

## New Hope sermon Jesus wipes away our shame and our guilt 9/1/19

Let me open with a story about the hymn *The Old Rugged Cross* that we just sang:

“My wife leads a weekly "Christian circle" at a nursing home. An Alzheimer's patient named Betsy faithfully attends, led there by a staff worker, and sits through the hour.... Every week Janet introduces herself, and every week Betsy responds as if she's never seen her before....

After a few weeks, Janet learned that Betsy has retained the ability to read.... She has no comprehension of what she is reading and will repeat the same line over and over, like a stuck record, until someone prompts her to move on. But on a good day she can read a passage straight through in a clear, strong voice. Janet began calling on her each week to read a hymn.

One Friday the senior citizens, who prefer older hymns they remember from childhood, selected "The Old Rugged Cross" for Betsy to read. "On a hill far away stands an old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame," she began, and stopped. She suddenly got agitated. "I can't go on! It's too sad! Too sad!" she said. Some of the seniors gasped. Others stared at her, dumbfounded. In years of living at home, not once had Betsy shown the ability to put words together meaningfully. Now, obviously, she did understand. Janet calmed her: "That's fine, Betsy. You don't have to keep reading if you don't want to."

After a pause, though, she started reading again, and stopped at the same place. A tear made a trail down each cheek. "I can't go on! It's so sad!" she said, unaware she had said the same thing two minutes ago. She tried again, and again reacted with a sudden shock of recognition, grief, and the exact same words....

Finally, when Betsy seemed tranquil, Janet led her to the elevator to return her to her room. To her amazement Betsy began singing the hymn from memory. The words came in breathy, chopped phrases, and she could barely carry the tune, but anyone could recognize the hymn.

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross

The emblem of suff'ring and shame.

New tears fell, but this time Betsy kept going, still from memory, gaining strength as she sang.

And I love that old cross where the dearest and best

For a world of lost sinners was slain.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,

Till my trophies at last I lay down;

I will cling to the old rugged cross,

And exchange it some day for a crown.

Somewhere in that tattered mind, damaged neurons had tapped into a network of old connections to resurrect a pattern of meaning for Betsy. In her confusion, two things only stood out: suffering and shame. Those two words summarize the human condition, the condition she lives in every day of her sad life. Who knows more suffering and shame than Betsy? For her, the hymn answered that question: Jesus does.” Preaching Today.com – shame.

“I can't go on! It's too sad. Too sad.” Indeed. What Christ suffered on the cross for us is horrific. And the guilt and shame because of ours or others' sins are some of the saddest conditions of human life. What we do and what people do to us can break our heart and certainly breaks God's heart. But we need to address these issues, beloved, because when people suppress issues of unresolved guilt or shame, those issues still remain alive inside them, even if they may seem frozen and inaccessible. It only takes a similar incident, or words, thoughts or feelings like a fire to melts those frozen feelings. Then they rise quickly to the surface, causing emotional, physical and spiritual havoc. At that point people act out the results of their shame or guilt – often very destructively – to themselves or to others.

Actress Anne Heche suffered sexual abuse from her father from when she was a toddler until age 12, and also had a lesbian relationship with comedian Ellen DeGeneres for three years. She says: "I did a lot of things in my life to get away from what had happened to me. I drank, I smoked, I did drugs, I had sex.... I did anything I could to get the shame out of my life."

Many people can be drowning in in their shame because of their inner brokenness.



Or drowning in a sense of unforgiven guilt. Ezra prayed this on behalf of his nation: *“O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to YOU, My God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads and our guilt has grown up to the heavens”* (Ezra 9:6). Ever felt like that?

Now I think God recognizes the various intensity of sins, but still guilt is guilt. See if you can get the guilt in this story:

“A man got a job as a night watchman at a factory. There had been a lot of thefts by the workers on the night shift, and so every morning when the night shift workers passed through his gate, it was his job to check their bags and pockets to make sure that nothing was being stolen.

Things were going along very well the first night on the job until a man pushing a wheelbarrow of newspaper came through his gate. Aha, he thought, that man thinks he can cover up what he is stealing with that newspaper. So he removed the paper only to find nothing. Still he felt that the man was acting strangely, so he questioned him about the paper. "I get a little extra money from newspapers I recycle, so I go into the lunchroom and pick up all the ones people have thrown away."

The guard let him pass, but he decided to keep a close eye on him. The next night it was the same, and the night after that. Week after week it went on. The same guy would push the wheelbarrow of newspapers past the guard's checkpoint. The guard would always check and find nothing. Then one night, about a year later, the guard reported for work only to find a message had been left for him telling him to report to his supervisor. He walked into the supervisor's office and before he could say a word, the boss said, "You're fired!" "Fired?" he asked in total surprise. "Why? What did I do?"

