

Cross Culture

God's Story in a Shame-Based Culture

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God's Story in a Shame-Based Culture Luke 4:18-19

If you have your Bibles, and I hope you do, let me invite you to turn with me to Luke 4. This is the next to last week in this series on "Cross Culture".

We have had opportunities each week to share our faith, to tell how God is at work across our faith family. There are a lot of stories that have come in this week. There is one that really sticks out though. When I referenced it earlier, I found it has to deal with the trip to Venezuela that our worship team leads. I mentioned to you this past week that we have had our first inaugural flight of Brook Hills Airline. We chartered a flight to Honduras, and that team was back last week. Then Monday, our next chartered flight of Brook Hills Airline was going out with close to one hundred of our people. They got to the airport Monday morning, and they were still at the airport on Monday afternoon. So, they left the airport Monday night, not in a plane, but in their cars going to their homes. Apparently, someone in the offices in Venezuela who handles flights like this that is coming in was arrested and all of the work that that person had done was immediately flagged.

So, our team was left high and dry. Everything was set here in the U.S. and everything was settled on the ground. However, five months of planning had been erased with this particular guy who worked in the offices there.

So Tuesday, they worked feverishly to try to get the flight off the ground, but it was not happening. So, basically, we faced the point on Tuesday where the flight had to be cancelled, because if we couldn't leave Tuesday, we couldn't leave until Saturday or Sunday, and that would obviously defeat the purpose. So, it threw everything into a tailspin. In the next few hours, our team began working frantically on trying to make a way for as many people as possible to still go on this trip.

We began searching different airlines on the internet. There were hardly any seats available. So, through some relationships that Billy and folks have on the ground in Venezuela, they were able to get into a Venezuela travel agency that was able to see all the flights that were going anywhere in Venezuela and try to find as many seats as possible to get our team to Venezuela. So, long story short: in the next few hours, 70 seats opened up for people to go. God provided for 70 people to go, but that also meant that still some of our team was not able to go. It was not a very happy picture on Tuesday. You can imagine preparing months for a trip like this; and some of you who were not able to go because of this mishap.

I wrote a letter because I wanted to remind our team and faith family of two things that we need to remember in this mission that we are giving ourselves to. The first thing is this: That the Great Commission starts with Jesus saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." That means that Jesus has the authority to move heaven and earth to make a plane be able to take off. He has the authority to do that. His authority can be trusted even in the middle of unexplainable circumstances. Maybe God is in control!

When the team got on the ground there, we used some different bus drivers than we had normally used. This particular bus driver drove our team into a very impoverished community where our team was giving out food and sharing the gospel with different people. The bus driver turned to one of the Venezuelans and said, "What is this team doing? Why do they have such hope and such joy on their faces when they are in such an impoverished place?" The Venezuelan person had an opportunity to share with this bus driver how the difference is Christ. Then, the bus driver looked at this Venezuelan who was not supposed to be with our team this week and said, "I want what they have. Can you tell me about Jesus?" Then, the Venezuelan bus driver prayed to receive Christ.

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." Yes, He can move mountains in order to get a plane off the ground, and He can also move mountains to bring people into a saving relationship with His Father.

The second reminder that I think we need to learn as a faith family, completely, from this picture of last week is that, if we are going to give ourselves in this mission, we must be diligent! It will not be easy! There will be all kinds of different trials that we face in giving ourselves to this mission. However, it is worth pressing through! It is worth trusting God in the middle of that!

I called this morning and talked to Billy and, right now, at this moment, our team is leading a worship conference in Venezuela. They are taking all the study we did in this "Awakening" series and are re-teaching it to over 200 worship pastors from across the country of Venezuela. Those worship pastors are in turn taking this series and re-teaching it in Cuba in the near future. So, basically, what you have are over 200 Venezuela pastors hearing over and over that the Word is central in our worship. "They are eating it up!" Billy said.

The beauty is now they will take that into Cuba, a place where it will be much harder for us to go, but because of Venezuela's relationship with Cuba, it is much easier for them to go into. The Word is going to be central in the worship in churches throughout Cuba as a result of what we are studying about the Word in our worship here. God is good! It is worth being diligent! So, I remind you that, even when we can't understand, and we can't answer all the questions, God is at work! Maybe He will change your schedule this week in order to make some things happen for His glory.

