Our Shame was Washed

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Preacher: Tim Suffield

[0:00] My name's Tim. I'm part of the team here at Harvest Church. We're going to be opening the Bible together. In a moment I'll be in Luke chapter 18 to start with. So if you want to turn there, if you've got a Bible with you, the words will be on the screen.

You can, I think, pick up a Bible at the end if you don't already have one. Just before I get into it, I want to give one brief notice. So this evening we have our second Sunday Bible study.
Lots of you came a month ago as we opened up Ruth chapter 1. We'll be opening up Ruth chapter 2 today. If you have any sense of, I didn't come last time, so I can't come, it's not true. We're going to do our best to make it so you can come in and pick up where we've got to.
We'd love to see you if you're interested in coming. And my one piece of information to give you, even if you did come last time, is I kept saying, oh, I want it to feel a little bit like my dining room. And then it was a bunch of round tables in here and you were like, eh, kind of.
Bring snacks. So I'm afraid I can't bring food for you. But bring snacks. We've got some popcorn, probably just for the two of us. But I don't know, it might go a bit further than that. But to help us make it feel like a kind of environment of, oh, we're friends together.
[1:05] We're opening the Bible. We want this to feel warm and that you can bring your contribution and we can toss things over together. Why don't you bring some food with you? Okay. What we're going to be talking about today.

So we are in the second message in our series called Seven Things That Happened on the Cross, which we're kind of running up to Easter. Last week I was preaching that our sin became righteousness, which in some ways is the headline of the whole thing.
Today we're going to be looking at the idea that our shame was washed. Our shame was washed. The theological term is expiation. We don't have to worry about that necessarily. But our shame was washed.
I don't know that we talk about shame a lot. I think we talk about guilt quite a lot. And we touched on that quite a bit last week. I don't know how much we talk about shame. It's in the Bible twice as often as guilt. To say that you're guilty is essentially to say you did something wrong or you feel like you did something wrong.
To say that you're shame is to say that you are wrong or that you feel like you are wrong. That might be the result of doing something wrong, but it's a different thing.
[2:17] It's more personal. And it's also more about a group of people because to be shameful is to be regarded unworthy of acceptance in social relationships.

It's a kind of communal thing. It's about your sense of worth, but it's also about the way that you're treated by others around you. It's a very powerful concept in the cultures that the people who wrote the Bible lived in.
It's in many ways a less powerful concept in Western UK, though I think it's still quite functional for us. Many of you come from other parts of the world where honor and shame are actually just part of your daily lives.
Let me start. So Luke 18, I'm going to just read a couple of verses, reading from verse 32. This is Jesus talking about himself to his disciples. He says, Jesus highlighted to his disciples before he was crucified the shame of it.
He said, I will be mocked. I will be shamefully treated. I will be spat upon. I reckon if we think of the cross, our tendency is probably to go to the pain of it and to consider how horribly painful this way of dying is, which is true.
[4:04] Not really going to get into all that today, but it is true. What we might miss is that in many ways for a Jewish person, or indeed even a Roman person of this age, that is secondary to how

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shameful it is.

It is designed to be the most humiliating way to die that there can be. It's designed to be dehumanizing. It's designed to be deeply degrading.
You go across a crossroads in the Roman world, anywhere that's well-traveled, and you'll find a crucifix, because it's deliberate that you kill people at a place they're going to be seen by many, many people.
Because the point is that people watch them dying. That's the point of it, is to make it slow and agonizing while you're watched and laughed at.
The biblical scholar Joel Green says, victims of crucifixion were subject to optimal, unmitigated, vicious ridicule.
[5:09] The point of the thing was that people would gather around the foot of it and point at you and laugh. Again, at the end of 2,000 years of Christian history, we find the idea of laughing at that kind of thing very difficult to get our heads around, because our culture has actually been so affected by the Bible, that we struggle to imagine why anyone would do that.

