

The Shame of the Cross

Matthew 27:35-44; Hebrews 2:11

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Perhaps one of the greatest trials to bear when standing for the truth of Jesus Christ is the burden of standing alone while hearing the lies, the mockery, and the insults hurled your way. Whereas physical blows make one look like a martyr, mockery and insults make one look like a fool and scar not only the flesh but the spirit. Parents, take heed that your discipline helps your child to learn and grow rather than crushing the spirit under a constant barrage of ridicule and scorn. Husbands and wives, do not make yourselves feel better by making one another look like a fool. Such attacks go very deep indeed.

If anyone knew what it was to suffer alone the public mockery, insults, and shame from a crowd, it was the Lord Jesus Christ as He hung upon that cursed cross and suffered such shame for those who were chosen in Him from all eternity. He was not ashamed to bear the shame of our sin as He suffered as no man has ever suffered. Jesus is not ashamed to call us His brethren, though He is absolutely holy and we are filled with shameful thoughts, words, and deeds (Hebrews 2:11). Our Savior endured the loneliness of all such indignities upon the cross so that you and I would never have to suffer similar indignities alone. Let us consider the following three examples of shame that Christ suffered upon the cross in the first three hours of His crucifixion: (1) The Shame of Nakedness (Matthew 27:35-36); (2) The Shame of Being Numbered with Criminals (Matthew 27:37-38); and (3) The Shame of Further Mockery (Matthew 27:39-44).

I. The Shame of Nakedness (Matthew 27:35-36).

A. As our text begins today, the Lord Jesus has now been led

outside Jerusalem to be crucified. Having arrived, our blessed Savior is cruelly nailed to the cross (one hand then the other hand and most likely the feet). He was then lifted up from the earth for all to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It was now the third hour according to Mark 15:25 (9 a.m.).

B. Every aspect of crucifixion was intended to dehumanize a man. Those being crucified ordinarily suffered the indignity of being stripped of all their clothing. Not only was it a curse to hang upon a cross, but it was also a public shame and humiliation as well. To be publicly exposed before men and women in such a manner was to endure one of the most extreme humiliations in the ancient world. The Scripture does not explicitly use the word “naked” in regard to Christ’s condition, but the text would certainly imply that the Lord Jesus was nearly naked (if not fully naked). For we find in John 19:23-24 that the four Roman soldiers specifically responsible for Christ’s crucifixion took the garments (in the plural) that Christ was wearing and divided them among themselves (in fulfillment of Psalm 22:18). Now the Lord Jesus would likely have had at least the following pieces of clothing: a pair of sandals, an inner cloak, an outer cloak, and a belt/girdle. This would have left him with only a loin cloth (if He even had that).

1. What a scene this was indeed! The sinless Son of God suffering in extreme misery and there these soldiers were playing games under the shadow of the cross to see who would get His outer garment. These executioners had become so calloused to the suffering of the sinless Son of God that they entertained themselves while Christ groaned in pain. Yet the Lord Jesus became naked that sinners like you and me might be clothed with His garment of righteousness through faith alone in Christ alone. Dear ones, we were those soldiers who lived for our own pleasure in the shadow of the cross. We cared not for His suffering or pain. We were ashamed of Him at one time, but He loved us with an

everlasting love and gave us eyes to see our own nakedness, filth, and shame and to behold by faith that we need not bear our shame any longer—Christ bore it for us upon the cross.

2. Dear ones, do you understand that your sin has made you naked and shameful before a holy God? Do you acknowledge that you are without any righteousness or goodness with which to clothe yourselves before a hold God? Do you know that without Jesus Christ you are under the curse of God for your sin? You may falsely assume that you're own works of righteousness and obedience are a sufficient robe with which to clothe yourself before an infinitely holy God and that your own goodness is a beautiful garment in the sight of God. But you have deceived yourselves just as the emperor (in that fable) was deceived when he was told that he was clothed in the most beautiful royal garments ever made while all alone he was walking about in the shame of his own nakedness.

3. Listen to the sobering words of the Lord Jesus as He addresses the proud and conceited in the Church of Laodicea (Revelation 3:17-18). Jesus took the shame of our sin upon Him as He suffered the insults of man and the holy wrath of His Father, and He cloths us in His perfect righteousness by faith alone (that is how you are alone justified before God). How then can we live daily in the shame of that sin, treating the beautiful garment of Christ's righteousness as if it were worthless? For we act like those soldiers, dear ones, when we can use our mouths to lie, to utter profanity (not only God's name, but "damn" and "hell"), to utter corrupt speech ("effing this or effing that") so that there is little or no difference in the way that the world speaks and the way that we speak (contrary to Ephesians 4:29). Why do we want so much to look like and sound like the world? Why are we entertained through books and movies that use such language and think nothing of it? Are we so insecure in Christ and are we so ashamed of the Lord Jesus that we feel like we must cozy up to the world to be like those are truly naked before

