

What to do with our shame (Matthew 27:1-26)

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[0 : 00] reading from verse 1 of chapter 27 through to verse 26. I hear the word of the Lord together.

Early in the morning, all the chief priests and the elders of the people came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the 30 silver coins to the chief priests and the elders.

I've sinned, he said, for I've betrayed innocent blood. What is that to us? They replied. That's your responsibility. So Judas threw the money into the temple and left.

Then he went away and hanged himself. The chief priests picked up the coins and said, it is against the law to put this into the treasury since it is blood money.

[1 : 15] So they decided to use the money to buy the potter's field as a burial place for foreigners. That is why it's been called the field of blood to this day. Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled.

They took the 30 silver coins, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter's field as the Lord commanded me. Meanwhile, Jesus stood before the governor.

And the governor asked him, are you the king of the Jews? Yes, it is as you say, Jesus replied. When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer.

Then Pilate asked him, don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you? But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge, to the great amazement of the governor.

Now, it was the governor's custom at the feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time, they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas.

[2 : 22] So when the crowd had gathered, Pilate asked them, which one do you want me to release to you, Barabbas or Jesus who is called Christ?

For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him. While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message.

Don't have anything to do with that innocent man. For I've suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him. But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

Which of the two do you want me to release to you? Asked the governor. Barabbas, they answered. What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?

Pilate asked. They all answered. Crucify him. Why? What crime has he committed? Asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder. Crucify him.

[3 : 28] When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. I am innocent of this man's blood, he said.

It is your responsibility. But all the people answered. Let his blood be on us and on our children. Then he released Barabbas to them.

But he had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified. This is the word of the Lord. And again, if there's anything that's a bit tender from reading this passage, do reach up.

Come talk to me or come talk to someone else in this church for prayer as well. So pass it over to Nathan. Thank you, William.

It's really lovely to be here with you all this afternoon. And I feel like I need to say, so about a month ago I was here, we were talking about end times and judgment. And now we're talking about all the issues in here, which are all very gloomy.

[4 : 35] And I just want to say, normally I'm a really fun person who tells a lot of jokes. And I'm always really happy. And if that doesn't come across, it's the passages, it's not me. Normally I add a lot more energy.

But it is a really striking passage for a lot of different reasons. And a passage that might touch us in tender places.

So I'd like to pray for us as we go through it, that we actually see the gospel and the Lord Jesus Christ and have his grace and mercy shine through to us as we think about it.

So let me pray and then we'll get into it. Gracious Father, as we read your word, it speaks to us so directly.

It brings up so many different emotions and thoughts in our minds. But I pray that by your grace and by your power, by the end of thinking about this passage, our thoughts and our emotions would be directed towards the Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 41] That he has come to save us and redeem us. I pray particularly for those who feel the pain of this passage as we go through it.

Will you help them understand the glorious thing that the Lord has done for us? We pray in his name. Amen. So a couple of months ago, something happened for the first time in my life.

So as some of you will know, I have two daughters. One's three months old in this coming week. The other is two. So a couple of months ago, it was me and my two-year-old.

I was looking after her. It had been a long day. We were getting home late. We were hungry. We were grumpy. She wasn't sort of cooperating as I would like.

And it just happened. I snapped. And I yelled at her. Now, I'd yelled at her before, but was normally like, don't put the knife in the socket or whatever it is.

[6 : 43] Yelled at her to warn her. I'd never yelled at her in anger before. I'd never lost my temper. And so immediately, I just sort of went into our bedroom and sat on the bed, just crushed.

Ashamed. Ashamed. I'd never wanted to be that kind of dad. I'd never envisioned myself ever being that kind of dad. I thought I was going to be the fun dad who would play with her.

And just in that moment, I realized I'd become this thing that I'd perhaps dreaded becoming. And I felt so ashamed. I felt so guilty.

Maybe you've felt like that. As you look back and remember something in your life that was just crushing. You feel so ashamed of you.

You never want anyone to know about. The question I think we need to ask ourselves is, what are we going to do with our shame? How are we going to face those shameful moments in our lives?