But the Roman Empire is very common, that you'd gather, you'd point, you'd laugh. You'd find things funny about it. The Romans genuinely thought it was too disgusting for discussion, so it's not written on that much, because this is such a shameful thing.
You would be naked. If you go and see a painting of Jesus, you'll see a very tasteful little loincloth. He wouldn't have had one. You'd be naked. People would consider your genitalia something to be discussed and laughed at.
Jesus' Jewishness, which is very visible when he's naked, would have been a subject for Romans of great humour.
And they would have enjoyed gathering around and laughing at his Jewishness. It says this is addressed to...
[6:31] It says in the book of Nahum, in the prophet Nahum, this is actually addressed to Nineveh, but it tells you something about what sin is like. Nahum chapter 3. It says, That's the result of sin.

The result of sin is nakedness exposed to shame, and that you become a spectacle. That's what Jesus did for us. Became a spectacle to be laughed at in our place.
Which is interesting. If you know your Bible, you know Genesis chapter 2, you know Adam and Eve in the garden. What are we told about them before all goes wrong?
Naked and unashamed. Why is Jesus naked and exposed to shame on the cross? To undo everything that happens in the garden.
So he is naked and exposed to shame. So that everything that went wrong could be undone in the cross. The shame of sin is not just the burden of sin, not just the punishment of sin, not just the guilt of sin, but the shame of sin is also undone.
[7:53] Dishonoring God leads to exposure and shame, but Jesus takes that for us. In Isaiah 53, that great passage where the prophet Isaiah basically just tells us what the cross would be like.

He says, For he grew up before him like a young plant and like a root out of the dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, no beauty that we should desire him. In fact, he was despised and rejected by men.
A man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as one from whom men hide their faces. He was despised and we esteemed him not. Jesus was made a shameful spectacle.
Exposed to mockery, exposed to laughter. The shame of the cross is the point of it. It's designed to make someone less than human. He was made, in the words of the historian Thomas Cahill, Jesus was made a cosmic gargoyle.
It's just like, it's disgusting. And we find this slightly difficult to get our heads around because we have turned this into a symbol of honour, which actually is the point, as I'm going to get to, that shame turns into honour.
[9:07] But we therefore think of the cross as a wonderful thing. And it is for us, but it is therefore difficult for us to see quite how disgusting it would have been in the Roman world.

And it is, as many people have quipped, a little bit like lots of people hanging a gas chamber around their neck or hanging a junkie's needle or just something that we would think, why would you ever use this as a symbol of anything good?
Well, Christianity has said, because the worst thing in the world became the best thing in the world. That's the story. But the cross, therefore, is first the worst thing in the world. It's almost like, I

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actually, I can't illustrate it.
I've struggled trying to come up with good illustrations for what the shame of the cross would feel like. I'm not sure I can. It's too stark. Other than just reading you passages from the Bible, like Isaiah 53, and just trying to get some of it slightly under our skin.
How do we get our heads around what this is like? deeply shameful. Laughter, mocked, despised, become a mockery of humanity, become almost like not really a human in the way he's been treated.
[10:25] And he chose to do that. For you. Why did he choose it for you? Because the point is that your sin does that to you.

My sin does that to me. Makes us, gives us reasons to be ashamed. Gives us reasons that it would be appropriate for us to be mocked before all.
And yet Jesus says, no, no, no, no, no. I'm going to take all that for you. Or the just result of everything you've ever done wrong, of everyone seeing it and being like, well that's what you're like. He's like, I will take that for you.
And so he is exposed to mockery and degradation and being made less than human on your behalf. And then the strange thing is that much like sin becomes righteousness, shame becomes honor.
The cross becomes this honorable thing. It says in Hebrews chapter 2, excuse me, Hebrews chapter 12, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
[11:43] So what was the result of shame? He's like, I don't care about shame because of joy. Okay. What was the result of shame? Right hand of the throne of God. Honor. The result of Jesus' shame is his exaltation.

