

“Shame, Cross, and King”
John 19:16b-23a
March 7, 2021
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service
Pastor Nicoletti

We come this morning to the crucifixion of Jesus.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

^{19:16b} So they took Jesus, ¹⁷ and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, and Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Aramaic, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ So the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but rather, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.”

²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his garments and divided them into four parts, one part for each soldier; also his tunic.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let’s pray ...

Lord, our souls long for your salvation,
and so we hope in your word.
We long for your promise,
and we long for your comfort.
Whatever trials and hardships we face,
we do not forget you, but we look for your deliverance.
As we come now to your word,
We ask that in your steadfast love you would give us life,
Strengthen and guide us
so that we can keep the testimonies that have come to us from your lips.
Grant this we ask, for Jesus’s sake. Amen.
[Psalm 119:81-84, 88]

Introduction

Our text this morning picks up right after Pilate delivered Jesus to the soldiers to be crucified.

As we learn from the other gospel writers, Jesus would have at that point received the severe beating that often accompanied capital punishment, and then he goes out bearing his cross, in verse seventeen.

D.A. Carson explains that this refers to the horizontal beam of the cross. The upright beam would already have been fastened in the ground at the place of execution. When Jesus got there, he would have been made to lie on the ground on the horizontal beam he had carried, with his arms outstretched, nailed to the beam, and then the beam would have been hoisted up and fastened to the vertical portion. After that, his feet would have been nailed to the vertical beam as well. [Carson, 608]

Crucifixion was brutal. Carson reminds us of this, writing: it “was so brutal that no Roman citizen could be crucified without the sanction of the Emperor. Stripped naked and beaten to pulpy weakness, the victim could hang in the hot sun for hours, even days. To breathe, it was necessary to push with the legs and pull with the arms to keep the chest cavity open and functioning. Terrible muscle spasms wracked the entire body; but since collapse meant asphyxiation, the strain went on and on.” [Carson, 610]

This is Jesus’s situation by verse eighteen. In verse nineteen we read: “Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It read, ‘Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.’”

It was customary for the charge against the crucified to be written on a tablet or placard, carried before the one condemned or placed around his neck as he marched to the place of crucifixion, where it was then fastened to the cross, as we see here. The use of the local language, the language of the army, and the common language of the empire ensures that all will know the crime of the crucified. [Carson, 610]

So there is Jesus: beaten and bloody, marched out publicly to the place of execution, stripped naked, hung on the cross, exposed for all to see, with a charge of sedition placed over him.

When we think of the events of the crucifixion we often think of the physical pain of Jesus. If we are more theologically-minded, we think of the spiritual pain of Jesus.

But if we stop with those two elements, we miss something. As Carson notes: “In the ancient world, this most terrible of punishments is always associated with shame and horror.” [Carson, 610]

Shame is at the center of the crucifixion. Shame is at the center of this text.

And though we can miss it, the writers of the New Testament did not. When the author of Hebrews mentions the pain of enduring the cross that Jesus went through, the form of suffering he highlights is its shame. [Hebrews 12:2]

Though in these verses here it is not named, shame is central to this text.

But if we are to understand what our text has to say about shame, we first need to ask a few questions to better understand shame.

So, this morning we will ask four questions about shame.

We’ll ask:

- First, what is shame?

- Second, what causes shame?
- Third, what are the world's solutions to shame?
- And fourth, what are Jesus's solutions to shame?

This will require us to draw from a number of different works. But the purpose of it all will be to help us then come back to our text and see more clearly what the crucifixion of Jesus has to say about our shame.

What is Shame?

With that, let's consider our first question: "What is shame?"

We tend to think of guilt and shame as approximately the same thing – we may even use the terms interchangeably. But, while the two are often connected, the distinction between them is crucial.

One way to think about it is that guilt is more legal or conscience-based, whereas shame is more relational. Guilt is about what we do, whereas shame is about how we are treated by others or how we fear we will be treated by others – whether our community will honor and accept us, or reject and exclude us.

Both shame and guilt have objective and subjective aspects. As Richard Winter points out, from a biblical standpoint guilt is an objective reality. He writes: "In a world where there is a God who defines a particular moral order, guilt is not just a feeling; it is a fact – the signal of having done something wrong, of having offended our Creator." [Winter, 90]

Guilt is rooted in the fact that we have broken God's law for us. It has to do with our legal or moral standing.

