

**“Fighting Shame with Shame”**  
**Matthew 27:27-31**  
**March 15, 2020**

---

**INTRODUCTION:**

Jesus has now endured two trials. The first was before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the most powerful body in Judaism. The second was before Pilate, the most powerful Roman in Jerusalem. After each trial, Jesus was beaten and mocked. In today’s passage, he is cruelly treated by an entire battalion of Roman soldiers, numbering around 600. He is brought to them in an already weakened condition, having endured a scourging at the direction of Pilate. Scourging is a severe beating using a multi-lashed whip with pieces of bone and metal tied to the ends of the leather strips. This was designed to rip the skin off the one beaten. Scourging was a common punishment given to those who had been sentenced to crucifixion. It was so severe that some died of the scourging itself. It is possible that scourging was designed to weaken the convicted prisoner so that the crucifixion might be shortened. Jesus survived it, no doubt in a weakened state. Still ahead of him were the horrors of the crucifixion itself, which often involved dislocated limbs, extreme thirst and difficulty in breathing.

Curiously, the Gospels give very little attention to these physical sufferings. Instead, attention is given to the social and theological side of Jesus’ death. He died a cursed man, isolated from people and rejected by God. Today’s passage, when Jesus is mocked by the soldiers, is about the shame experienced by Jesus. Shame is one of the strongest of negative human emotions. I remember reading years ago about one of the Church fathers who lived during the time when Christians were experiencing martyrdom from the Roman government. Such martyrdom was considered by some Christians to be desirable. This particular Church father was a young Christian at the time and a young man who wanted to follow Jesus into martyrdom. He was ready to go out and declare publicly that Jesus is Lord, expecting then to be executed. His mother, understandably, was against this plan and successfully thwarted it by the simple act of hiding his clothes. So here was a young man ready to die for Jesus, but not willing to walk out in public naked. The power of shame is deeply rooted within us, having its origin in the first sin of Adam and Eve. **“Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths”** (Gen. 3:7).

Jesus takes the shame we deserve in order to release us from it, and this release involves the following three elements.

## I. Receive the Shame

The mockery of Jesus at the hands of the Roman soldiers shows us the ugliness of sin. If you want to know the true nature of sin, look at what it brings to Jesus when sin is placed upon him during his sufferings and death. Our sin deserves the kind of shame Jesus experiences here.

The Roman soldiers are mocking Jesus. What is mockery? To mock someone is to imitate them in an exaggerated way that makes them look a bit ridiculous. Comedians often do this with famous people, especially politicians. Mockery is a way of saying, "You are laughably ridiculous. The thing you think you are is so much not the way you are, that the best response to you is just to laugh." So when someone mocks a disabled person, they imitate their awkward movements in an exaggerated way that says, "You are so abnormal that you are beneath the rest of us." If you've ever been the object of mocking, you know something of its malevolent power, a power to bring great shame.

Jesus is mocked for his claim to be a King. This battalion of Roman soldiers brings him into Pilate's headquarters, called the praetorium. This was the seat of Roman power in Jerusalem, something like a combination of our White House, Capital Building and Pentagon. And they have their way with him, beginning by stripping him. Jesus stands before six hundred men completely naked. Then they place on him a scarlet robe. Such robes would have been worn by Roman soldiers, so this robe would have been a symbol of power. But it is given to Jesus not for the purpose of recognizing his power, but for the opposite, to make fun of him for not having any power. Next they put a crown on his head. Every king has a crown, and they want this one to wear one as well. But it's a crown designed for mocking, not homage, made of thorns rather than precious metals and jewels. Kings also have scepters, the long staff symbolic of royal power. Jesus' staff is a farce, a flimsy reed instead of the stalwart and beautiful staff normally used by kings. This mockery would be like giving a soldier a water pistol or a famous musician a kazoo, all for the purpose of laughing at them.

They don't stop with these items of the robe, crown and scepter. Now that Jesus has been given the trappings of royalty, they give to him the actions given to kings, but once more in a mocking manner. So they kneel before him and speak words of homage, "**Hail, King of the Jews!**" It is not difficult to read between the lines and hear a cacophony of laughter accompanying the kneeling and acclaim. Then things deteriorate. Not content to shame Jesus with their mock homage, they begin to treat him with contempt. So they spit on him, an act of great disrespect. If someone has to spit, it is normally the ground that receives the repulsive bodily discharge. To spit on someone says, in effect, you are worse than dirt. And then they strike him on the head with the reed scepter. Instead of being a symbol of royal power, it becomes an instrument of torture.