We've been looking at how we share our faith in different cultures. We have looked at God's story in a guilt-based culture, and we've looked at God's story in a fear-based culture. Remember, we are looking at the three effects of sin that we saw in Genesis 3: Guilt, fear, and then this morning, shame. We will see how the gospel addresses each of those.

We are talking about how, in different cultures, these effects of sin rise to the top and, maybe, are more predominate in some cultures than others. We've talked about how Western culture is a predominantly guilt-based culture. We define things according to right and wrong. We've seen how God's story relates to our own guilt. Last week, we talked about fear-based cultures. Many Latin American cultures, African cultures, and many Asian cultures are more based on fear and power instead of guilt and innocence. There is a constant struggle with the supernatural, with different gods, or ancestors, or spirits, and with a constant fear of what the supernatural might do. The gospel speaks right to that fear with the power of Jesus Christ.

This morning we are going to think about shame...the effects of shame in different cultures, about shame and honor. These are things that we are obviously familiar with but that may not be as predominate in our culture as in many Middle Eastern cultures. For example, let

me share with you a few stories...firsthand accounts from missionaries in Middle Eastern cultures. One writes:

Our taxi screeched to a halt. Lying in the middle of the street was a teenage girl, dying. She had been shot four times. Just then, her brother walked across the street with two policemen and stated, "There she is. I killed her because she was in an immoral situation with a man." Under the laws of that country, the young man was innocent. He had not committed murder but had preserved the honor of his family.

Another writes,

A girl ran away from home. Later, her family learned that she had married someone from another religion. They were furious! The police imprisoned the girl so that she would be protected from her family. Elderly grandparents taunted the mother and father. "How long do we need to keep our heads to the ground in shame? Won't you do something to cleanse the shame from our tribe so we can raise our heads and live in honor once again?" The family finally agreed to pay the police fifty thousand dollars to guarantee that they would not hurt her, and she was released into their custody. Within hours, her father and brother had killed her. The entire family was pleased that honor had been restored.

One more:

Many years ago, an Arab soldier's gun had accidentally discharged and killed his friend and companion in the army. After serving seven years, he was released on condition that he would leave his country. He lived for nearly twenty years in the United States but decided to return one day to see his family. When it was learned that he had returned, several young people, some of whom had not even been born at the time of the killing, surrounded the house where he was and shot him. Their honor was restored and shame removed.

Now, those stories don't seem to add up at all, nor should they. They are horrible pictures, but they illustrate that there is a picture of honor and dishonor that drives certain cultures. I have heard stories like this, but it wasn't until I visited India, for example, and met my former Muslim friend, Zimir. You may have heard me talk about Zimir. When he was about eighteen or nineteen years old, he began expressing interest in Christianity. He wanted to find out more about who Christ was. He just expressed an interest, and as soon as his father and brothers found out, they brought him into a room and threw him up against a wall and began to beat and abuse him. They kicked him out of the house that night, put him outside the gate of their property and said, "You are never allowed back on our property again." Zimir, with tears in his eyes, shared with me how he hit on the gate all night long, wanting to get back into his home, but nobody listened. He told how he ended up going from family member to family member trying to reconcile with his father and brothers, and all his family members ignored him. Eventually, his father and brothers sent him an affidavit for him to sign agreeing that, when they died, that Zimir would not come to their funerals. He had dishonored his family so much by placing his faith in Christ, which he eventually did.

There is a picture in the world where right and wrong is not as predominant as something you do that is questioned to be honorable or shameful. There are parts of the world where we don't think that telling the truth is right and telling lies are wrong. There are parts where

what you say is determined to be honorable or dishonorable based on what it does for your family, what it does for your tribe, what it does to bring honor to you and the people around you. In those kinds of situations, you start to wonder, "How in the world can you share the gospel?" If all we have is a legal understanding of our salvation, then we are exasperated thinking, "Well, then, how can you even begin to share the gospel with people that don't see right and wrong?"

It's at this point where we start to ask that question. We may actually dive deeper into a richer, fuller understanding of what Scripture has to teach us about what the gospel does in our lives. I think we'll be surprised to learn that in both the Old Testament and New Testament, shame and honor are predominant themes. From the very beginning of the Old Testament, God is delivering His people out of slavery into the freedom of the Promised Land, restoring their honor. At the end of the Old Testament, He is taking them from exile back to their home, restoring their honor. When you get to the first century, you see Jesus going into a very agrarian stratified society, where the honor and shame of a tribe, or honor and shame of an individual is based on your family, your money, your wealth and your education. This is still alive and well in many cultures today.