[7 : 56] I think this passage will help us. Before we dive into the verses that were read, it's worth stopping and thinking about how unusual it is, this passage.

So the Gospel of Matthew, as you hopefully have realized, it really focuses on the Lord Jesus Christ, his life. And if you don't know, we're getting to the real pointy end of what he came to do, his mission.

The Gospel is about to be explained. By the end of this chapter, chapter 27, Jesus will be dead. And chapter 28 is the end of the whole book.

So this is the climax. This is it. This is what we've been reading all the way through four. This is what the book has been building up to. And the question is, why at this crucial moment does Matthew take the spotlight away from the Lord Jesus and direct it to all these other characters, fairly minor characters in the story?

In these 26 verses, recounting some of the final hours before Jesus' death, Matthew only gives us one sentence of Jesus' words in verse 11.

[9 : 08] In Greek, it's only two words from Jesus at this pivotal moment. Why does Matthew spend so much time in his account talking about characters who are relatively minor at this point in his book?

Well, I would suggest to you that to understand what's going to happen to Jesus and why he had to do what he did, you need to understand what these characters are going through. We need to understand what happened to these people, their experiences.

And as we understand them and perhaps empathize with them, we will know how valuable Jesus is. We'll understand his death. In this passage, we meet four different kinds of people.

You have Judas, the chief priests, Pilate, and the crowd. They all play a role in this story. And they're all sort of grappling with the same question, who is responsible for the death of Jesus?

And I think in some way, they all feel a sense of shame over this. Because they all know that they are all responsible in some way. But they all deal with that shame in different ways.

[10 : 20] And we're going to go through this passage and think about how they're dealing with this guilt and this shame, that they are the ones responsible for the death of the Lord Jesus.

First, let's look at Judas, verses 1 to 10. But focusing on verse 3. When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders.

Like I said, we all have moments we feel ashamed of. Moments that, you know, you remember them now and you just cringe. Oh, I can't believe I did that or I said that.

Moments perhaps you desperately love to go back and undo, go back and fix, go back and blot out of your life. Perhaps that's, in a small sense, what Judas is trying to do.

Go back on a truly awful decision that he's made. A truly awful action of his. And sometimes these feelings of shame can be overwhelming.

[11 : 30] We want to run. We want to hide. We want to escape. We want to sink into the ground. I think that's what Judas is trying to do.

Escape this overwhelming shame that he feels for what he's done. And Judas' life ends in absolute tragedy.

I suspect we've all been touched by that tragedy that is suicide. It's sadly so common in our world today. Many of us will know someone.

Perhaps have really deeply cared about someone who has committed suicide. And this passage isn't meant to comment on that topic or answer any questions about that topic.

I think it's meant to show us just how tragic it is to try and run from shame and guilt. That that option, trying to get away from it, trying to get out from under it, trying to sort of escape or blot it out or whatever, it truly doesn't work.

[12 : 39] It only ends in disaster and tragedy and deep, deep sadness. And so I implore you.

As you listen to this, if you feel shame, if you feel guilt, don't think you can outrun it. Don't think you can get away from it. It always catches up. And if you don't deal with it, then perhaps a tragedy of this kind or a similar kind could catch up with you.

It did with Judas. Judas, we see how awful his life is in the end. Now we see we can't escape shame and guilt.

It will catch up with us. But there are some relatively common methods that people use to try and avoid it in some way. To try to get away from it. To try to get away from it long enough that we can sort of be happy and content.

And I think we see that in the actions of the groups who come next. The second kind of person is illustrated in the chief priests. Now unlike Judas, who's just overwhelmed and is a mess, they seem cool, calm, and collected.

[13 : 58] They don't seem bothered at all. Following Judas' death, we have this fascinating account of these priests deliberating over what to do with the money he's left in the temple.

This blood money, as they call it. Option number one, donate it to the temple, but they can't do that. This money is dirty. It's been used to pay for a man that they're going to murder.

Can't go towards the temple of God. Option two, then, let's go buy a field where they can bury people who have nowhere else to be buried. That seems like the right sort of thing to do.