How should we read and apply this painful text? I think the words of the hymn that were sung as last week's offertory are appropriate. "Ye who think of sin but lightly nor suppose the evil great, here may view its nature rightly, here its guilt may estimate. Mark the sacrifice appointed, see who bears the awful load; 'tis the Word, the Lord's Anointed, Son of Man and Son of God." In other words, we need to abhor sin. Sin was placed on Jesus, resulting in this deep shame. But the shame received here by Jesus doesn't belong to him. It rightly belongs to us. That is the first point I want us to grasp. We need to receive this shame as our shame. Our sin deserves to be spat upon.

Two universal truths of our fallen condition are that we all battle a deep sense of shame and we all battle it the wrong way. Shame is common. I still have occasional nightmares in which I am inadequately clothed in public or in which I am standing up to preach a sermon for which I am completely unprepared, and I feel deep shame even in my dream state. Shame is deeply rooted in the human condition. But it is also the case that we instinctively do the wrong thing to fight our sense of shame. We seek to cover it ourselves, just as Adam and Eve sought to cover their shame with a fig leaf loin cloth. What we must do instead is to receive this shame that we see in Jesus' treatment as rightly belonging to us. We don't cover it, we uncover it. We do so in order to let Jesus cover it, and that brings us to our next point.

## **II. Renounce the Shame**

God doesn't want us to live with shame, so he sent Jesus to take the shame for us. Sin has brought a curse upon us and our world, and there are echoes of that curse in the shameful way Jesus is treated. The crown of thorns reminds us of the curse God put on the ground because of Adam's sin. **"Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you"** (Gen. 3:17-18). Earth's great curse sits on Jesus' head, that he might remove this and all other curses.

The reed scepter given to Jesus reminds us of the dominion man was created for. All of us were designed by God to be little kings and queens, ruling the earth and having dominion over it. Because of sin, though, our rule has been significantly weakened. Now, instead of ruling over the earth, the earth rules over us in certain ways. Viruses and bacteria attack and make a mess of things, and we often have very poor weapons against them. Jesus bears that curse as well, standing here as a weak man, being beaten over the head with his reed scepter.

Jesus bears the curse of shame that comes because of our sin. Twice he stands naked before these soldiers, as his clothes are removed and the scarlet robe put on him, and then again when the process is reversed. And when the

scarlet robe is put on him, it is there not to cover nakedness, but to fuel the mockery pouring forth from them. Clothing, or the lack thereof, is an easy way to understand what shame feels like. How would you feel if you were attending a wedding where everyone was dressed formally, and you were wearing shorts and a t-shirt? Shame causes us to want to hide. But clothing can also be a picture of the removal of shame. Think about the confidence you experience when a particular outfit really makes you look good. The effect of outward dress upon us, for good or for ill, is a faint picture of the deeper reality of shame and its removal. Jesus is here the picture of shame that we might be covered with the white robe of his righteousness. So the application is to renounce the shame and take refuge under the white robe of Jesus' righteousness.

Jesus the shame-bearer makes a big difference in our lives now, but an even bigger difference on Judgment Day. On the Day of Judgment, the shame will be so strong because the light of Jesus will allow no thought, word or deed to go undetected and unrevealed. In another place in the Bible, we read that on this day, even the powerful of the earth will flee to the caves and mountains, **“calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb”** (Rev. 6:16).

But that is not the case for those who have put their trust in the shame-bearer. They may have been looked down on and despised just like Jesus, and have suffered through countless trials in their lives. But on that day when Jesus will judge all men and women in perfect righteousness and justice, they are full of confidence. There is no fear, no fleeing in panic, only bold confidence. What is the origin of such confidence, and how can I know now whether I will respond in that day in confidence or fearful shame?

