

The King and Shame

Hebrews 12:1-2

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John Song

Thank you, worship team, for that. Great is thy faithfulness, O Lord, unto me. Beautiful reminder as we get ready to go into our final week in Hebrews 12. Before we begin, I would like to just say first of all, my name is John Song, I'm the pastor of youth ministries here at Columbia Presbyterian church. At this time, we would like to dismiss children age 4-1st grade to attend children's worship. They will have an age appropriate worship together, and so, we would like to dismiss them at this time. The rest of you, you are with me no matter what your age.

We have intentionally spent this time over the last three weeks in Hebrews 12:1-2 because this is a momentous turn in the book of Hebrews. The writer of Hebrews so far, if you've been with us over the past year and a half, has been painting this picture of who Christ is. And so, Christ is this better prophet who's better than the angels and those messengers that proclaim the truth, this confession that we have to hold on to. Christ is this better priest as we've been discussing in our time, talking about the priesthood of Melchizedek – however you say it – the high priest, that Christ has made payment for us. He is the better priest. He has made the ultimate atonement for our sins through His precious blood.

But in Hebrews 12, we now see what is now known as the third office of Christ. His kingship is going to be demonstrated in these passages. And so, we've been unpacking what all of this looks like. Pastor Randy, last week, spoke of Jesus as the author and perfecter of the faith. That the obedience of Christ is passive, and His active obedience allows us to go to Christ in our weakness and call upon His mercy in our lives.

So, this week, we get to hone in even more carefully on the second half of verse 2 in this passage as we look at both very heavy themes and themes to rejoice in here today. So, for the last week, let us read these two verses. Hebrews 12:1-2,

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 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. [ESV]

This is the Word of the Lord. Pray with me.

Father, we call upon that strength, the name of Jesus. Lord, who will give us ears to hear, hearts to receive the truth of this Word. Lord, your Holy Spirit that will proclaim your truth, not man's wisdom, to us right now. Lord, we long for this Christ to be real here in this service to us. We long for us to not listen to the lies that we are told by the world around us and by the thoughts inside of us that our shame defines us. Lord, let us look to this Christ in your holy Word today. In Jesus's name, everyone said. Amen.

Have you ever thought, nowadays in the age that we live in, that it becomes incredibly exhausting to hold an ordinary opinion? Now, I'm not just talking about the serious philosophical, religious, political opinions. We know those have always been hard to hold on to, right? But I'm simply talking about the ordinary everyday opinions on life. I think it's been a little bit exhausting as we sort of interact with all of these opinions each and every day. Let me explain this a little bit.

If you don't think that it's become polarizing to hold ordinary opinions, let's play a little bit of a game here right now. I'm going to say a couple of words or phrases, and some of you will realize what the debates are surrounding these, and hopefully, this will be a little bit fun. But these are things in which holding an ordinary opinion is now used against us. It sort of says everything about you and who you are,

and it's used to shame you into a certain posture or position. Let's try this. This is going to be fun. Hopefully, we won't traumatize anyone right now, but we'll see.

All right, so, here we go. Ordinary opinions. The appropriate pronunciation of "gif" or "GIF." Ordinary opinion, very controversial. Exhausting to hold on to, right? The last two *Star Wars* movies. The proper use of the Oxford comma. Laurel or Yanny? Using a double space after a period, which apparently is now a huge thing. I don't get it. Cream in coffee, right?

Ordinary opinions, and in all of these – because we've all felt it – the feeling of shame. Now, these are fun to talk about and it's fun to get into these camps. And it's fun poking fun at other people: you like cream in your coffee, what's wrong with you? That kind of a thing. But these things don't really mean too much. But when they're stated, suddenly these groups come together, they formulate, they come into these two camps of shame-givers and shame-receivers. And then you've got people on the outside who don't care about the debate and they're ashamed that everyone's shaming each other, right? And suddenly, we begin to start to unpack what is being said here at the second half of verse 2 when we see the word "shame." What does it mean for Christ to despise this shame?