Two Verses

So, how does the gospel speak to that? That's what I want us to dive into this morning. I don't want us to be so ignorant as to think that honor and shame are just terms that are reserved for overseas, different cultures. How does the gospel speak to this picture of honor and shame? I want you to look with me at Luke 4:14. We are going to focus on two particular verses. Our pattern over the last few weeks has been to look at one or two verses that summarize the picture of the gospel in these different cultures, and then to look at different stories that illustrate that, so that all of us will be equipped to be able to share the God's story as it relates to shame. Listen to Luke 4:14.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogues, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, He found the place where it is written:

"The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

This is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, accounts we have of a synagogue service. Synagogue services would basically begin with prayer and blessings, reading of the Shema...Deuteronomy 6:4-9...then they would have a reading from the Law and a reading from the Prophets. Those would be read standing up, and then, usually, someone would sit down and expound on one or both of those texts.

So, this is a picture of Jesus reading from the Prophets, and then, He sits down, and He begins to share, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* That is one bold statement! He is quoting from Isaiah 61:1-2. He also brings in a little Isaiah 58:6. He brings in this picture of release for the oppressed, which we'll get to at the end of our time together. What I want you to see is that this is a theme statement, a summary passage for the entire book of Luke. It is Jesus stating why He came. God sent Him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind and to release the oppressed, and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. This is why He came. He is the fulfillment of all these things in the Old Testament.

Five Stories ***He reverses our status.***

I want us to think about how bold a statement this is on two lines. First of all, I want us to think about how Jesus is proclaiming to be able to reverse our status. I want you to see a picture of shame and honor all over those couple of verses, Luke 4:18-19. You've got pictures of shame, the poor, prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed. These are all pictures of shame in the first century. Then, you've got pictures of honor, good news, freedom, recovery of sight, and release for the oppressed. You've got honor and shame put right beside each other.

Now, it is interesting. If you are living in the first century, it is a very stratified society. We see this all over the pages of the New Testament. There are different groups in the first century. Most of the honor and shame you have in your life is inherited. It's ascribed to you. You are born into it. You are born into a certain class of people, and you may try to do some things to gain more honor, or you may do some things that would bring more shame upon you, but you are pretty much stuck in that class.

It is very similar to the Hindu caste system that has been predominant in India for so many years. Though not officially there anymore, it's still very prevalent. When I was there, I saw this group of Dalits, the untouchables, who are the lower caste. There is no hope for them ever getting out of that case. No matter how hard they work, there is no dream of them getting out of that caste. That is where you are and stay. At the same time, there are higher castes, if you are in one of those, then you belong to one of those. The picture in the first century is very similar. You are born into certain groups, you have a certain amount of shame and honor upon you. That is where you are in your life.

So, what Jesus is doing is coming on the scene and saying, "I have the power to reverse your status, to reverse your caste, so to speak." He says, "I have the power to take the poor and bring good news to them. I have the power to take those who are oppressed and release them. I have the power to take those who are prisoners and set them free." What Jesus is saying is, "I have come to reverse the status that this world has given you."

I want us to see this illustrated in five different stories. I want you to see, briefly, each of these stories unfold. I want us to think about a few different facets in each of these stories. First of all, the reversal that happens from this to this. Then, I want us to think about how that relates to all people of all time, and what Jesus is saying to us.

From dirty to clean ...

Turn to Luke 5:12. This is the first story. This is an incredible story. See this picture illustrated. He reverses our status.

While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean." Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him. Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

Here is the reversal I want you to see in this passage. This man with leprosy comes to Jesus, and Jesus reverses his status from being dirty to being clean. From dirty to clean. You have got to understand the context here. When you go back to the Old Testament, and you look at Leviticus 13 and 14, you see some pretty stringent rules laid down for those who had leprosy. Leprosy was obviously a physical condition, a skin disease. The most extreme form we come to think of when we think of leprosy is when your nerves become completely cut, so that you can no longer feel pain. Your limbs, basically, get to the point where they have experienced so much pain, and you've not been able to feel it that they began to be deformed. Leprosy in many cases was not curable at all.