But shame is about relationships. Shame is about how we are viewed or esteemed by others. Shame is not about legal evaluation but about relational rejection. [Winter, 90; Allender, 67]

And so, while guilt longs for forgiveness, shame longs for acceptance. [Winter, 91]

Shame, Dan Allender writes, "requires the presence of another, in fact or in imagination" [Allender, 61]

It is, he writes, the "awful experience [of being] aware that we are seen as deficient and undesirable by someone whom we [had hoped would] deeply enjoy us." [Allender, 61]

While guilt can be rooted more in internal conviction and shame is rooted more in external relationships, shame can often get more to the core of our being because it is about who we are – we have not just done something undesirable, we are undesirable. [Winter, 90]

And as we've said, shame can have both an objective, social form, and a subjective, internal form.

And the social form of shame is especially relevant for our text this morning.

Because our text takes place in an honor/shame culture – in two honor/shame cultures actually ... two cultures where social honor and social shame were important in ways that we, as modern individualistic Westerners, will struggle to appreciate. [Crouch, Mackie]

In the ancient world, one's acceptance and esteem by one's peers, family, social class, city, and so on, was deeply important and played a crucial role in one's self-understanding and one's understanding of their human value. [Mackie]

Western culture is different. Though some have argued that that might be changing.

In a 2016 op-ed, David Brooks argued that the moral relativism that used to dominate college campuses a few decades ago has been replaced with a new, strict morality. "Many people carefully guard their words," he writes, "afraid they might transgress one of the norms that have come into existence. Those accused of incorrect thought face ruinous consequences. When a moral crusade spreads across campus, many students feel compelled to post in support of it on Facebook within minutes. If they do not post, they will be noticed and condemned."

The new morality is not based in the typical Western concept of guilt, but the more traditional concept of shame. What people fear most is not guilt, but shameful exclusion and rejection by their peers and institutions.

And this pattern is not limited to the secular world or to college campuses. In a more recent article David French writes about the prevalence of honor/shame dynamics in conservative circles and in the American evangelical church.

And Andy Crouch described this tendency back in 2015, in an article in which he argued that a new form of honor/shame culture was developing in postmodern America – what he called a "fame-shame" dynamic.

In any case, our culture is increasingly fixated on the question of who should be given social esteem, and who should have it taken away – who deserves honor or fame, and who deserves shame.

That is the dynamic of social shame.

But as we said, shame is not limited to the external, social realm, but it is an internal reality as well. But how can this be if shame is all about relationships?

Well, as Richard Winter points out, our hearts were built to internalize dynamics of shame from those around us, that they might testify to our hearts about right and wrong.

He puts it like this: "Imagine your conscience is like a smoke detector with two different tones that warn you when something is wrong and corrective action needs to be taken. It is what I will call a 'guilt and shame detector.' Both guilt and shame are built-in systems of self-evaluation arising from our consciences. Most people have not learned to discriminate between the two and so hear only one tone. But when our consciences are functioning correctly, we can learn to recognize two separate tones, one for guilt and one for shame. Sometimes they go off together; sometimes they are triggered separately. It is very important to know the difference because the remedy is different for each." [Winter, 89-90]

Now, if our communities perfectly taught and promoted the law of God, and we perfectly perceived their promotion of God's law, then our internal guilt-alarm and shame-alarm would always line up. But in a fallen world, they often do not. We can feel shame when we are not guilty of anything. Or we can fail to feel shame when we are guilty.

Yet even when our guilt and shame detectors are aligned, they are indicating different things. Our guilt indicates a violation of God's law. But our shame indicates the experience of rejection or the fear of rejection. And that internalized shame – even in just the fear of rejection – can be a powerful force in our hearts and minds.

When I was in college, one musician I used to listen to had a song that was titled: “When They Really Get to Know You, They Will Run.” [Pedro the Lion] *That* feeling – that gut-level conviction or fear that if someone really knew you, they would reject you – that is internal shame rooted in fear of rejection. [Allender, 68]

So that is what shame is: It is the experience of, the internalization of, or the fear of rejection and loss of esteem by others.