Shame is used as a very powerful weapon. It's used to justify all sorts of behavior. It's used to justify all kinds of sins. It's the shamed and the not shamed. It's the disgraced and the dignified. I think what shame does is really a form of dehumanization, isn't it? It's a form of control over an individual that they're told: who you are, what you are, what you believe, what you think, what you've done is less than human; you are not worth as much as the person next to you. They are being told that whatever pain and rejection they feel: you're supposed to feel that because the one enduring shame, the one who is impacted is less than the one who does not have it.

Shame is real and its effects are devastating. A researcher on the topic of shame and vulnerability, Brene Brown – who has studied this topic for ten years – puts it like this, "Shame is understood as the fear of disconnection." "Shame is understood as the fear of disconnection." Is there something about me that if other people know it and see it, they will believe that I am not worthy of connection? She goes on to say that, "Shame is a focus on self, and guilt is a focus on behavior." Guilt is saying I did something bad. Shame is, I am bad. Guilt is, I made a mistake. Shame is, I am a mistake.

We see this all throughout the pages of Scripture. Shame in Scripture is Adam and Eve realizing they were exposed, realizing they were seen. Shame is the removal from the community of God in Scripture, being cut off from the Israelite tribe, being unclean, being contaminated by everything that shame touches. Shame is Tamar crying out after her experience with Amnon, the sign of ultimate humiliation, crying out: where can I go to remove my shame? Shame is in the Psalms and songs that we sing. This is a shame of calling out to God not to leave His people despite their shame of their sin. And even for the calling of God to invoke justice, to shame the enemies of God, to seek out His justice and His vindication. So, shame is real, and it has all of these things to unpack and all these different facets.

So, what is the reality of shame and how it affects us here today? What happens to those of us who feel shame? What are the effects of shame? Justin Holcomb, a pastor and theologian who has taught courses on sexual violence and sexual assault, and Lindsey Holcomb, his wife, who also works at a sexual assault crisis center as a crisis intervention specialist, writes in a book called *Rid of My Disgrace*, which is a wonderful book to read, very pastoral for anyone who wants to think through how to deal with victims and how to help those who have been hurt by this from a Gospel-centered perspective. He writes that "Victims of sexual abuse are filled with shame that leads to a host of physical and psychological damage."

This is the power of shame as he writes, and the research has shown of what shame does to victims. I'm going to read each one of these things in full because I want us to grasp the weight of what shame does to us. These are the effects of shame:

Heightened sense of self-blame, guilt, embarrassment, anxiety, stress, fear, anger, confusion, interpersonal, problems, denial, irritability, depression,

despair, social withdrawal, numbing and apathy, detachment, loss of caring, feelings of isolation and alienation, restricted ability to express emotions, nightmares, flashbacks, headaches, difficulty concentrating, negative self-image, loss of self-esteem, emotional shock or numbness, erratic mood swings, feeling powerless, disorientation, OCD, panic attacks, body memories, loss of security, extreme dependency, impaired ability to judge the trustworthiness of others, various phobias, hostility, aggression, change in appetite, suicidal ideation, hypervigilance, insomnia or other sleep disturbance, decreased energy and motivation, exaggerated startled response, eating problems and disorders, self-mutilation, substance abuse or abuse, compulsive behaviors, shock, impaired memory, and post-traumatic stress disorder.

This is the power of what happens when the worst kind of shame is realized upon those who experience it. Shame is real, and it is everywhere. What is tragic, often in our best intentions to help people and to counsel people who are dealing with the problem of shame is that we are told that what they need to do is to fix themselves. Do you see the irony of that statement? We are telling people who are dealing with a host of issues surrounding their shame that they aren't good enough, and they need to be ashamed of their shame. And this is the tragedy of many of the self-help things that we try and do for ourselves, isn't it? We try to tell them that the solution simply lies in the next technique or method or book or TED Talk to find your way.

So, what hope does the Word of God bring to us in light of all of this? Hebrews 12:2, the second half of this, reminds us of Jesus enduring a cross. "For the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross." That alone, by the way, should give us some unbelievable comfort and joy in the way that God Himself, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man relates to us, for those of us who deal with the effects of shame. Jesus endured the Cross, and with that comes all of this shame and brutal victimization of all the evil and the vile that was done in the nature of the crucifixion. The very public nature of the cross was designed to demonstrate the lack of humanity of the one being tortured.