So, what you have is this man with leprosy coming to Jesus. This is not just a physical condition; it is also a social condition. Leprosy was not just a disease; it was a dreaded contagious disease. You were filthy. You were repugnant, repulsive to the people around you. You couldn't go near to people, and if you did, you had to cry out, "Unclean! Unclean!" You had to yell to let them know you were near, so they would stay away from you. Many people believed you could not let a leper into your house, or your house would become contaminated. You wouldn't want to walk where a leper had just walked because of what it might do to you. You could only imagine the effects...the social, psychological, spiritual effects of this on somebody's life. You certainly couldn't go to the temple and worship. Even Isaiah uses leprosy as a term to describe the contamination of sin. This is a horrible disease.

This is not just a picture of healing like we've seen in other places the last few weeks. In fact, when you read Luke 5:12-14, you don't see the word "healed" mentioned once, but you do see this idea of cleansing mentioned over and over again. You didn't need to just be healed of leprosy; you needed to be cleansed. You were filthy, repulsive and repugnant.

So that's the situation this guy is in. He is able to do nothing about it. He can't go to anyone; he has lost everything: His name, his family, his occupation, everything. Any interaction with other people is gone. I want you to see the message here. From dirty to clean. Jesus is speaking to all who feel helpless. Feel the weight of this man's condition as he approaches Jesus. See the boldness of this move. He comes to Jesus and, instead of keeping his distance, he falls down at Jesus' feet. He bows down and honors Jesus. Listen to what he says. He says, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

Now, think about that statement. This man is not doubting whether or not Jesus has the power to make him clean. He knows that Jesus has the power to make him clean. What he doubts is that if anybody would be willing to help him out in this way. Here is a guy who has lived his entire life with everybody ignoring him. Now, he is just crying out for somebody to help him.

What does Jesus do? Instead of turning from him, Jesus turns to him. That, in and of itself,

is different than everybody else in the culture. Not only does He turn to him, Jesus reaches out His hand and touches the man. Don't miss the beauty in this picture right here. You touch a leper, you defile yourself. You run the risk of taking his leprosy upon yourself. Jesus doesn't just keep His hands behind His back and say, "Okay, be clean." Instead, He reaches out and touches this man right at the point of his helplessness. You can imagine the shock on this guy's face as Jesus touches his skin. When nobody would even get near him, now somebody is actually touching him. Jesus says, "I am willing, be clean." The leper realizes this man is willing to risk taking his defilement upon Himself in order that he might be made clean.

Does that sound familiar? Jesus would be so willing to take our defilement upon Himself in order that we might be made clean. Jesus says to all who are helpless, "I will restore you." Jesus says, "Be clean," and immediately the leprosy left him. Those words "Be clean" are actually only one word in the original language of the New Testament. Jesus says one word, and immediately, the leprosy left him. Luke had emphasized how he was covered with it and now, immediately, it is gone. He is able to go to the temple and offer his sacrifice, go to the priest and say, "Hey, look at this. I look a little different than the last time you saw me, don't I?" He is completely restored. His whole life is restored in that one word Jesus said, as Jesus touched him.

Now, this picture is so clear in this idea of shame-based cultures that we are thinking about this morning. You go into Muslim cultures for example, and whenever you go into a mosque, you see everybody realizing the importance of being clean before you go in. You wash, and you take off your shoes before you go in. It is a very important thing that you are cleansed before you enter in the presence of Allah.

Similarly, I remember the first time I was sitting with a Muslim guy at a table in India, and I brought out a Bible, and I said, "Let me share this with you." All of a sudden, he put his hands up, and I thought, "What's wrong?" He said, "I can't touch that book." I said, "Why not?" He said, "In order to touch that book, I would have to go wash my hands and my face, put on gloves, and then I could touch the book." Now, this is the Bible we are talking about. I was going to try to give him the Bible, and he wouldn't take it. Not because he didn't want it, but because he thought he had to be clean to even touch it.

So this idea of Jesus taking us in our dirtiness, in our filth, in that which is repulsive, and He makes us clean, that is huge! I don't want to limit it to how this might speak in other cultures. As I was reading through this particular story and praying about it this week, I couldn't help but think that there are many people in this faith family who come here this morning, and there are things in your life and in your past that have made you feel untouchable, dirty. Whether it is something you've done that you really wish you could forget, or sins you've struggled with that you wish you could wipe out completely from your mind, or maybe, it is things that have been done to you that you couldn't control, and you were helpless then, and for whatever reason, for years the dirt and the filth that you have felt have just pervaded your life. I want to remind you, based on the authority of God's Word, that Jesus looks at you, and He says, "I am willing to take your defilement upon myself, and I am willing to make you whole, to restore you again." Jesus does not turn from you in your shame. He turns to you in your shame. He reaches out to you, and He says, "I will restore you." To all who are helpless, Jesus says, "I will restore you."