Because he's willing to put himself to shame. The only person who's ever lived, he doesn't deserve any on your behalf. He finds himself exalted and that is the reason that we hang this, in one sense, horrible implement in our churches because this thing of shame has become a thing of honor.
It's actually like the worst thing in the world becomes the best thing in the world because it's the place that because if you trust in Jesus, it's the place that he is able to make us honorable despite our own shame.
Shame is replaced by honor. Shame is washed. In the Old Testament, in the book of Leviticus, chapter 16, you will find the description of something called the Day of Atonement.
This was the one day a year when, for a number of different reasons, the Hebrew people were asked to make a specific set of actions and sacrifices to make themselves right with God for the next year, in essence.
[13:04] There's more to it than that. There's a whole sacrificial system all year round. But that's the day when the high priest is purified and the nation is purified and they go. That's the day that he then gets to go through the curtain into the Holy of Holies, right into the presence of God.

Now before that, they take two goats and they do a different thing with each goat. The first goat is called a sin offering or a purification offering and that, probably what happens to that goat is what you might imagine with the sacrifice.
There's a little bit of praying going on and then the thing is killed and burned and on we go. The point of that is to purify them so that the high priest can enter the presence of God. But the second goat, often called the scapegoat, it doesn't get killed.
So the first goat is really, in some ways, it's about purity and kind of about sin and righteousness that's what we were talking about last week. The second goat is about shame and about being washed and about expiation.
What happens to this second goat is the high priest goes he puts his hands on it and he says, I'm the whole nation. Put my hands on it. All of our sin is on you. And then they send it off into the desert and just left to go and wander, to be sent far away.
[14:24] Guilt can be dealt with through sacrifice. Shame is dealt with by being sent far away. Both things are happening on the cross. There is a sacrifice for us to deal with our guilt, to replace sin with righteousness, but the shame that comes with sin is taken away from us so that we are no longer a people of shame.

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Now shame has one good use. Not all shame, but shame has one good use and that's it. It points us to our sin. When you feel ashamed, you can ask the question, why am I ashamed? And should I be ashamed?
Did I do that thing? Sometimes you'll be like, actually I didn't. Oh, this is coming from somewhere else. That's a different thing. But sometimes you'll think, oh, yeah, actually, I did that thing. Okay, I need to repent.
That is the one good function of shame. And that means, as soon as you go, oh, that's because I sinned, well, that means the shame goes away with your sin. And Jesus has already dealt with your sin on the cross.
So shame does not need to stay. Now, one thing for me to say that, it's a very different thing for you to experience that in your daily life. But it is something that we need to at least get into our heads so that it can slowly drip into our hearts.
[15:47] That shame does not have to remain once our sin is dealt with. We can live, as Christians, as unashamed people. Other people might make us feel ashamed. They may or may not be trying to do that.

But we do not have to live ashamed. In fact, it gets better than that. 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 9 onwards, says this.
Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Oh, this case doesn't sound like good news. Do not be deceived. Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor many who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God.
Okay, that sounds like quite bad news. But here we go. And such were some of you. And such were some of you.
But you were washed. You were sanctified. You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. The result of our sin is washed.
[17:00] Our shame is washed. The identities that perhaps our sin might have had us wear again are washed.

And they are not who we are anymore. The church is supposed to be a people who can go, yeah, that's exactly what I was. But the cross has taken it all away. Yeah, that's what my life looked like. But the cross has taken it all away. Think of it perhaps like this. There's, um, there was a, some of you might remember some of this story in the news, many of you won't, but it was a guy who worked with President Nixon called Chuck Colson.
It's like his hatchet man. It was a pretty ruthless guy, kind of got stuff done in dirty ways in order to achieve what the president was looking for. And when the Watergate scandal hit, which kind of unseated the president, this guy was right at the heart of it.
He had done all the things. He had been involved in all the various, he knew what exactly was going on. He was one of those who ended up going to trial and prison for Watergate. Just.
[18:13] He had been one of the most powerful men in America. Behind the scenes, but ruthless and powerful. He was the kind of guy who made President Nixon's problems disappear.