They've come across some money, and instead of keeping it for themselves, they donate it to a worthy cause. They do something good. Or it seems good. And in this whole fascinating deliberation, there seems to be no acknowledgement of the fact that perhaps just a few hours earlier, that was their money.

That they were paying to Judas for the life of Jesus. They gave Judas that money in the first place. It's their blood money. The price for Jesus' head.

[15 : 13] They pretend like that didn't even happen. It's like they've forgotten that they conspired with Judas to kill Jesus. And now they're dancing around the silver coins wondering how they can look good and holy and righteous with this blood money.

You can just hear them passing off the blame. I'd say something like, I think you'll find that Judas sold Jesus. It wasn't us. We just found the money, and we were trying to do the right thing.

We're not guilty. We kept the temple holy. It's not our blood money. We did the right thing. And yet they are as guilty as anyone for the death of the Lord Jesus.

And this is a response to shame. To try and cover it over with other good things that we've done. So we can look at our lives and say, well, on balance, you know, there are some bad things.

But on balance, I'm good. I'm a good person. I do a lot of good things, and there's a few other things. But I'm really a good person. Really. We try to distance ourselves from the shame with the good things that we do.

[16 : 23] And I think this is illustrated in the reference to the Old Testament verses 9 and 10. These verses are kind of tricky because there's no one passage that Matthew's referencing, but kind of this idea.

He seems to draw from a number of different passages. Jeremiah has a couple of places where he speaks of this potter's field. And the prophet Zechariah mentions 30 pieces of silver.

And what Matthew is noticing and he's showing us is that there's this really uncanny resemblance between the events that are happening, the events surrounding Judas' money and that kind of thing, and the words of the prophets.

See, both of those prophets talk about the judgment that would come upon the leaders of Israel. And they use this potter's field and the 30 pieces of silver as sort of an illustration.

These are like red flags warning people that these are the kinds of leaders that are condemned in the Old Testament. So their own actions, their own attempts at being good are actually the thing that reveals these people are guilty.

[17 : 36] And often we're just like them. We try and escape our shame by smothering it with all these other good things that we do. We try to balance the ledger.

We try to soothe ourselves by doing something, you know, that we think is righteous. Lull ourselves into a sense of ease because on balance we're good.

Like the chief priest, though, it won't work. In fact, it can seal our fate. At the time when I yelled at Ali, it was a stressful time.

My wife and youngest child were in hospital and I was sort of juggling, looking after a two-year-old and work and going to see them. And it was hard work.

And it would have been easy for me to think, you know, I've done really well. I'm trying to hold everything together and I've done it so much and I've only broken down this once. But all the rest of the time I've been good. And to sort of just justify it away.

[18 : 35] I'm actually a good dad, even though I wasn't. So often our response to shame is to try cover it. But it doesn't work.

It doesn't work. The next character we meet in the passage is Pilate. He's a Roman governor of the area. And what we know from our history books is Pilate had a pretty bad relationship with the Jews.

And we also know that the emperor at this time was, most emperors are, but this emperor was pretty anti-treason. He didn't like the idea that someone else would try and be king.

And so Pilate wanted to avoid anything that might look like treason. And so Pilate, you know, he's a governor. He's a politician. He's trying to juggle all these relationships and keep people happy.

And then Jesus turns up on his doorstep. A man who's accused of claiming to be a king, a king of the Jews. And so in one sense it's a pretty easy decision for Pilate.

[19 : 36] Everyone will be happy. The emperor, the Jews, except for maybe Jesus, but he's one person. But there's a problem, which is that Pilate believes that Jesus is innocent.

He doesn't believe that Jesus has done anything wrong because Jesus hasn't. On top of that, his wife sends him a message saying, don't have anything to do with him. What would you do in his situation?

Pilate quite cleverly tries to delegate the decision. Did you notice? Apparently it was a normal thing for him to release one prisoner at Passover time. So Pilate gives the crowd the choice, maybe hoping they'd choose Jesus.

But certainly sort of getting out of this situation that he's in. Verse 21, which of the two do you want me to release to you, Jesus or Barabbas?