What Causes Shame?

That leads us to our second question: What causes shame?

And we will need to make a few distinctions here, including the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate shame.

Legitimate shame is caused by guilt – by the exposure of our own depravity. [Allender, 63]

Legitimate shame comes from when we know we have done something objectively wrong, and we feel shame over the rejection of God that is due to us over our sin, or the rejection we fear or experience from others because of our sin. [Winter, 91-92]

Legitimate shame is shame working as it is supposed to. It is like an alarm, telling us that we have done wrong – that there is something we need to deal with – that we have damaged our relationship with God or with others through our sin and we need to repent. Legitimate shame is actually a gift.

Unfortunately, it's not the only kind of shame. Because there is also illegitimate shame. And that can take at least two forms.

First, illegitimate shame can be shame based on human expectations or demands for our appearance or our performance – by our failure to live up to non-biblical standards we receive from those around us. [Winter, 92-93]

And the form those standards can take can vary widely. Churches and religious communities can add to God's law and place illegitimate shame on those who break their additional laws, even when they are not guilty of breaking God's law – this is a pattern we see in the Pharisees, and many churches still struggle with today. Other times our shame has to do with more worldly ambitions. We might feel such illegitimate shame when we strive to live up to worldly models of success, or

achievement, or beauty, or desirability, but we fall short. We are not guilty of doing anything wrong, but our hearts or those around us still place illegitimate shame upon us. We can even be shamed in this way for doing good – for refusing to go along with a group that is encouraging us to sin.

Other times, even when our shame is in response to something legitimate, it can be illegitimate in its proportion. Those with a sensitive conscience can blow a misdeed out of proportion, fearing or inflicting on themselves a disproportionate response of rejection from others. [Winter, 92-93]

Each of these instances of shame – whether internal or external – is rooted in an illegitimate elevation of non-biblical models and expectations for performance or appearance. That is one kind of illegitimate shame.

The other kind of illegitimate shame is rooted in an experience of being stripped of our dignity. [Allender, 63]

This can happen in a number of ways – when we are demeaned, when we are objectified, when we are ignored or cast aside, when we are treated as less than truly human. One common way this happens is through abuse. [Winter, 94-96]

Even though all human beings are fallen, they are still made in the image of God and so are due dignity as image bearers. When that is denied them – when they are stripped of their dignity and treated as less than human in some way – then they experience another form of illegitimate shame.

Far from having sinned, they may be the ones who were sinned against, but still they may experience deep shame because the sin committed against them either involved some level of relational or social rejection, or because they fear that if others knew of what had been done to them, they would reject them.

And so the second form of illegitimate shame is rooted in an assault on our dignity as human beings – as image bearers of God – when we are used, abused, mocked, or otherwise degraded or dismissed.

How have you experienced shame?

How have you experienced social shame – the rejection of those you had hoped would accept you? How have you internalized that rejection? How do you now live in fear of that rejection?

And as you consider those different experiences of shame, what is each one rooted in?

Are some forms of legitimate shame? And if so, did you respond by paying attention to whatever your shame told you needed attention, or did you ignore it?

Are some forms of illegitimate shame, based on the worldly expectations of others? If so, where in your life does that most play out, and how do you usually handle it?

And are others forms of illegitimate shame based in an assault on your dignity – of being treated as less than a human being should be? When has that happened to you, and how did you respond to it?

Shame is a powerful reality in our lives as human beings. It is one of the most powerful forces in our lives, and one that we rarely ever acknowledge or speak about.

But we all have some way of dealing with it – of processing it, or at least coping with it.

What are the World's Solutions to Shame?

And that leads us to our third question: What are the world's solutions to shame?

There are many, but this morning I'll just mention five possible responses.

The first worldly response to shame is to try to earn back acceptance.

This is where we have experienced or we fear rejection, and so we try to counteract it by earning acceptance back – in order to avoid being excluded or to gain back acceptance that has been lost.

This is a form of justification by works, and it can be a powerful force in our lives. Whether with peers, or with family, or with our church, or with God, we can frantically strain ahead to try to earn approval or acceptance.

This is often the response of high-achievers, and we can pursue it in almost any area of life. Dan Allender writes about a “major partner in a prestigious law firm” who “remarked that he owed his entire career” to this kind of response to shame. [Allender, 61]

We try to overcome our shame through frantically striving after perfection.