But all of a sudden, no power. Exposed to public shame. In fact, felt, if you read what he's written about it, he felt pretty ashamed. Not just of what he'd done, but also of that loss of who he was, which he felt was his own fault, which is true, but everything he had had gone away as a result of his actions.
Pretty ashamed in prison. As he's facing trial, pretty much seeing what's coming, he reads the Bible. He meets Jesus right at the bottom.
By the time he gets, he pleads guilty. I think partly because he's like, oh yeah, that is the right response to the gospel. Actually, I did do that. Jesus has taken it away, but I did it, so I plead guilty. And he spends his time in prison. Again, you'd think, deeply shameful in one sense. But he has expressed many times how his shame just taken away at the cross, he devoted the rest of his life, he founded something called prison fellowship and devoted the rest of his life to going back to the place of his deepest shame in order to help prisoners meet Jesus and to love prisoners and to advocate for prisoners in American society.
[19:36] what is the power that makes someone keep going back to the place of their greatest shame where you'd think they'd be continually reminded of the worst things they've done in their lives?

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It's the cross. It's because Chuck believed in Jesus on the cross. It turned his life around, yes, but it also then turned many other people's lives around, yes, but it meant he kept going back to what you'd think would be the one place he'd never want to go again because he's like, it doesn't really matter, does it?
He does say, he says things like, I thank God for the water goat scandal because it led me to him. So he thanks God for his shame because it led him to Jesus. He lives like an unashamed man.
I mean, even to give you a little slither of my own shame, I grew up, my nickname as a kid was Pest. Now you mean, yeah, sure, it's kind of funny, right?
It does something to you, though. I don't know that it was intended for anything particularly by the people who gave it to me, but it gets under your skin.
[20:47] It actually wasn't until I was an adult and had been an adult for some time that I started to realise that, oh, hang on, this has affected me. Like, you live your life trying not to take up space.

You live your life trying not to be annoying to people. You live your life trying not to say exactly what you think in a room because you're worried that people will think you're a pest.
It's quite common when we reflect on our childhood actually for the way your father behaves towards you to then alter the way that you consider God the Father. It's quite a common thing, it doesn't happen to everyone, but if your father's cold and distant, it's often quite difficult to realise that God the Father is not cold and distant.
Now for me, most of that came from my older brother. Coming to believe that Jesus, my older brother, was really for me, it's quite challenging. I was quite comfortable with the idea that God loved me, the idea that maybe he liked me.
That took a long time to get into me. It's true, by the way. I wonder if you know that. God loves you. He actually likes you too. He likes you, he enjoys spending time with you.
[21:57] He likes your personality. You are fearfully and wonderfully made, which means he's like, yeah, you're great. Yeah, he wants your character to change and your sin to be sorted out.

Yeah, sure, absolutely, but he's made a way for that. He loves your personality. But that, I wouldn't have put it in these terms to start with, but I would have probably called it rejection, but that shame that I encountered as a kid took a long time to come out of me.
I needed help. I needed pastoring, in essence, people to sit down and go, but is that true? But is that what the Bible says? And then you use the magic tools Jesus has given us, forgiveness and repentance.
You repent of your sin, you forgive those who've hurt you, and funnily enough, your whole life changes. Now, I make it sound easy. It's not easy. It's like walking over nails. But it's worth it. Because we actually find that even the most difficult things inside of us can be turned around in the Lord to be massively freeing and discover ways to follow Jesus in wholeness.
[23:05] Now, none of us is quite whole yet. Lots of us being created are more whole than we were. There is a day when we'll see him in the face and it's like everything burned up in an instant and you'll be whole.

