of your back and help you to heal.”

Tonight, my friends, I have a trade to make with you. I’m going to pass around a container as a repository for those knots around your arm – those memories in your head – those shameful, past problems, whatever they may be, that burden your spirit.

We’re going to gather them all here, and we’re going to drop them at the foot of the cross.

You’re going to trade it for one of these – a heart made of rope to hang around your neck or on your nightstand, or wherever you choose to put it. It’s also made of rope – because Jesus was human, just like you. But instead of being in knots, it is, formed as it is to remind you of this: Jesus loved you enough to take all your knots upon Himself so that He might help release you from their grip on you. Jesus died so that you might have life and have it abundantly. And Jesus lives, still today, so that His heart might beat within you to strengthen you for your continued journey of faith.

By the way, this cord has also been created from the cord that once wove its way through the sanctuary as a reminder of our oneness as God’s people. Do you remember that Sunday when we each took hold of the rope? You are now linked also to your brothers and sisters in Christ, who also walk with you, and care for you, and pray for you. Because, you see, not only did Jesus bear your burdens and shames – but your brothers and sisters in the faith also stand ready to walk together with you on your journey. In Christ we are united. In Christ our heart beats as one.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.