But, of course, this never really works.

For one thing, it is always tenuous. We may do many good things to earn favor. But we know that favor can always be lost. It takes just one mistake – one failure – and we can be stripped of our esteem and plunged into shame. Our achievements are always a fragile defense against shame and rejection.

But even if they weren't so fragile, they'd still be insufficient. For they never truly eliminate our failures, and so they ignore the stubborn reality of our legitimate shame – the effects of the real wrongs we have done. Our good works never seem to succeed in wiping those away.

And so one false response to shame is to try to earn or achieve our acceptance.

A second worldly response is to try to elevate our own honor and standing by diminishing someone else's.

This is actually a pattern we see in our text – we see it in verses nineteen through twenty-two.

Why does Pilate write “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” on Jesus's placard, why do the Jews protest it, and why does Pilate persist?

Well, we need to remember what happened a few verses earlier. There Pilate was publicly shamed by the Jewish leaders. He made it clear that he was going to release Jesus, but then the Jewish leaders politically outmaneuvered Pilate, forcing him to do their bidding. This humiliated Pilate and made him appear powerless. [Carson, 611] It shamed him.

So Pilate then tries to elevate his own honor by diminishing the honor of the Jews. He identifies Jesus as “The King of the Jews” to shame and humiliate them. And having done that, he seems to feel that he has saved some face – that some level of his public honor has been restored.

And we see this pattern all around us today.

We see it in individuals: From the child who responds to embarrassment by calling a sibling a name, to the spouse who responds to a feeling of shame with a sarcastic snipe, to the insecure person who spreads gossip about others, to the abuser who responds to their own shame by degrading another.

This dynamic plays out in individuals, but also in whole communities, as communities attack one another in an attempt to elevate the honor of their group by diminishing the honor of another group.

As David Brooks points out, people today “are extremely anxious that their group might be condemned or denigrated. They demand instant respect and recognition for their group. They feel some moral wrong has been perpetrated when their group has been disrespected, and react with the most violent intensity.”

Sometimes their group strikes out at the one who has disrespected them. Other times, when that is not an option, they strike out at those who are easier targets for them.

Anthony Bradley has noted how those who experience classism can be more tempted to racism as a way of trying to restore their sense of social esteem, and those who have experienced racism can be tempted to forms of classism to do the same thing.

We all are tempted to try to enhance our own honor by diminishing the standing of another, but we scarcely need to be told that this doesn’t work. It is not a real way to heal our shame, but it is an ugly spiral of shame.

We know this ... yet how often have we fallen into this pattern ourselves?

A third worldly response is denial of our shame by trying to cover it up, and projecting an appearance that we think others will accept. Whatever may be going on in our lives, or whatever may be going on in our hearts, we project what we think people want to see. We give up on authentic acceptance and settle for thin, appearance-based acceptance and honor. This not only is exhausting, but it always falls in on itself in the end, as the gulf between our appearance and our real life widens. The edifice always crumbles at some point.

A fourth worldly response gives up on seeking acceptance altogether. It is the response of despair – of killing hope for true acceptance. We withdraw, or we willingly give ourselves over for further degradation. It is the way of hopelessness.

These are all common and historical responses to shame. We have, in some ways, developed a more historically quirky one in the modern Western world – a fifth response: we have come up with the response of disregarding acceptance by others and focusing instead on self-acceptance.

This response is very American – very modern and individualistic. It feels natural to many of us, which is why we need to be reminded that it is a way of thinking that would sound ridiculous to most people today or throughout history who have come from a more traditional culture. [Gorman in Mackie; Crouch] But it is everywhere in our culture – the theme of many popular songs, and one of the central messages of almost every popular children’s movie.

Here we discard social-acceptance, and pursue self-acceptance alone as the antidote to our shame.

This is a popular sentiment in the West ... but in the end, this pattern fails us as well.

For one thing, we should admit that the goal itself is a bit questionable.

We might notice that many of the people in our lives or in this world who have the most self-esteem ... really shouldn’t. They have not so much corrected the shame-detector in their hearts as they have disabled or muffled it.