This is where we begin to feel less sorry for Pilate, though, because Barabbas had been arrested for being a leader of an insurrection or a revolt, not dissimilar from the accusations that Jesus had leveled against him.

- [20 : 47] Pilate seems happy to release him. And if it was his plan, it doesn't go as planned because the people call for Barabbas to be released and Jesus to be crucified.
- And then Pilate does this fascinating symbolic gesture. Stands up in front of the people and washes his hands. This is not my decision.
- I'm innocent of Jesus' blood. The end of verse 24. I'm innocent of this man's blood. He said it's your responsibility. Now, if you're paying attention, you'll recognize the last phrase because it's almost the exact same phrase that the chief priests said to Judas in verse 4.
- In the same way the chief priests tried to blame Judas to get away from their shame, Pilate tries to blame the crowd and get out from under his shame.
- And it's here, I think, that we see the third response to shame. Pilate is trying to pass it off as not him. He's trying to avoid it. He wants to be able to ignore it.
- [21 : 58] Just get it away from me and I'll just go to sleep and wake up in the morning. It's not my decision. It's not my, you know, problem. It's not my shame. Someone else deal with it.
- I'll delegate it. I'll try and ignore it. I think that's another common response to shame. It wasn't my fault. It was the situation.
- It was the circumstance. It was my upbringing. It was society. It's someone else's fault. I don't need to be ashamed. Or maybe it's even more simple for us than that.
- Rather than actually facing our shame, we'll just keep scrolling the news feed until we're tired enough to go to sleep. So I don't have to deal with the feelings I'm feeling.
- Have you ever responded to shame that way? Perhaps it's the easiest way to respond is to just try and switch it off. Going back to me dealing with that feeling with my daughter.
- [22 : 59] It would have been easy to say, and every parent after this will come up to me and say, it's okay. Every parent does something like that. Every parent, you know, breaks at some point with the stress and whatever.
- It's okay. It's okay. We all do it. Maybe she won't even remember. Just try and ignore it. It's okay. But it isn't.
- So we've seen someone overwhelmed by shame. We've seen someone try to smother their shame. We've seen someone try to ignore their shame.
- The final response to shame, to the shame of Jesus' death in this passage, it's the crowds. And we've already touched on the choice that Pilate gave them.
- They could choose Jesus or Barabbas to go free. And it's easy to see what a bad decision this is. But in one way, their response is quite refreshing within this passage.
- [23 : 58] Finally, someone who's willing to acknowledge their guilt. Who's willing to say, yeah, let the responsibility fall on us. However, while it's sort of refreshing, it's also devastating.
- Let the blood be on us and our children. Verse 25. They willingly acknowledge their part in Jesus' death. But it's as if they don't see anything wrong with what they're doing.
- They're so convinced that this is right. That they're willing to sort of include their children in the guilt and the shame of this. There's no chance in their minds that this is wrong.
- And so I think this is the last response to shame, to try and reverse it. To try and make out that this is actually good.
- This is actually not shameful at all. This is actually fine. Claim that what's wrong is actually right. That there was never really anything to be ashamed of. In one sense, it's sort of the next step on from what Pilate did.
- [25 : 01] The response of justifying a wrong action until you actually believe that it's right. I know I've done this thing. And actually, if you really understood the situation, you'd know I've done the right thing.

You know, maybe I could have said about my daughter, you know, actually she was really asking for it. And if I don't yell at her, if I don't lose my temper, she'll never understand that what she's doing is wrong.

And that she needs to listen to me. So actually what I did in yelling at her was good. It was right. Helped her see how she should behave. Perhaps that's the response we're seeing all around us.

It seems like every day, every year, our culture, the world around us decides a thing which traditionally we thought was wrong is actually right and fine and nothing to be ashamed of.

You go and you decide what's right for yourself and live your truth. Don't be ashamed of anything. Friends, this response to shame too will not work.

[26 : 11] And so here are four responses to shame. You can be overwhelmed. You can try smother it with something good.

You can try ignore it and pass it off on someone else. You can try and redefine it away. So what are you doing with your shame?

