



A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: OCTOBER 2019

by Lee Shipp

THE INSANITY OF PAUL

I wish I could write this slowly, because I know your tendency is to read it quickly. It was not intended to be read quickly. It is filled with emotion. It is a Messianic psalm capturing the heart of the Messiah as only the Holy Spirit can convey. So, please be still as you read. Be quiet! Listen. Feel the words. These words are meant for you! Though they are cried to the Father, they were intended for you to feel them. Jesus is concerned that you will be offended by Him. Here it is.

"Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord God of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. Because for Thy sake I have borne reproach; shame hath covered my face. I am become a stranger unto my brethren, & an alien unto my mother's children. For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; & the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me" (Psalms 69:6-9).

There you go ... reading it fast! But wait! Listen to Jesus' cry. Feel His passion, this zeal that is eating Him up. Here Jesus is depicted as being drenched in shame! He feels the shame. He can imagine the multitudes that will not understand how someone so loathsome can be the One upon which all men should hope!

Allow me some liberty as I express Jesus' concern here:

Oh Father, please don't let those who are waiting for you, waiting for your promised Messiah, be ashamed of You when they see me. Please Father, don't let those who are seeking you be confused by the shame I will go through. When they see me on the cross: naked, rejected, hated, despised, defecating on myself, helpless; please Father, don't let them be confused and turn away!

Please hear me Father! Turn to me in your mercies. Don't hide your face from me: you know my reproach, my shame, & my dishonor. You see all of my enemies surrounding my cross and hating me. Please Father, don't you turn also!

My heart breaks from the reproach. I am full of heaviness. I looked for someone who would have pity on me. Surely, someone in heaven or on earth would have pity for me, but no one did! I had no comforter. (Psalms 69:16-21)

But the zeal for the Lord's house consumed Him. He went forth & tread the winepress alone. He bore for us the fury of God's wrath against sin. Why did He do this? For the House of God! So the Father could have His Church! So the shamed sinners can have freedom from their shame! Hebrews 12:2 captures this, "... For the joy that was set before Him [He] endured the cross, despising the shame[.]"

Jesus despised the shame, He looked down upon the shame. Jesus attributed no worth or influence to shame; He treated it as an outcast. It was simply not an issue to Him. The opinions and judgments of the self-righteous leaders would not intimidate His zeal to free the shamed & oppressed. He refused to allow their opinions to affect Him. He refused to defend Himself against their accusations so they would like Him. Therefore, He could prefer the company of outcasts. He could touch unclean people & not care what holy people would think of Him. He could wash people's feet. He could touch lepers. He could allow prostitutes to cling to Him. He could defend the outcast from religious brutality! He could take a cross & publicly die; & actually, this was the height of shame & dishonor, dying on a Roman cross, & Jesus suffered it all!

Just consider how the world has changed since Jesus came. Unclean people were

filled with hope. The shamed were set free and boldly go out to follow Jesus. When they saw him, they felt compelled to touch him because they understood that their salvation was near. They came alive!

Just consider the surge of hope that filled the atmosphere when they heard that Jesus was near. Consider how they rose from their filth to touch hope! Consider how unstoppable they were when the cure to their disease was at hand! Don't get in the way of someone who is both desperate & hopeful when the King is near. Jesus was an outcast and the outcast knew He could heal them. So, what is this shame Jesus despised? He despised the oppression of sin and its power over humanity. He despised the addiction that imprisoned so many. He despised the shame of divorce and broken relationships. He despised the diseases that caused multitudes to hide from family and friends. He despised the humiliation that covered men & women. He did not create them to be covered with this! Therefore, He clothed Himself in that shame, in that reproach, in order that He could remove it from all men & clothed them in His glory! For Jesus, honor before God outweighs whatever shame we experience before mere creatures!

FEW COMFORTERS

Jesus is still despised today. Very few are His comforters. Very few are those who have pity on Him. Just imagine how insane a person would appear who actively sought to recruit people to follow someone who was crucified on a Roman cross. This is just what the author of Hebrews is doing! This has to be insanity: *"Wherefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach" (Hebrews 13:12-13).*

Take a moment to consider the historical shame of crucifixion. Before crucifying their victims, the Romans tortured them. They would "... have to endure the lash, the

"JUST CONSIDER THE SURGE OF HOPE THAT FILLED THE ATMOSPHERE WHEN THEY HEARD THAT JESUS WAS NEAR."

rack, chains, the branding-iron in his eyes, & finally, after every extremity of suffering, he will be crucified ..." thus, began the degrading loss of all dignity.