Or, as Brené Brown points out, most people who don’t experience shame at all, are sociopaths. [Brown, 125]

But even if this was commendable goal, to replace any concern for social esteem with a strong and powerful sense of self-esteem, it is also impossible.

We simply are not strong enough to drown out the cry of shame in our hearts. In a fallen world, people will always reject us in ways big and small, and combating that rejection with our own self-esteem is a never-ending marathon.

But even more than that, none of us are strong enough to fully silence the alarms of legitimate shame that ring from our hearts. For such alarms are true.

Combating shame with self-esteem requires constant self-assurance, constantly telling ourselves we are good, constantly focusing on our own estimation of ourselves, constantly building ourselves up. And few if any can continue that work indefinitely and by our own power. As one author has put it, “To endure oneself may be the hardest task in the universe.” [Herbert, 130]

Striving for achievement, fighting others for esteem, denying our shortcomings, despairing of acceptance, and relying on ourselves – these are the worldly solutions to shame.

And none of them really work.

What are Jesus’s Solutions to Shame?

What then are Jesus’s solutions?

Well, to begin, we need to acknowledge that Jesus does offer a solution.

Andy Crouch notes that it can be tempting for many Christians in the modern West to simply push the question aside and try to refocus the discussion on the topic of guilt. But this is a mistake, especially because that is not what the Bible does. The Bible was written to people in unmistakably honor/shame cultures, and it addresses not only guilt but shame.

It does not brush the issue of shame aside, but instead the gospel and the cross of Christ both address the reality of shame. And they do that in at least four ways.

First, the cross tells us that in Jesus Christ, God understands our shame.

Crucifixion, Crouch reminds us, was not just an effective way to put people to death, but it was “specifically designed to maximize victims’ shame, from the whipping along the route to the place of crucifixion, to the stripping of every article of clothing (even though Western art has often shied away from portraying this brutally humiliating aspect of Jesus’ final hours), to the hours or days of exposure to the elements and the mocking of passersby.”

As the author of Hebrews has reminded us, shame was central to the experience of crucifixion. And so on the cross, Jesus experienced shame.

He experienced the shame of rejection, as his disciples abandoned him, and his people – the Jews, the very people he had come to minister to – publicly and completely rejected him.

He experienced the shame of degradation, as he was stripped of his dignity by the Roman soldiers.

He experienced even the shame of guilt – not his own, but as he took on the guilt of his people, so he took on their shame, experiencing himself the rejection from God that they deserved.

All of that means that whatever shame you have felt, God truly understands it.

Have you experienced the shame of knowing you deserve to be rejected by God and others because of your sin? In Jesus Christ, God experienced that same kind of shame as he bore the sins of his people. He understands what it feels like.

Have you experienced the shame of being rejected by those you long to be embraced by? God understands that too, because in his incarnation those he was closest to abandoned him, and the people he longed to love and serve cried out for him to be killed.

Have you experienced the shame of having your dignity stripped from you – maybe even in intimate ways? God understands that as well. In Jesus Christ, God experienced what it is like to be stripped naked and exposed before others. He was beaten. He was mocked. He experienced degradation.

The first thing Jesus offers us for our shame is understanding. Because he has been there himself.

Second, Jesus absorbs our shame.

As Curtis Chang has pointed out, in the Western church we talk a lot about the reality that Jesus took on our guilt, but we often miss the reality which was obvious in the ancient world, and is

obvious in so many traditional cultures today, that Jesus also took on our shame – he absorbed our shame, so that we could be free of it. [French]

On the cross, just as Jesus takes on the guilt of all who trust in him – their unrighteousness before God – so, on the cross Jesus also takes on our shame – he receives the rejection from God and from others that we deserve, so that we can be set free from it. Jesus receives and absorbs our shame on the cross.

Third, Jesus replaces our shame with tremendous honor.

Jesus not only takes on the shame that we deserve, but he gives us the honor that he deserves. Where we deserve to be rejected by God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is entitled to full acceptance with the Father. And he shares that acceptance with us. [Jayson Georges in Crouch]

And with that, he also shares with us his honor over all of creation. Because what Pilate meant as a mockery, we know was in fact a declaration of truth. Jesus is the King of the Jews. And in fact, he is much more than that. He is the King of the universe – the King of heaven and of earth. That truth was proclaimed in the cross, but it was vindicated in Jesus's resurrection from the dead and ascension to the throne of heaven. And it will one day be seen by all when Jesus returns and visibly reigns over the earth for all eternity.