From rejected to accepted ...

Second story: Go over to Luke 7. Look with me at verse 36. Jesus reverses our status from dirty to clean.

[Now] one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and then poured perfume on them.

When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who was touching him and what kind of woman she is - that she is a sinner."

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you."

"Tell me, teacher," he said.

"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?"

Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled."

"You have judged correctly," Jesus said.

Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven - for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little."

Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven."

The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

Jesus takes us from being dirty to clean. Second, Jesus takes us from being rejected to being accepted. Get this scene: This woman is around watching this meal take place. It was a pretty common thing for people who were not invited to a meal like this with important religious leaders to stand around and watch, and maybe, if you are lucky, you get leftovers from their table afterwards. So, here is this woman relegated to the sidelines, and all of a sudden, she intrudes on the scene and kneels at Jesus' feet and lets down her hair. This is a woman who is known for loose living. We don't know exactly, but most likely, something along the lines of prostitution, or something that was a very public picture of her sin that she was known for. Here she was bowing at the feet of Jesus, pouring perfume on His feet and wiping His feet with her hair.

Immediately, Simon, the Pharisee, reacts, and he thinks, "Wait a minute. First of all, a woman and a Jewish rabbi would never be seen reacting like this in public. Then, second, Jesus claims to be a prophet, and if He were a prophet, He would know who this woman is, and He would know all the sins that she has, and therefore, He wouldn't have anything to

do with her." So, Simon concludes Jesus is not a prophet because of the way He is responding to this woman. She has lived in this culture where she is completely rejected by the sin that pervades her life. She comes on the scene, and she's wondering, "What is going to happen when she does this to Jesus?"

What's really interesting is that when you take this story and put it in chronological order, like a harmony of the Gospels when they are put side by side, you realize this happens soon after Jesus says those words in Matthew 11:28, "*Come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" Now, whether that was exactly what happened before this particular meal or not, obviously something has happened in this woman's heart, and she has trusted in Jesus to take her from a place where she will be rejected to a place where she is accepted.

So, I want you to see the picture here to all who are hurting; to all who are relegated to the sidelines by your sin, by your reputation, by the things you can or cannot control. Jesus says, "I will receive you." Nobody thinks that this woman should be allowed at the table except for Jesus.

Now, don't miss the beauty of this picture. It is not the picture of this woman having to get things right in her life, and then, she would be allowed to come into the presence of Jesus. That is not what this passage is teaching us. This passage is teaching us of a woman who was known for her sinfulness, who has, obviously, had a change of heart and trusted in Jesus. He says later, "Your faith has healed you." Not what she did had healed her, but her faith had healed her. She was trusting in Him to receive her.

So, she comes into His presence, still with all the baggage of her life, and Jesus says, "Go. Your faith has healed you, go in peace." He restores her. He says, "I will receive you, and I will take your hurts, and I will take the pain that you have experienced in your life as a result of your sin, and I will overcome it by receiving you, and my grace will transform your life." This is good news!

For all of us in this room, no matter how storied our past might be and no matter what we've done even this past week in our lives, it is important to realize that coming to Jesus does not mean getting our act together and getting everything right and then coming to Jesus. We come to Jesus with all the filth in our lives, and His grace transforms our lives. This is not a performance-based salvation where we do this or that in order to have this honor that Christ has bestowed on us. He bestows honor on us in the middle of our sin. By His grace, He says, "I will receive you."

From lost to found ...

Now on to the next story, which is in Luke 15. I am guessing this story is one of the more familiar stories we will look at. In Luke 15:11, I want us to look at verses 11-24 and picture this scene. Jesus is describing the love of His Father.

There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, "Father, give me my share of the estate." So he divided his property between them.

Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach

with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." So he got up and went to his father.

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

The son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son."

But the father said to his servants, "Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." So they began to celebrate.