So, dear shamed one, do you feel exposed? Embarrassed around good people? Jesus understands your shame. It was out of this that Jesus cried, Oh Father, please don't let those who are looking for You be ashamed or embarrassed and confused because of me ... it is for You that I am covered in disgrace & shame!

Crucifixion was designed to humiliate the victim. The victim was stripped naked before being hung on a cross so that his genitals would be publicly exposed. Obviously, the Romans sought to humiliate their victims. Crowds would gather around the grisly sight. His mother, His sisters, His brothers were all there looking on at that sight! As the victim drew near to expiring on the cross, his bowels would loosen, defecating and urinating on himself. Crucifixion was a horrid picture on the Roman landscape, and it was intended to be. Cicero argued that Roman citizens should not ever have to hear the word cross. He said:

Even if death be threatened, we may die free men; but the executioner, & the veiling of the head, & the mere name of the cross, should be far removed, not only from the persons of Roman citizens — from their thoughts, & eyes, & ears. For not only the actual fact & endurance of all these things, but the bare possibility of being exposed to them — the expectation, the mere mention of them even — is unworthy of a Roman citizen & of a free man.

At the ghastly sight, Mark records: *"They all left him and fled"* (Mark 14:50). The crucifixion was such a devastating blow to his disciples. Surely, this is why many of them abandoned Jesus & scattered after the crucifixion. They simply couldn't connect this kind of humiliation with glory, divinity, & triumph. Jesus was humiliated, shamed, & brutalized. There was no comforter. There was no pity for Him. Why? Why did they leave? Because He was shame! His cross was shame! By the time Jesus got to the cross, you could count on one hand the number of people who were willing to be associated with him.

The Son of God, while on a rescue mission of love, was misunderstood, insulted, betrayed, denied, mocked, spat on, cursed, abandoned, stripped, & crucified. And

everybody fled from Him!

But wait! One comes ... what is this insanity? What does he dare say? Is he in fact glorying in the cross? Is he actually declaring that One who died on a cross is in fact – God? Who is this preaching the cross? Who is this making so much commotion about the Cross of Jesus? What insane person is embracing this event with such joy? Is it Saul of Tarsus? Dare he jeopardize so much reputation and accomplishment to glory in the cross?

Yes! Yes, he will! “... God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (Galatians 6:14). He found in this cross freedom! Paul saw it the glory of Jesus. It was lowliness (Philippians 2:3). It was in esteeming others better than himself. Jesus had elevated the lowly by surrendering all to the One who is most lofty! It was not in the approval of the mighty or the undefiled and religious that Jesus was after. Oh no, it was there ... in the streets, among the broken & rejected where Jesus would delight the Father’s heart.

GLORYING IN THE CROSS

Jesus made Himself nothing in the world’s eyes and Paul wants to do the same. Paul wants to imitate the shamed King and embrace being nothing before the world. Paul strove to become lowly in the world’s eyes & was unaffected by the world’s rejection. He counted all of his accomplishments as dung in comparison to the wealth of knowing Jesus! His churches were embarrassed of him! He boasted only in his weakness & suffering. He went around telling everyone he was the greatest sinner in a day when all wanted to be seen as holy. He went around promoting himself as the slave of One who died on a Cross!

He suffered rejection, mockery, imprisonment, & beatings. Paul made THE CROSS THE CENTER OF HIS THEOLOGY in a day when the cross was the most shameful instrument on earth! As Jesus, Paul was going to welcome shame & boast in it, by glorying in the Cross!

People everywhere are trying to save their lives and reputations. People everywhere are trying to save themselves from pain, yet all the while dying at the hands of men. But those who have chosen the way of the crucified are free. They have nothing to defend. They have laid down their lives; therefore, what can man do to them?

Paul, defamed & crucified by his own people, beaten & crucified by the secular world, betrayed & crucified by professing believers: attacks, false reports, beatings, plots, setbacks, failures, & even the destruction of his work, still he rose from the grave of their abuse & hate to show men the love of God.

His churches were nearly destroyed by men who professed to follow Jesus. His converts were nearly robbed of their grace by the deceitfulness of lawyers. Like David with Absalom, Paul took it all from the hand of God, ran from none of it, altered none of it, & yielded to all of it! His crucified life has literally saved the lives of innumerable believers because he triumphed in crucifixion & rose from the beating. He was not cynical. He was not hard. His crucifixion was voluntary – he chose this cross! He really loved.