Jesus is the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. And, the author of Hebrews tells us, he is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters [Hebrews 2:11]. By grace, Jesus identifies all who trust in him as his family. We are family to the King of all Creation. And so we share in his honor and his acceptance. [Mackie]

In these ways and more, Jesus replaces our shame with the greatest of honors.

Jesus understands our shame. Jesus absorbs our shame. Jesus replaces our shame with tremendous honor.

The challenge for us is to accept that.

When we sin, we are to come to God and confess our sins, and receive in faith not only the forgiveness of God by grace, but the acceptance of God by grace. We are to see that in the gospel God not only wipes away our guilt, but he embraces us, washing away our shame.

When others judge and exclude us for failing to live up to their models and expectations for us, and we experience social shame, or feel internal shame, Jesus does not deny the existence of that shame, but he offers us something better. He offers us honor and acceptance with God the Father, and Christ the King, that goes beyond anything this world can offer – that drowns out any shame this world can lay on us.

When others degrade us, and strip us of our dignity, Jesus identifies with us in his suffering, and he raises us up in his ascent to glory. He restores our dignity. He heals our wounds.

Now ... in some cases – especially cases of abuse or trauma – that healing and restoration may take time, and work – including work with a well-trained Christian counselor. That is true. But the

help we need in those cases is not in creating an antidote for our shame but in receiving it – for Christ has already accomplished the antidote for our shame.

In faith we are to focus on what Christ has done for us – focusing ultimately not on social-esteem or self-esteem, but on divine-esteem. [Mackie]

Then, fourth and finally, Jesus calls us to do one more thing. He calls us to walk in his ways, and to extend to others what we have received from him.

As Jesus has covered our shame by accepting us when he could have rejected us, so we, as his people – as individuals and as a church – are to cover the shame of others by accepting them when we could have rejected them.

And while this must always be connected to forgiveness, it is not actually the same thing. Forgiveness is releasing someone from their moral debt to you – freeing them of their guilt. But we are not only to be a people of forgiveness, but of restoration. Restoration embraces and accepts those who have done wrong and who have come to us in repentance. Restoration frees the repentant from their shame.

If we are a people who forgive, but who do not embrace those who confess and repent of their sins, then we are not a people who are living out the fullness of the gospel.

Now, to be sure, in this fallen world true restoration is sometimes not possible between two individual Christians. Some sins rupture a relationship and break trust to such an extent that while forgiveness is called for, restoration to how things were may be unwise. But even in those cases, the people of God as a whole are called to embrace the repentant sinner. And cases where restoration is not possible between two Christians are surely a minority of cases. Ordinarily, as followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to show one another the grace of the gospel by not only forgiving, but embracing those who have sinned against us and then come to us in repentance. Ordinarily, to do one but not the other is a denial of the gospel.

And so, if we forgive our children, but we do not graciously embrace and accept them again as part of our reconciliation with them, then we have not shown them the love of the gospel.

If we say we forgive our spouse when they confess and repent to us, but we do not warmly embrace them and speak words of love and acceptance to them again, then we are not living a marriage shaped by the gospel.

If we, as a church, give to repentant sinners only a sterile sort of forgiveness and remission of sins, and do not embrace and accept them as a community, washing away their shame, then we are not a church that is living out the gospel.

Jesus calls us to love as we have been loved: forgive as we have been forgiven, and embrace as we have been embraced.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we all have shame – some legitimate and some illegitimate.

Let us forsake our worldly ways of dealing with it and instead turn in faith to the cross of Christ.

Let us find comfort in the fact that we have a God who understands our experiences of shame.

Let us find relief in the fact that Christ has taken our shame onto himself – he has nailed it to the cross, and it is no more.

Let us rejoice that we have been given the greatest of honors that exist in the universe – that as we trust in Christ we are accepted by God and we are family to the King of Kings.

And let us strive to show one another the loving acceptance that Christ has shown us – that we might be a community that lives out the gospel, wiping away the shame of others through the power of Christ.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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