"It was your job to make sure that no one stole anything from this plant, and you have failed. So you're fired." "Wait a minute -- what do you mean failed? Nobody ever stole anything from this place while I was on guard." "Oh, really," the boss answered. "Then how do you account for the fact that there are 365 wheelbarrows missing?"(GCFN 82819)

God knows when our guilt is overwhelming or perhaps more minor, like the wheelbarrow thief's. Still, unconfessed sin does weigh on us, and unremitting shame can break our spirit. I think our Psalm we read today expresses well the long-term negative effects on our mind and body when we have unconfessed guilt or shame.

*Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! <sup>2</sup> Yes, what joy for those whose record the LORD has cleared of guilt,<sup>[b]</sup> whose lives are lived in complete honesty! <sup>3</sup> When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. <sup>4</sup> Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Interlude. <sup>5</sup>*

Have you ever felt like the Alzheimer patient Betsy or the Psalmist whose strength is getting sapped away because of unconfessed sin? How does unresolved shame and guilt work its effects out on you?

Max Lucado tells this story: A Chinese man named Li Fuyan had tried every treatment imaginable to ease his throbbing headaches. Nothing helped. An X-ray finally revealed the culprit. A rusty four-inch knife blade had been lodged in his skull for four years. In an attack by a robber, Fuyan had suffered lacerations on the right side of his jaw. He didn't know the blade had broken off inside his head. No wonder he suffered from such *stabbing* pain. Lucado comments: We can't live with foreign objects buried in our bodies. Or our souls. What would an X-ray of your interior reveal? Regrets over an [earlier] relationship? Remorse over a poor choice? Shame about the marriage that didn't work, the habit you couldn't quit, the temptation you didn't resist, or the courage you couldn't find? Guilt [or shame] lies hidden beneath the surface, festering, irritating. Sometimes so deeply embedded you don't know the cause.”

But God does. And the good news of the gospel is that Jesus Christ himself bore our shame and guilt on the cross, and rose, triumphing over those sources of death so we could live free in Him. On earth He continually reached out to heal those who were shamed because they were untouchable. Or broken because of their sin. Then in His death He made forgiveness possible.

God wants to restore shalom, a total sense of wellness, peace and well-being to His people, **so let's look at the scriptures that tell us this truth.**

We start with the second half of Ps. 32: God's forgiveness

*Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the LORD." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Interlude*

*<sup>6</sup>Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment. <sup>7</sup>For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. Interlude*

*<sup>8</sup>The LORD says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.*

*<sup>9</sup>Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."*

*<sup>10</sup>Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the LORD. <sup>11</sup>So rejoice in the LORD and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!*

Or Romans 8: *So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>And because you belong to him, the power<sup>[a]</sup> of the life-giving Spirit has freed you<sup>[b]</sup> from the power of sin that leads to death. <sup>3</sup>The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature.<sup>[c]</sup> So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. <sup>4</sup>He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit. The Spirit sets free those who have trusted in Christ Jesus.*

Remember that Satan is an accuser, always trying to take us down by reminding us of our former sins. But if we have confessed our known sin to the Lord, He has forgiven full stop. So Satan's accusations are now false guilt and we must rebuke them with this word of truth. Also we remember the promise in terms of our current sins - I John 1:9-11 *if we confess our sins 'God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* That's wonderful, beloved. God cleanses what we confess and what we know, but goes way beyond that to cleanse us from all unrighteousness – often beyond our own self-awareness.

Hear, too, the word of truth from the Psalms about shame. Ps. 62:7 *"My salvation and my honor depend on God; he is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.* Shame creates a loss of honor. But here God Himself restores our honor when He is our salvation.

And 1 Peter 2:24 *He Himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live for righteousness; by His stripes we have been healed.* Healed. Our slate wiped clear from all the debilitating effects of guilt and shame. We are made free through Jesus Christ as His life transforms us.

But here are two final words of advice, so you can live these truths out practically. 1. **"Don't allow your pride to remember what your heart should forget."** We all have mental tapes in our mind and if we focus on the wounds caused by others we will close our hearts to Christ's healing. Also, 2: **"In the shadow of my hurt, forgiveness feels like a decision to reward my enemy. But in the shadow of the cross, forgiveness is merely a gift from one underserving soul to another."** (Andy Stanley). That's good, and true, isn't it? If we have been abused or hurt badly by another, we want them to suffer for it and feel like forgiving them frees them unfairly. But actually, if we still hold the wound and nurse it, that perpetrator of our shame and anger and abuse is still controlling us and we free ourselves, not the other, by forgiveness. Releasing forgiveness. So the word is: don't let shame and

guilt keep you from receiving God's love any longer. Christ has paid the price for all our guilt and shame. And accepting that gift of salvation, will release God's shalom in us.

Then we will act like that girl who is dancing in the rain: *the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.* I tim.1:14.

May we live free like that – in God's abundant grace, and love in Christ Jesus. Amen.

9/1/19 Dr. Codman-Wilson