Jesus takes us from being dirty to clean, from being rejected to accepted, from being lost to found. We know this story. The son goes to his father and says, "I want my share of the estate now." He was entitled to this once his father died. So, with his actions, he is saying, "I would be better off if you were dead now, so I can get the stuff you are going to leave to me." It is a huge shame that he is putting on his father.

So, he runs off and squanders it, and he finds himself working in a pig sty, and he is jealous of what the pigs are eating. That is not a good situation to be in. So, he comes to himself and says, "I wonder if I could go back home." So, he gets together his speech, and then heads home. When he gets close to home, he starts wondering what his father will do. However, as soon as his father sees him, he comes running out to his son.

Now, this is an incredible picture. First of all is the fact that the father was waiting on his son and saw him when he was far off. Isn't that a great picture? No matter how far we wander, we know that we have a father who waits. However, then the father runs; this is the big cultural surprise in this parable, to see the father running. This is the only time we see God in a hurry throughout Scripture. The father is running after the son. Now, why is the father running? Obviously, out of love for his son, but also because he wants to show his affection to his son. However, it may be a little deeper.

I want you to turn with me in the Old Testament to Deuteronomy 21. I want you to let this passage transform your understanding of the parable of the prodigal son. Look at verse 18. Why did the father run, throw his arms around him? This is, literally, the Greek for "tackle the guy". I mean, he just went after him. Why did he do that? Listen to this.

If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard." Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.

Did you catch this? That is pretty intense. Remember honor and shame? That is the picture here. The son is not bringing honor to his family. He is shaming his family. This is what the law says. So, the father, when he sees his son coming back to him, goes running to him. Why? Because the law says a son that has brought this kind of honor and shame upon his family is worthy of being stoned. So, the father goes running out to him and says, "If anyone is going to stone him, he will have to go through me to get to my son." The father covers him so that, if anybody was to try to hurt him, they would get the father instead.

Now, do not miss the beauty of the gospel here. To all who feel hopeless, who feel God could never forgive this; that God can never bring me back in life, or this or that; to all who feel hopeless, Jesus says, "I will rescue you!" This is God in a hurry to rescue His people, even when they have completely brought shame upon themselves. He rushes to restore the honor. He says, "Put a robe on him; put a ring on him, and put sandals on his feet. He is not a slave; he is free in our house. Let's celebrate!" What should have been a funeral has turned into a feast because of the God who rescues His people from their sins.

I don't know if you've ever been in a situation where you've been so immersed and engrossed in your sin that you felt completely hopeless. You felt like you would never be able to get out of it. Or, maybe, there are people you love and care for who may be in that situation right now. I want to remind you that we serve a God who rescues His people from sin and the things of this world. He rescues His people from the shame that sin brings.

From poor to rich ...

Two more stories. Luke 16:19. This is a parable that is in two parts. We will look at the first part starting in verse 19.

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."

But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."

I want us to see how Jesus takes us from being poor to being rich. There is a huge reversal in this passage. It starts with a contrast between a wealthy man and Lazarus. The wealthy man is dressed in purple, which is a representation of all the wealth that he had in this world. He had everything you could want. Then, you have Lazarus who could do nothing but sit there and have his ulcers, his sores, licked by dogs. What a horrible picture of the poverty of Lazarus.

However, then, when they both die, everything is reversed. You've got Lazarus enjoying the feast at Abraham's side, and you've got this rich man who is now in torment and pain; it

says four different times, in unceasing agony. There is a chasm that will never, ever be crossed. This is a picture of how Jesus takes us from being poor to being rich.

Throughout the book of Luke, we see a lot of emphasis on poverty and what Christ does in the middle of poverty. However, it's not just poverty physically; it's also poverty spiritually. It is a dependence on God. Don't miss this. This story is not intended to say that if we are poor economically in this life, then we will be rich in heaven, or if we are wealthy economically in this life, then we will go to hell. That is not what this passage is teaching here. After all, Abraham was known as a very wealthy man in the Old Testament. Here he is rich next to Lazarus. The picture, though, is the poverty of the dependence upon God, trust in God.

I think it does have something to do with our economic level. You go overseas into impoverished areas, and you see people's faith, and you see a real genuineness and a real purity to faith. You see a people who find it easier to trust in God because they don't have things of this world to trust in. Then, you come back to our setting here, and we have to realize that in our culture, it is very easy for us to become dependent on the things that we have as opposed to being dependent upon the God whom we serve.

