

Last week we talked about how the gospel is good news for all people. We talked about the father and his two sons who both had made choices that separated them from him and the good news of who he really was. Yet we saw how he went out to both of them and offered understanding and willingness to bring them back to their rightful place with him. In this, he showed that, not only was he ready for their return, but they too were ready if they'd only come. What great news – Right?!

However, both brothers might ask – how is this possible? Both from different angles, yet still a profoundly important question.

While the gospel is good news from the standpoint that the Kingdom of God is now – it is also profound news in that, through Christ's work, it brings power to make this transformation possible. In his letter to the Romans, Paul states quite clearly:

For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes. Rom. 1:16 NLT

The reason Paul says he's not afraid is because some in Rome were questioning whether Paul really wanted to come to Rome and preach the Good News. You see, the Roman church had some pretty big issues, and some doubted quite simply if the Gospel could actually speak to the complexity of what was going on in Rome. So Paul makes it clear. He's not afraid; he's anxious to get there and share this profound good news of Jesus Christ.

God is not unfamiliar with human problems. From the beginning, God has dealt with man's mistakes, even the really big ones. We just had our children's story before this, and there God was in the garden not only dealing with distrust in him, but also their personal shame and blame.

There's an interesting phenomenon that takes place when we are in this shadow of shame –

In one interview, Brene Brown, a researcher who's done extensive work in the area of vulnerability and shame, shares the view that none of us enjoy the emotion of shame. As a matter of fact, she says it creates a visceral reaction. "It is probably the most repelled emotion in the human body."

But what do we do with it is key, and it depends on our place, or how we are positioned with power and control.

Let me explain. The very next story that we read in Genesis is about Adam and Eve's two sons, Cain and Abel. Both of them offer sacrifices – one chooses to follow God's rule, and the other decides on his own. Sound familiar? However, this time the one who didn't follow the rules

had the club and killed the other. The result – neither would see their lineage continue. But good news still comes and has the power to save this family. Seth is born. Seth – the name actually means “Anointed” or “To stand in place of.”

It is very interesting, by the way, that of the 4 gospel writers, Luke is the only one who traces Jesus’ lineage all the way back to Seth—the Anointed one who was to provide a way through and eventually out of the pain and the shame. And God knew this plan long before Seth.

Luke was helping us understand that this good news that started as a promise to the first family now is here in the person of Jesus, and he doesn’t just carry empathy and understanding for a lost world, but power to change the damage we’ve encountered from it. Because that damage is the part that causes so much shame.

Jesus would talk openly about this. His words cut deep into the lives of so many who had to take hard and vulnerable looks at their lives. But then there were others who could not go that hard road. They repelled the notion that they needed to be “schooled by this man from Nazareth.” They became furious and indignant.

You see, shame doesn’t sit long before we start to put it somewhere. We either have to admit who we are and seek restoration, or we have to project it on someone or something else and discredit the source.

However, the motivational factor that influences which way we go is where we see ourselves in the area of Influence and Control. If we have the control, then we believe we can alter the narrative. Then our shame can be displaced. It is what the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day had, and they exerted it - even to kill. This ultimate end was a way to eliminate someone they couldn’t tolerate in the face of their shame.

The problem is not that this reaction happens. No, like the two stories of the brothers, the problem is that, many times when given the chance, most of us exert the same intolerance on someone else when we ultimately find ourselves in a position of control.

It is the reason why most of us project our shame on those who might be in a more vulnerable or weaker position than we ourselves are.

But the Gospel is all about a different kind of power. It is not motivated by control or manipulation. It is completely different.

So we head back to Romans. Paul was not unaware of what was at stake. You see, the leadership outside, and many inside, the church were all about exerting control. As long as we have it, let’s wield it for our good. The problem was that the church in Rome was becoming a place of judgement and exclusiveness rather than a place of compassion and forgiveness.

I'd like look at Romans starting in the first chapter. For those of you who know Romans, you know that you can't read just the first Chapter. Because in truth, Paul is setting us up – much like Jesus sets us up in his parables. Paul is not done after Chapter 1. He continues his thoughts on the gospel all the way into Chapter 3 and beyond.

But I'd like us to deal with these first 3 chapters in a different way. I'd like us to keep as a backdrop in our minds the story that we looked at last week – the story of the father who waits for his two sons. Please see these 3 chapters in the light of that father whose sons have been separated from his presence by choices that brought shame, guilt, resentment and intolerance.

Unfortunately, the first chapter of Romans has sort of become known as the chapter that we go to – to see all the people who God doesn't like. We've even used this chapter to proclaim, "If you want to know who's responsible for all the bad in the world, well here you go – here's the list"

And Paul lays it on pretty well.

²¹For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²²Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

²⁴So God abandoned them to do whatever shameful things their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things with each other's bodies. ²⁵They traded the truth about God for a lie. So, they worshiped and served the things God created instead of the Creator

NIV Rom. 1:20-23

He doesn't stop; he keeps going. And if we use Jesus' parable as a backdrop, you can almost hear the older brother: "Yes, give it to em! God has no place for that kind of nonsense, he has no tolerance for someone screwing with the rules he's put in place!"