the Lord? Dear ones, are you playing games with sin (excusing your sin) under the shadow of Christ's suffering for those very sins? How seriously do you take your sin? Come to Him today with your nakedness and shame and He will clothe you with His perfect righteousness, and He will sanctify your mouth, your eyes, your ears, your hands, your feet, and most of all your heart. The Lord Jesus asks not that you be holy before coming to Him for His perfect righteousness and forgiveness. You would have no need to come to Him, if you were already perfectly righteous or perfectly sanctified. Confess your need of Him, trust alone in Him, and He will remove your shame and will cause you to hate the shame of sin.

II. The Shame of Being Numbered with Criminals (Matthew 27:37-38).

A. A further dehumanizing indignity which Christ suffered as He hung upon that cursed cross was to be accounted a common criminal with the alleged crime for which He was crucified hanging above Him which said, "THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS" (Matthew 27:37). We are told in John's Gospel (John 19:21-22) that the chief priests did not like the way Pilate had written the accusation on this sign that hung above the head of the Lord Jesus. For the way the sign read, it appeared that Christ was condemned for ACTUALLY being the King of Israel rather than ALLEGEDLY being the King of Israel. But Pilate refused to change the sign, and in so doing we find another divine testimony that pointed to Jesus being Israel's Messiah; for Jesus was condemned, and He suffered as the Messiah, the Anointed One of God. He was not a mere man suffering for His own sin, but was the King of Israel suffering for the sins of all who will look by faith alone to Him. Even in His crucifixion, man could not remove the glory of Jesus who suffered for sinners chosen in love from all eternity.

B. We are told in John 19:20 that this sign of Christ's supposed crime was written in three languages: Hebrew (or Aramaic which was the

common language spoken in Palestine at that time), Latin (which was the legal language spoken in the Roman Empire), and Greek (which was the social language used throughout the Roman Empire).

1. Christ had prophesied in John 12:32 (a week before His crucifixion) that if He was lifted up upon a cross, “I will draw all men unto me.” The Lord did not mean that He would draw every man, woman, or child that ever lived unto Himself to be saved. Christ was saying that His suffering and ultimate death upon the cross was not only intended for sinners among Israel who would embrace Him by faith alone, but for elect sinners from all nations as well. And dear ones, that truth is made clear in the fact that when Christ was crucified, He was declared to be Israel’s King, but was also the King of all in every nation that would trust in Him (whether they spoke Aramaic, Latin, or Greek). He is Lord of all.

2. God rules and overrules in the affairs of men in order to glorify Himself. Dear ones, if God can turn this most shameful death of Jesus Christ upon the cross into the power of God unto salvation to His elect in all nations, He is certainly able to take your trials and suffering and even your sins and your failures and to use them for your sanctification and growth in Jesus Christ. You must know that your suffering, your trials, your pains, and your heartaches are not in vain. The suffering of Jesus has removed the evil in your suffering as a Christian. There is a divine and holy purpose in all your pain and suffering. Call upon the Lord not only to mercifully remove your afflictions, but even more importantly to sanctify you and to use your afflictions to draw others to Christ (2 Timothy 2:10). If what you have suffered or are suffering would be used by the Lord to bring that loved one to Jesus Christ (or that friend, co-worker, neighbor, or stranger), should not that transform my whole attitude in suffering from merely my pain to someone’s eternal gain?

C. The Word of God tells us in Matthew 27:38 that the blameless Lord Jesus was numbered with transgressors (with criminals) in

fulfillment of prophecy (Mark 15:28; Isaiah 53:12). This was the shame of all shame that Jesus suffered upon the cross—He was accounted a cursed criminal that was dying as one that deserved this punishment. He was placed in the center between two condemned criminals as if He was the chief of all sinners. It is most likely the case that Barabbas was intended by Pilate to occupy that middle position between his two accomplices in murder and robbery. But Jesus Christ voluntarily took the place of the chief of sinners and was accounted to be among the most vile criminals in order that He might rescue those who are deemed to be among the most undeserving of sinners from the wrath and curse of God.

1. The fact that this indignity of being numbered with criminals was no accident, but was ordained by God from all eternity did not mean that Christ did not suffer infinite shame under it. For if we who are corrupt sinners would find it shameful and repugnant to be stripped of all our clothing, dehumanized before men and women, and crucified with the worst of criminals (say classified among pedophiles) for no crime which we had committed, can we even begin to imagine the degree of humiliation which Christ suffered who was forever pure and holy and had never even thought that which was sinful, let alone spoken or done that which was sinful? To go from His heavenly throne of glory in order to be stripped naked, crucified, and accounted the chief of sinners was an inexpressible shame. But Jesus suffered that shame and indignity that you, the real criminal and the real transgressor, might be forgiven through faith in Him, now and for all eternity.