Are you overwhelmed and you just can't think straight when it comes on? Do you pile up and keep a list of all the great things that you've done so you can sort of douse the flames of shame?

Do you try and ignore it? Do you just distract yourself and get away from it? Do you refuse to believe that you've done anything wrong and try to tell yourself that it was actually right? It was actually right.

And are any of these a good response? Have any of these worked for you? I don't think any of these responses are good.

[27 : 16] And so how should we respond to shame? Well, in the midst of the people struggling, churning under the weight of their shame, different parties trying to get away from it in one way or another, there is a man, mostly silent, mostly unnoticed, mostly unreferenced, mostly ignored.

And as other people churn around him, they miss that he's the one that can deal with their shame. This is Jesus, the one they're guilty of murdering, the only one who can truly help them.

The only way to face shame without being overwhelmed or having to redefine it or ignore it or smother it or anything like that, the only way to do that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

What he's going to do, you see, on the one hand, if you're looking at the cross and what Jesus has done, he fully exposes our shame. You cannot look at the cross and think, wow, that's lovely.

It is awful. It's terrible. It's terrible. And as you look at the cross, you're seeing our sin. Jesus went to the cross because of my sin. That's how bad it is.

[28 : 21] Jesus does not, for one moment, tell us that everything's okay. He wants us to see how terrible sin is. That's what we see on the cross.

He knows and understands exactly, exactly how terrible we've been and how ashamed we should be. And yet Jesus says, I love you.

I can see your shame. I can see your filthiness. I can see all those things that no one else can see. And yet I forgive you. So committed am I to my love for you that I will give my life to wipe you clean.

See, Jesus takes our shame upon himself and buries it so that he might crown us with honor.

The only way you can truly, honestly face that which makes us ashamed is through the gospel. By having someone, the Lord God, who sees us totally, every thought, every action, every single thing, who sees everything and yet still welcomes us and forgives us and loves us.

[29 : 40] The grace and forgiveness of the cross. So there I am. I'm sitting on my bed and these kinds of thoughts are going through my mind.

How do I get out of it? I'm feeling crushed. I'm feeling like I want to run. I'm feeling like I want to excuse myself. And by God's grace, get up. Go into Ellie's room and say, I'm sorry.

I shouldn't have done that. Today I don't feel any less ashamed of the way I behaved as a dad.

But I know I'm not running from that shame. I'm not covering it. I don't need to be afraid of that. Because Jesus has seen and he's forgiven.

And I know that I'll only be able to continue as a dad to try and do what's right in his strength and in his love.

[30 : 42] You see, you have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as the creator of the world who sees everything and yet forgives to be willing to do something like that.

To stand in your shame facing your two-year-old daughter and ask for her forgiveness. It's only by God's grace, only through his love that I was able to do it.

To not sort of get away from my shame, not try and mask it in any way. But actually confront it and ask for forgiveness and not run.

The only way to deal with our shame is through Jesus. Perhaps there's something that's been on your mind, on your heart this whole time. Something that causes you shame.

The only way to face that thing is through the grace of the cross. I encourage you to confess it to Jesus who already knows and asks. For his forgiveness.

[31 : 43] For his forgiveness. And face it in his love. And in his gospel. Let's pray. Our Father, we all know that we have many reasons to be ashamed.

Many reasons to be guilty. Many reasons, many ways in which we don't stack up, which we haven't lived as you wanted us to live. Many things that we want to hide.

We want to run from. We want to bury deep. Father, help us to face those things. Knowing that you love us and you have forgiven us.

That those things have been placed on the Lord Jesus Christ. That he has washed them with his blood. That he has buried them in the tomb and risen again. That he is leading us home to sit at your right hand with crowned with a glory and honor that we don't deserve.

But that we can have because of him. Father, help us to face our shame. To seek forgiveness where we need to ask for forgiveness.

[33 : 01] To seek repentance where we need to repent. To not be defined by our need to escape what we've done.

But be willing to stand in it and in your grace. And seek to follow after you. Not being crushed but by being renewed by your spirit.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.