So, what we see here is a transition from being poor to being rich. The point is Jesus is speaking to all who are humble, to all who trust in God and to all who are dependent upon God for their sufficiency, for their sustenance. For all who are humble, Jesus says, "I will reward you." Don't miss the picture here. There are rewards before and after they die. The difference is, before they die, the rewards belong to the wealthy man. He had everything he wanted. When they crossed over to the other side, so to speak, the rewards are completely reversed. God bestows the honor instead of us having to acquire the honor for ourselves. God says to all who are humble, "To all that will trust in me, no matter what this life brings you, no matter how much you have or do not have, I will reward you." Humility is the picture here. We need to see this.

From blind to seeing ...

One last picture. Luke 18:35. In this story, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem where He is to be crucified.

"As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, "Jesus of Nazareth is passing by."

He called out, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Those who led the way rebuked him and told him to be quiet, but he shouted all the more, "Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Jesus stopped and ordered the man to be brought to him. When he came near, Jesus asked him, "What do you want me to do for you?"

"Lord, I want to see," he replied.

Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has healed you." Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus, praising God. When all the people saw it, they also praised God.

We've seen Jesus take someone who was dirty and make them clean, from rejected to

accepted, from lost to found and from poor to rich. Now, I want you to see how Jesus takes us from being blind to seeing.

This guy is mentioned as being Bartimaeus in Mark's account. He cries out, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*" Here, he is blind, and as a result of his blindness, he has to resort to begging on the side of the road. You could not do anything else if you were blind in this particular culture. So, he's sitting there begging, and he hears that Jesus is coming by, and he starts to scream out. The crowd tries to quiet him down, and he screams even louder, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*"

I want you to see the picture. Jesus, literally, says one word. He says, "See." All of a sudden, this man's sight is restored. I want you to see, not only the physical picture, but also the picture underneath it. To all who need healing, Jesus says, "I will reveal myself to you."

Don't miss the play on sight in this passage. This is at the point in Luke where Jesus is about to go to the cross, and people are wondering who this Jesus is and should we believe in Him. These people who can see doubt who Jesus is. However, then you have a blind man who knows exactly who Jesus is. He says, "*Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.*" He calls out for his healing. Jesus says, "I will reveal myself to you." He says, "Your faith has healed you." Jesus brings light in the middle of his darkness. He shows Himself clearly to this man, and the beautiful picture is that this man goes from being on the side of the road begging, then you get to the end of this passage, and it says he is walking alongside Jesus, praising God. His life is completely transformed as a result of his disease. As a result of his blindness, he was able to see Christ for who he really was. That brought complete healing to him, now walking alongside Jesus on the road, praising God.

Jesus reverses our status. Five different examples here, from dirty to clean, from rejected to accepted, from lost to found, poor to rich, and blind to seeing. All throughout the book of Luke, Jesus speaks into pictures of shame and brings honor. He reverses our status.

He redeems our souls.

From cross to resurrection ...

However, that is not where the story ends. He not only reverses our status, but He redeems our souls.

I want you to see the ultimate picture of shame and honor in the book of Luke. It is when Jesus goes from the cross to resurrection. Don't miss the whole message of the cross. The shame of our sin is put upon Him, as He is mocked, He is beaten, He is scourged, and He is spit upon. He is nailed to this cross and all of our shame is put upon Him. He hangs there completely shameful before all who pass by. However, God takes the ultimate picture of shame and turns it into the ultimate picture of honor in the resurrection of Christ.

It brings us back to Jesus' words in Luke 4 when He says, "I come to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." What is really interesting in this picture is in Isaiah 61, then even further back, in Leviticus 25, you see a reference to the Year of Jubilee. The Year of Jubilee happened every fifty years. Every fifty years, it was declared that during that fiftieth year, everybody who had a debt, the debt would be cancelled. Everybody who had fallen into hard times and had to become a slave of somebody else, they were now freed. In that fiftieth year, God brought things back to even keel, so to

speak.

So, when Jesus comes on the scene in Luke 4 and quotes from Isaiah 61, and He says, "I come to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor", He goes to the cross, and He dies there, and He rises from the grave, and what He is saying to all who are held captive by sin, to all who are oppressed by your sin, in the middle of your shame, "I have come to set you free. I will release you." That is a picture of the gospel in a shame-based culture. Jesus is saying in the middle of your shame, "I release you." God has taken your shame and turned it into honor.

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