Paul ends chapter 1 by saying:

They refuse to understand, break their promises, are heartless, and have no mercy. They know God's justice requires that those who do these things deserve to die, yet they do them anyway. Worse yet, they encourage others to do them, too. *Rom. 1:31-32 NLT*

Paul is speaking the language of the Older Son. But if we read this from the younger son's perspective, you might notice a different kind of confirmation. First off, depending on the timing of his experience, you might get the arrogance, indifference and self-gratification. However, in the parable it reads, "When the younger son came to his senses he started to realize that this was no life at all." But even after that realization, there was this sense of

shame. He saw how his own choices had led him to separate himself from what he believed home to be.

So how are we to look at this? Well, Paul doesn't want us to process this quite yet – because he continues in Chapter 2

Just when the older brother thought for sure that Paul was on his side, here comes Chapter 2.

1-2 Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. *Romans 2:1-2 Message Bible*

And Paul still continues:

You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. *Romans 2:3-4 Message Bible*

Wow, and everything was going so well in Chapter 1. I sometimes wonder what it was like to sit in the 1st Roman Christian Church that morning, and one of the members gets up and says, "Hey everyone, we've got a letter from Paul!" and then they start reading. Wow, what a roller coaster ride.

Paul is helping all of us to understand that sin is a terrible thing for people. It is because it is what separates us from God and the life he has always wanted for us. But let's not stay on the rollercoaster – let's move to Chapter 3.

So, here's the Simply Profound part of the Gospel –

Romans 3 says:

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses^o and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. *Romans 3:21-24 NLT*

Paul shares that, in this simple profound truth of Christ's life and death, there is power to redeem us. There is now – No condemnation and no deprivation – It is this realization that gives us the power and the ability to walk away from our shame and bitterness. We finally get to see ourselves in his eyes, the same way he sees his own son. But there's another side to this.

If we are truly able now to see ourselves in God's eyes, we also need to allow others to be seen as God sees them. Meaning – it is not our place to impose what we assume to be God's eyes on the life of another.

Paul says, yes, our actions, our attitudes, our whole life will change as a result of this power. God will always be transforming us into his intended purpose for him. But for him, not for our imposed impression or judgement of who or what they should be.

God has redeemed us; there is no better news than that. Yet he calls us all to be responsible to this incredible revelation and the power it gives us to change not only our understanding of ourselves, but also of others.

A couple of months ago I shared a story about my dad's Mercury dime collection and how he had sold the one dime in his collection that was 100 times more valuable than all of the other dimes in his collection. Little did I realize that he had done that for me.

Anyway, since then, I thought how nice it would be, and perhaps meaningful as well, to replace that one dime in my dad's collection and return it to a complete set. Well, little did I realize how challenging that endeavor would be. Challenging not only in trying to find one for sale, but also to make sure it was not a fake. Because of that dime's rare value, it also has precipitated a lot of counterfeit productions. As a matter of fact, there are actually more fake 1916-dimes than the number of real ones that were originally minted.

Needless to say, it's been quite difficult finding a dime to fill in that empty space. However, I did find one that seemed to be both similar to the one my dad had and in a manageable price range. When I asked the dealer at the coin shop about it, he said, "No, you probably won't want that coin." Disappointedly, I asked, "Why not?"

He explained that, even though it had been authenticated as a real dime, someone along the line had tried to clean it themselves by thinking it would add value, when in actuality it took away its real value by removing the very thing that would keep this coin from deteriorating.

When we try to do the master's job, we end up not only devaluing what he's made each of us to be—we end up removing the beauty of what he wants for all of us in community together.

The Gospel is simply profound in that – When we choose to believe in God, we are made whole and righteous. The transformation that takes place in our lives is for his purpose – No more separation, no more condemnation, no more shame. – That is the power of the Gospel



9.12.20

1. Take a moment to read Romans 1-3 in your favorite, most understandable version. However, after each chapter, condense your thoughts about it by sharing the emotions that gripped you while you were reading. How did they change as you moved from one chapter to the other?
2. If the good news of Jesus is that we are all able to walk away from our shame, how does that change how we look at others in our life? How does it change the way I see those who I find it difficult to respect?
3. Paul tells us in Romans 3 that our partnership with Christ in sharing the gospel does not put us right with God, meaning that even our good intentions and good actions are not what make us righteous or saved - (Only Christ) – So, what should motivate us as the underlying reason to follow Christ and make disciples?
4. The Gospel shows us how God sees us and how he wants us to see ourselves. However, deep-rooted shame is usually held by three very strong resisters to God's grace. They are secrecy, silence, and judgment. Which one of those has shown to be a hindrance in your faith, in your journey of accepting God's redemption? What measures did you or might you take to find your way through it?



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