I believe we can know in advance whether we will respond in confidence or shame, because it is the same way we respond to God now. Is your tendency to run from God and from God's people now, because you are afraid of seeing your sin exposed? Then it will be the same on that day, only worse. Or is your response more like those words in the Heidelberg Catechism, Question 52. The question asks, “What comfort is it to you that Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead?” The answer: “In all my distress and persecution I turn my eyes to the heavens and confidently await as judge the very one who has already stood trial in my place before God and so has removed the whole curse from me.” In other words, the confidence displayed by God's children is not borne of being sinless or focused on their greatness. Rather, it is focused on the greatness of our Lord Jesus, the sin-bearer and the shame-bearer.

### **III. Love the Shame-Bearer**

When I consider Jesus here, standing naked before these mocking soldiers, enduring the shame with their spit running down his face, I see a beautiful Savior. I see the loving face of the God-man who came to endure the punishment I so richly deserve. My response involves at least these two things. First, I find him lovely and I love him. Second, I want to follow him, even if it involves suffering some of the same treatment he suffered. He was willing to endure such great suffering for my sake, and because of him I too can endure hardship for the sake of others.

So much of the suffering of Jesus teaches us that Jesus has scars where we have wounds. Have you been wounded by a mocking voice, someone who seeks to remind you that you just don't belong, don't measure up, don't fit in? Perhaps in the eyes of some you are the wrong color, the wrong weight, went to the wrong school or no school. Maybe the ridicule has something to do with your appearance or your personality, things over which you have no control. Such things wound deeply, and all of us carry around some of these wounds. Jesus has scars there. He too was wounded, not as a helpless victim, but as a loving Savior. He came that we might be healed of all such wounds. Gaze upon his beauty and love him.

### **CONCLUSION:**

I read recently something Steve Jobs wrote as he was dying of pancreatic cancer, which took him when he was only 56 years old. He was worth about \$7 billion at his death, but his money meant nothing to him. He wrote, "In other eyes... my life is the essence of success... In the end... wealth is just a fact of life to which I am accustomed. At this moment... lying on the bed... sick and remembering all my life... I realize that all my recognition and wealth that I have is meaningless in the face of imminent death. You can hire someone to drive a car for you... make money for you ... but you cannot rent someone to carry the disease for you. One can find material things... but there is one thing that cannot be found when it is lost - "LIFE".

Those words make me sad for any who don't have hope in Jesus. You may not be able to rent someone to take the disease for you, but there is someone who takes all diseases. Jesus takes the disease of sin upon himself, the disease of guilt and shame and punishment. He does so without cost to us, but at great cost to himself. Part of that high cost is portrayed in this passage. Let us respond by receiving his gifts with confidence.

**Small Group Discussion Questions**  
**Matthew 27:27-31**

1. Shame is a strong human emotion. Consider the fact that, unlike many emotions, it usually doesn't decrease with the passing of time. Remembering something from our past that we are ashamed of will often cause a fresh feeling of shame over that same act. Given the strength of shame, we have a great desire to cover our shame. What are some ways that people seek to do that? How have you sought to cover your shame?
2. After they sinned, Adam and Eve sought to cover their shame with the fig leaf loin cloths. This suggests that human efforts to cover shame always come up short. How is that failure seen in the shame-covering attempts mentioned in the previous question?
3. Jesus was mocked by the soldiers. To mock someone is to imitate them in an exaggerated way that is designed to ridicule. Review the ways Jesus was mocked. What goes on inside of you when you consider these mockings?
4. The specific form of the mockery Jesus endured speak of the curse of sin. The crown of thorns reminds us of the curse on the ground, that it would yield thorns instead of fruit. Do you experience thorns in your work? What are they?
5. The reed scepter speaks of the curse placed on the earth, over which man was created to have dominion. The earth now, at least in part, resists that dominion, including nasty things like the coronavirus. How have you reacted to the threat posed by this virus?
6. Jesus' nakedness and his being clothed with the scarlet robe speak of the shame brought either through no clothes or the wrong clothes. In what way are clothes an apt metaphor for shame?
7. Consider the first two stanzas of the hymn, "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness." *Jesus, thy blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress; 'midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed, with joy shall I lift up my head. Bold shall I stand in thy great day; for who aught to my charge shall lay? Fully absolved through these I am from sin and fear, from guilt and shame.* What good results in our lives come from this kind of boldness?