2. He who suffered this indignity of being numbered among criminals and transgressors will never abandon you. Dear child of God, His suffering your shame is the guarantee of your forgiveness in Christ now and for all eternity.

III. The Shame of Further Mockery (Matthew 27:39-44).

A. Christ had previously been mocked by the Roman soldiers

(Matthew 27:27-30), but now the King of kings is mocked and insulted by those who passed by (Matthew 27:39-40), by the chief priests (Matthew 27:41-43), and even by the two criminals who were crucified on each side of Him (Matthew 27:44). Let us look at the words spoken by these who ridiculed and criticized the Lord.

B. Those passing by looked upon Christ as an imposter whom they thought had claimed to destroy the temple in Jerusalem and in three days miraculously to raise it up again (which He did not claim at all, but rather spoke of the temple of His body according to John 2:19). They wagged their heads or shook their heads as a sign of derision and disapproval. Here were people who no doubt had either witnessed or heard of the many miracles of Christ, and they conveniently misinterpreted His words and selectively forgot His actual miracles because He was now hanging as a criminal upon the cursed cross. This was the stumbling block over for which the Jews would not believe in Him (1 Corinthians 1:23-24). Jesus was cursed by God, and they were right. He was cursed by God, but not for His own sins, but for the sins of sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began.

C. Then there were the members of the Jewish Sanhedrin, who gloating in their supposed victory, also mocked the Lord Jesus by recounting how the Lord Jesus had miraculously rescued others from all types of infirmities and now could not rescue Himself from the cross. What is telling about the words of these religious leaders is that they do not say that Christ CLAIMED to save (or heal) others from their afflictions, but rather that He did save (or heal) others from their afflictions. These men knew and could not deny the miracles which Jesus had performed. However, they had conveniently attributed them to the devil.

1. These mockers challenge Christ to come down from the cross and if He does so, they will believe in Him. These very same Jewish leaders had heard and seen Christ perform many miracles during His

ministry and that was not sufficient for them to believe in Him. These very same Jewish leaders had most recently witnessed the power of Christ in knocking over 600 Romans soldiers (like a row of dominoes) in the Garden of Gethsemane and to heal the ear of the servant which Peter had cut off and that was not enough for them to believe in Him. They would soon know and realize that Christ had been raised from the dead when the Romans soldiers reported to them what had happened at the tomb where Christ was buried and that did not bring these men to a saving faith in Jesus Christ. They had no intention in believing in Christ even if He did come down from the cross. Their hearts were so hardened by self-deception and unbelief that nothing apart from a miracle of God's grace would lead them to trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

2. As sinners, we think we are so intellectually honest in evaluating facts. But this IS one of the greatest delusions under which we suffer. For apart from the grace of God, we can see the facts concerning Christ clearly and yet we will not come to Him in faith. Unbelief is not so much an issue of denying the truth in one's heart of hearts. Atheists who taunt God to appear before them or to move some object (and then they will believe) are very much like these who taunted Christ to come down from the cross. They know the truth, but suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Professing to be wise, they have become fools (Romans 1:22).

3. Dear ones, if the testimony of inspired Scripture is not a sufficient testimony to lead one to faith in Jesus Christ, no miracle an unbeliever asks to see will change his mind (Luke 16:27-31). If you are waiting for some miracle to happen in order for you to receive the truth of Christ, you will never believe. The problem is not that you do not know the truth of Christ to be true in your heart of hearts. The problem is that you don't want to receive it and embrace it because Christ will bring changes into your life that you do not really want. You still want to be the lord of your own life. That is the real problem.

4. Dear ones, had Christ come down from that cross, it would have meant your destruction, for His suffering the wrath of God and the shame for sinners chosen in Christ Jesus before the world began was absolutely necessary for salvation. The fact that He remained upon that cross and suffered the humiliation of that mockery brings salvation to all who will come to Him in faith.

5. Does Jesus know what it is to stand all alone and to be stripped of dignity, shamed, accounted a criminal, mocked and taunted by others? More than we will ever know. Listen to the words of Hebrews 12:1-3. He suffered all these things for His people that He might deliver you from the shame and condemnation of sin. What a shame it is when we are ashamed to stand for the Lord Jesus, when we laugh at the filthy jokes that we hear, and when we sound like and look like the world. The Lord Jesus was not ashamed to call us who are vile and filthy His brethren (“He is not ashamed to call them brethren” Hebrews 2:11). Let us not bring shame upon His holy name by being ashamed of Him and His truth before family, friends, co-workers. Let us rather glory that we have the honor of bearing insults and mockery for Him who bore our shame and removed our shame before God once and for all.

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