The Romans called the crucifixion the death of a beast. That was the name they gave the crucifixion. Theologian F. F. Bruce writes this,

"To die by crucifixion was to plumb to the lowest depths of disgrace. It was a punishment reserved for those who were deemed most unfit to live, a punishment for those who were subhuman. From so degrading a death, Roman citizens were exempt by ancient statute. The dignity of the Roman name would not be besmirched by being brought into association with anything as vile as the cross."

Jesus experiences this. And yet, in His shame, He is completely innocent of all of it. Shame is real for Jesus even though He has no reason to feel guilt or shame. He has not committed any sin. He has not done anything wrong. He is acted upon horribly, but He is not to blame for the actions that are being done to Him.

Let me unpack this, here, pastorally because I know that we have people in our congregation that are dealing with physical, mental, psychological abuse and the effects of that shame. So, let me just offer this. The research does say that if you are a victim of these horrible acts that many times, the one who is abused often tries to blame themselves for the actions of the perpetrator, blame themselves for the actions of the sin that was done to them. If only I wasn't there. If only I was strong enough. If only I had just spoken up.

What is the greatest comfort? Let me tell you what the greatest comfort is. We have a Savior who experienced shame and, yet, was not guilty of it. And so, for you who have experienced this, know that the

abuse and the pain that you experience is not your fault. And I encourage you with that here this morning. It's not your fault.

This is very personal for me. I grew up with the intensity of bullying growing up in very strong and severe ways. And I'm unpacking a lot of it and how it's related to me in life. But a lot of that bullying was actually done within the church. And I blamed myself for what had happened to me. If only I was charismatic enough, then they wouldn't have treated me that way. If only I was strong enough to fight back. If only I didn't like nerdy things, maybe they wouldn't pick on me so much. Maybe if I was into what all the cool kids were into, then none of that would've happened. It's my fault.

If we're looking to Christ, we see a shame that is real, but He is guiltless. And that should free us all in this room to know that the actions and the sins of the perpetrator are not your fault. Now, how can I say that? Why? Because shame is despised when Christ goes to the Cross. Shame is despised when Christ goes to the Cross. Again, I am in debt to Justin Holcomb's book on this, *Rid of My Disgrace*, which outlines this so beautifully. This is what he writes. He says,

"Despising the shame means that Jesus was not controlled by the shame that He endured. The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus disregarded the shame of dying by crucifixion and in doing so also took our shame upon Himself. Jesus willingly suffered the most shameful death, and this exposed the extremity of sin's shameful consequences and the despicable character of our humanly devised shame."

Amen. The verb here is "despising," right? He is despising the shame that has been brought upon Him. And how? How? How is He doing this? He is despising the shame by sharing in it and bearing our shame of sin, taking the wrath of God for our shame to vindicate us. This is the good news of the Gospel, isn't it? Christ's humiliation on the Cross. And as the larger catechism writes, as He bears the weight of God's wrath, as He endures the pain, the shame. The cursed death of the Cross is actually the greatest irony, because in this humiliation of Christ – this supposed disgrace on Him as He's hanging there, this means that was used to dehumanize Christ, to call Him a beast, to make Him feel lowly and less than human – this would be the means that Christ uses to spit in Satan's face and redeem a people that was once caught off and bring them to Himself.

The glory of God's exaltation is found in a crucified Jesus. What a great comfort that is. What a great joy and love that we have in this Christ. You see? You see how much better this is than to simply tell somebody that they need to try harder, or to think better, or to love more deeply to remove shame, right? I mean, those things are not bad. Let me be very clear, those things are helpful. But those things are limited because they are fragile, because their foundation is fragile. We are broken by shame. But if our foundation for our trust and hope in the midst of our shame is the persevering Christ, the One who despises shame on the Cross, the One who takes the best shot that shame could give and turned it into a position of glory, then we have an eternal hope that all of this can rest on, that far outweighs any kind of remedy or help the world can give to us. This is the King on the throne where the humiliation leads to His exaltation. And we stand, and we see that shame is defeated because we have a King over all shame.