To glory in the cross is the decision to surrender my will to God’s. It is the decision to grasp the hand of God & agree to rejection from friends and family. It is to welcome the hammer, the nails, & the cross. It is the decision to have my family, my friends, & my church stare at me in horror wondering what horrible thing I must have done.

I would bear it all. I would drink the cup, feel the shame, and become an object of humiliation and scorn. I would take pain as a crown, rejection as a throne, & humiliation as a royal robe worthy of wearing! I would be draped in the identity of another, having lost my own to this cross. I would see myself in my Father’s eyes and hear my worth from my Father’s mouth rather than the belligerent rants of the brutish crowds gathered to watch me die. I would agree to the lies & rumors that will continue to live long after I have died.

THRIVING IN SHAME

Are you a Christian? Are you a minister of the gospel? Do you boast in the Cross? Then don’t be ashamed to embrace the shamed! Don’t hide yourself from those that men have deemed unworthy. When you make a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind! Go out into the highways and hedges & compel all to come to the table.

Maybe this is why so many are lost, so many shamed are dying in their shame. Perhaps it is because there are still so many who fail to comfort Jesus. So few are

willing to go outside the camp & bear His reproach. So few are willing to demonstrate His message, too ashamed of people of shame, too scared to be an object of shame by the religious elite.

Luther was not afraid of going to Jesus. Luther’s good friend George Spalatin was a pastor who had made a scandalous error. In response, Luther said,

Therefore, my faithful request & admonition is that you join our company & associate with us, who are real, great, & hard-boiled sinners. You must by no means make Christ to seem paltry & trifling to us, as though He could be our Helper only when we want to be rid from imaginary, nominal, and childish sins. No, No! That would not be good for us. He must rather be a Savior & Redeemer from real, great, & grievous, & damnable transgressions & iniquities, yea, from the very greatest and most shocking sins; to be brief, from all sins added together in a grand total.

How many preachers would do that for a fallen brother today? How many reputable men would be willing to bear the rejection of their noble class in order to invite someone who is covered in shame to be their friend? And yet, most of those preachers who would never chance the rejection of their religious group, by loving shamed people, would consider themselves to be preachers of the gospel. How sad! How tragically sad!

Honestly, they are the ones who are truly shameful! Those who stand in arrogant judgment of their fellow men, those who are tearless in the face of misery, those who care more about honor from men than approval by God are the truly shameful!

LET US GO TO HIM!

So, are you a Christian? Whose shame are you most afraid of? The world’s or God’s? Do you bear His reproach? Do you boast in His cross? Have you come out of hiding to call all men to be healed by the One who touches crosses and makes them beautiful?

One Christmas season, I was driving through town & noticed the marquees all around town. They were advertising the most beautiful jewelry people could purchase as gifts for their loved ones. Crosses were advertised everywhere. Crosses! Something that was so hideous that Cicero claimed no Roman should even hear the word! The ghastly sight was enough to make the strongest nerves collapse. Yet, all of the stores were selling crosses on necklaces, on rings, on bracelets. But no one was selling guillotines, meth needles, or electric chairs as jewelry. Why? Because they are not beautiful! So why the cross? How did the cross become so beautiful to people all over the world? The cross became beautiful because Jesus touched it! Whatever Jesus touches becomes beautiful. See, He is the remover of shame! He removed the shame of the cross! If He could remove the shame of the cross just imagine what His touch could do for you! When He touches the shameful people, He makes them beautiful!

So dear one, go to Him! Join Him. Don’t be ashamed to be all that He was and is. You are His hands, go touch some people who are dying in their shame. Go love someone who has destroyed their family by shameful actions. Go to some religious preacher who is more afraid of his group’s rejection than he is of God’s approval and touch that shameful man. Love him and help him be free to love and serve the shameful King!

I forgot who said this, but I considered it to be a brilliant thought. As at the beginning of this article, read it slowly. Here it is: “Our interest in how we treat others is threatening to overtake our concern about how others treat us.” Now that is how to live life! And beloved, to live this life is truly an honor! Like Paul, it is to be free from the ones who are truly shameful – those who are too good to love broken and defiled people. Jesus not only joined Himself to fallen humanity, He took their shame on Him that He may absolutely devastate it from ever returning to haunt them again. Follow Him! Accept this honor for Jesus’ sake and for His glory.

Lee Shipp

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