Yeah. But until that point, we try and walk into wholeness. What do you do if you're...
Because I'm talking about this and it's possible that if... I haven't been super specific in some ways, but it's possible that some of you are starting to think, ah, I'm aware of some of this in me. I'm aware that I generally feel shame.
I'm aware that there's this thing in my heart that niggles me. Or even I could not describe it in those terms, but something is holding me back. Often because someone else has hurt you and we people do hurt each other, but the thing is for whatever reason lodged and festered rather than been pulled out.
It might be their fault, it might be your fault, it might be both of your fault. What do you do? Well, you need help often to excise it. First you need to go, yeah, I think there might be a problem there.
[24:13] And then you go and you talk to someone. You work and talk to any of the elders. There are others, again, who can help you. But you need other Christians often to reflect the truth to you, reflect the Bible to you, take you to the cross and say there's no shame.

But if that's not you, what's your response to this message? What's your response to being told shame is tending to honour? Think about it like this. Last passage I'll read. 1 Peter 2. It quotes lots of the Old Testament in this.

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So he says, For it stands in Scripture, Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame. That's Jesus. He says, You believe in Jesus, you won't be put to shame.
So, the honour is for you who believe. Excuse me. No, no. So, the honour is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone, and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence.
They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who you called out of darkness into his marvellous light.
[25:30] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. This is the word of the Lord. I mean, that, I do, in some ways, I'm not going to execute the whole thing.

I don't really have time, but one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible, riffing on a number of very specific Old Testament texts, to go, it's the opposite through Jesus. But, what do we see? You're not ashamed you're a chosen race. You're not ashamed you're a royal priesthood. You're not ashamed you're a holy nation. You're not ashamed you're a people for his possession. Each one of those is plural. At the start, I said that shame is a communal thing, right?
It's a thing that happens in relationships. It might largely be inside of you, but it's about how you're feeling like other people look at you and perceive you. Shame is social.
That was quite hard to say. Shame is social. So the solution is social. I mean, there's an individual thing in your heart involving forgiveness and repentance, yes. But the church is the one who's supposed to show you that you've been washed by God.
[26:40] So we need to do that. We're not going to get it right all the time. We make plenty of mistakes, but we need to try our best to be doing that. And that includes, therefore, the person who is not like you, the person who is quite different to you, the person who you look at and think, I don't like the way they live their life, the person who eats food that's not like yours, the person who has habits that's not like yours, the person who stands out the front door having a vape and you think, oh, stop it.

The church is not the place that people should be made to feel ashamed for things that are not sin. And even then, we don't need to make people feel ashamed for their sin. We're capable of producing plenty of shame ourselves in our hearts.
We don't usually need much help. So we try our best to not make each other ashamed. We, of course, are going to get that wrong. But we need to be active in our attempt to honor one another in our interactions.
Why? Because our shame is taken away by Jesus. It's gone. It's gone at the cross. And that is good news.
So, how do we respond? Well, we're going to respond in worship to start with. In a little bit, there'll be some prophetic words and people might want to respond to them individually. But in a moment, the band are going to lead us in worship as we sing and look to the cross and go, Jesus has washed my shame.
[28:07] That might prick things inside of you where you're like, it hasn't gone though. You need to do something about that. But Jesus has washed your shame.

I'm going to pray then we're going to sing. But why don't we stand together if we're able. Lord Jesus, we come to you broken, full of our own confusion, hurt by our past.
carrying wounds and scars, carrying shame and hurt. When we come to the foot of the cross and we look up almost in surprise at the idea that maybe it can be taken away.
We lift our eyes to you, Lord. in wonder that shame becomes honor. In wonder that we would find position in the kingdom.
In wonder in we who, to be honest, probably deserve shame, do not receive it because we've been washed. Such were some of we, but not anymore. We've been washed.
[29:31] We've been sanctified. We've been made holy in the Lord. And we're so thankful. Stir that in our hearts, oh Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

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