Now, when I talk and speak about the exaltation of Christ, there is a phrase that we need to unpack before we understand Christ as King who is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. This is the phrase right before "despising the shame" which is the phrase "for the joy set before Him, He endured the Cross." "For the joy set before Him." Now, I want to clear something on these words "for the joy set before Him," because I think it's radically important and connected to our understanding of Christ on the throne, and Christ even in His suffering and in His shame.

So, for those of you who love exegesis and want me to say more Greek, this is for you. This is your time right now. Here we go. Some of you might have grown up with the translation of Hebrews 12:2 that says, "Jesus renounced the joy and endured the Cross," rather than, "for the joy set before Him," implying that if He renounced the joy, that Jesus somehow cast aside joy in order to complete His mission of

suffering. That joy was something that He had to put aside, something that He couldn't see because of the shame that He was feeling. Now they based that translation on the word used for the word "for" in this passage. "For the joy set before Him," they would say that translates incorrectly. It should be "renouncing the joy" because everywhere else in Scripture – almost everywhere else in Scripture – the word for "for" is used as renouncing or set against. But the writer of Hebrews, we have to ask ourselves, is he trying to set up a false dichotomy, a false distinction, between joy and shame?

Now, if you have our church's translation, the ESV, you'll notice that it doesn't translate it that way. It says, "for the joy set before Him." And I think there is a good reason why the ESV might be right here. And of course, I'm going to be biased. The commentators that speak on these verses note that while there are many places where this word is used as "against," in Hebrews, it seems to be exclusively used as "for." And, in fact, for it to be "against," if Jesus was renouncing the joy, that would seem to be contrary to everything that had been stated in Hebrews about the relationship between shame, suffering, and the Christian hope. For example, Hebrews 10:34 talks about the joyfulness of the Hebrews to accept suffering when their property was taken. Why? Because of the joy that they could have knowing that there's something ahead. Hebrews 11:26, which talks about Moses considering the reproach of the Christ greater than the treasure of Egypt, and he was looking to the reward again, right? Not saying that joy is rejected, but actually in anticipation of joy, in anticipation of seeing our fulfillment over suffering and shame. Hebrews 13:13-14, which we will talk about later, which speaks of seeking a city that is to come, and that is our hope for enduring the reproach.

In other words, rather than Jesus setting aside joy or renouncing the joy, the writer of Hebrews seems to suggest all throughout the book that He is looking at the joy set before Him. He is looking to the Cross and seeing the joy that is laid out for Him. He's looking to His exaltation as King where He is seated at God's right hand. This is how shame is defeated. This is where we come to this phrase that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Now, just to explain some terminology here for those who may not be aware of what it means to sit at the right hand of the throne, this is the place of highest favor. This is the place of highest favor with God the Father. This is the opposite of shame. This is the polar opposite. This is a place of worthiness. This is a place of honor. This is a place not just of confirmation but validation of all of the sufferings and trials, all the effects of shame that Christ has bore on your behalf, the seated at the right hand of throne is a place in a position of power and glory, a place of no powerlessness, a place of no humiliation. And this, by the way, is the exact position by those of us who are by faith alone and grace alone united to Christ, this is the place that we are promised to stand as well.

The exaltation of Christ is proof that shame never will have the final say in our lives because our union with Christ. We already know where our final position is as Christians and believers in Him. Ruling and reigning with Christ is often not a talked about theme because it almost seems arrogant to suggest the idea that we will be participating in the heavenly work that Christ Himself is a part of, isn't it? And that's maybe also the effect of shame. Shame has told us an identity. Oh, you will be ruling and reigning with Christ. Oh, we can't accept that. We can't embrace it because who we are is certainly not someone who would be seated at the right hand of God the Father.

But this is who we are. We are co-heirs with Christ. We are no longer defined by the shame of our sin, by the shame that has placed us for confessing all the wickedness and evils that we've done. We are no longer shamed by our circumstances, by people, or perverse ideologies, or the false wisdom of our age. But we are vindicated, freed, and in perfect fellowship, and in joy, and in the position of highest favor not because we are worthy, but because we have a worthy author and perfecter of our faith who has made us and called us worthy.

This is the beauty of the Gospel. I'll end with this story. I promise, I know when preachers say they'll end with this story, and then they, you know. Anyways, I'll end with this story. In 2012, a freshman by the name of Justin Gallegos entered into the track and field program of Hart High School in Santa

Clarita, California, looking to join the school's cross-country team. We've been talking about marathons and races for the last two weeks, so why not? Let's just keep it going.

There was simply one thing that both the family and the school had a concern about with Justin entering into the cross-country program. And that is that Justin had cerebral palsy. The condition left him with a gait and a stride that was often awkward and difficult. He would fall over and over again in his first week of running. And this was coming to a point where the coach was wondering if he could actually make it or not. Justin's knees and elbows took a beating. He would have cuts and scrapes and bruises. His parents would put knee pads on him to cushion his falls. Think about wearing these knee pads when you're running and the shame that would be palpable, the shame of falling and the shame that is real that he had to deal with.

But then a funny thing started to happen with Justin. Justin got up every time he fell. Justin did not let the shame define him or strip him of who he was as an image bearer of God. He started setting goals. He started saying that, "Even though I would finish dead last in every race, I would have goals that I would set for myself." And so, at the end of his freshman year, he was running 8 minutes and 30 seconds in his mile. By senior year he had cut it off by a full minute, 7.30. He then exceeded that and went to 7 minutes and 14 seconds for the mile, and he set a new goal of 6 minutes and 30 seconds.

His story, as word got out, was an inspiration to his town, city, and school, and eventually it made national headlines. Justin would run, and towards the finish of the race, the opponents of the other team and families would clap and cheer for him as he finished each and every single race. And every single race, he finished faster, stronger, still with a gait in his run, but with better technique. This caught the attention of his dream school, the University of Oregon. And they offered him a position on the university team. And when he couldn't afford it, the communities and the people who heard his story paid for his first two years so that he could run.

But perhaps the most beautiful part of this story is what happened this week. The world's largest major sports apparel company who offers sponsorships and contracts to professional athletes around the world, they heard Justin's story and decided to prize him by offering, for the first time ever in its history, a professional athlete contract to Justin for his efforts. They wanted to support his dreams to perhaps one day compete in the Para Olympic games. And there's this moment – and the video's online, I encourage you to watch it, if you're looking for a good cry, just watch it – there's this moment where Justin doesn't know what's going on. And the person announces his name as the one who would be receiving this professional athletic contract. And there's this moment where – despite everything that he's been through involving his cerebral palsy, despite all the shame that he has in talking and in speaking, all the shame that he has in finishing dead last in every single race – he's validated, and he's given the seat of Honor.

There's this one moment where he starts weeping uncontrollably, and it's a good cry; there's fluids coming from every part of his face, it's this good cry. And the best part about this is that the contract giver at one point says to him, "We want to let you know that in our eyes, you're just an athlete." Not defined by anything else, "you are just an athlete." Translation, your shame doesn't define you. Christ is your hope. Christ is the One who defines us. He has despised the shame of the Cross and bore your shame so that you would rule and reign with Him.

This is the joy that is not renounced but is set before us to walk in this thing that we call life together as the body of Christ. This is a joy that we get to sing about and rejoice in hearing now. So, why don't we pray together.

Father, we thank you that the effects of our shame is removed when you despise the shame of the Cross, when you remained obedient to the end, when you saw the joy that was set before you. And you endured the greatest humiliation so that you would be exalted and lifted high. Father may this precious hope of the Gospel give us grace today. For those of who are in the mode of self-condemnation, who blame themselves for all that has happened, and who are struggling and wrestling with the effects of sin

in their own lives, Father, I pray that they would know that there is forgiveness for them. That you condemn them no more. That you forget their sins as far as the east is from the west. That nothing can separate them from the love of God. Father help us to renounce Satan's lies. He tries to tell us that we are something that we are not. Help us to fix our eyes to the author and perfecter of our faith, Jesus Christ. It's in His name we pray all of these things. Amen.