

Call to Worship

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His love endures forever. (Ps 136:1)

Worship in song by Philipp Bliss

1. "Man of Sorrows";
What a name for the Son of God who came ruined sinners to reclaim!
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!
2. Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood – sealed my pardon with His blood:
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!
3. Guilty, vile and helpless we, spotless Lamb of God was He;
Full atonement! Can it be?
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!
4. Lifted up was He to die. "It is finished" was His cry.
Now in Heaven exalted high:
Hallelujah! What a Saviour!
5. When He comes, our glorious King, all His ransomed home to bring,
Then anew this song we'll sing: Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

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Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 100

Prayer of confession

Merciful God, in our worship, we ask your forgiveness.

Forgive us for:

- the sins of our ignorance and the sins of our choosing;
- the sins of our doing and the sins of our inaction;
- the sins of our thinking and the sins of our speaking;
- the sins that torment us and the sins we daren't remember.

Forgive us for:

- the sin of ignorance in the light of your truth;
- the sin of despair in the light of your hope;
- the sin of guilt in the light of your forgiveness;
- the sin of feebleness in the light of your empowerment;
- the sin of small thinking in the light of your possibilities.

Forgive us, for our Saviour Christ's sake, and renew us so we can live for your glory.
Amen.

Dealing With Shame

Assurance of forgiveness

If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. (Ps 130:3-4).

Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving Lord, this is my boast:

- You are my light and show me the path I must walk.
- You are the one who saves me from sin and death.
- You are the stronghold of my life,

And so I declare:

- Faced with those intent on evil, I will not fear.
- Faced with those who would destroy me, I will not fear.
- Faced with intimidating odds, I will not fear.

I resolve:

- to live in the purposes of God all my life;
- to dwell upon the beauty of God all my life;
- and to seek the safety of God all my life.

He will shelter me, and I will praise him.

He will prompt my heart, and I will seek him.

He will teach me, and I will wait on the Lord for all things.

Bless your holy name.

Holy Communion

John the Baptist called Jesus “the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn 1:29). What does this mean? Its significance stems from events that happened many centuries earlier. When the Hebrew people were enslaved and brutalised in Egypt, God sent ten plagues of judgement on the land of Egypt. The last plague was the death of all firstborn animals and humans in the land. God told his people, through Moses, to take the blood of a lamb and smear it on the doorposts of their huts. This would prevent the angel of death bringing God’s judgement on those inside and the judgement of God would “pass over” them. Ever since that day, the Jews have celebrated this Passover every year.

Another key ceremony that the Jews celebrated each year occurred when the Jewish High Priest would sprinkle the blood of a lamb in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place in the temple. The death of a lamb and its sacrifice of blood was to symbolically atone for the sins of all Gods’ people. This too, was a foreshadowing of what God would do later through Jesus.

When Jesus lifted the cup and said, “this is my blood ...which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Mt 26:28) Jesus was saying that he was the true lamb of God who was shedding his blood to atone for the sins of all

people in order to make them worthy of life with God. His blood would cause the judgement of God to pass over them ...and us.

Say a prayer of thanks for the bread and the wine which represents the body and blood of Jesus sacrificed in order to rescue us back to God. Then eat the bread and wine.

As an added refinement, you can ask people to exchange a nail [bought from the hardware store] for a piece of bread as you serve them Holy Communion.)

The Bible Reading

- Daniel 9:1-19

The Message **HOW TO DEAL WITH SHAME**

You were designed for honour. How, then, do you deal with shame?

Shame is the condition of dishonour. It is carried by guilt and bitter regret. Too many are crushed under its weight.

The great Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar, had invaded Judah in 606BC and carried off its leading Jewish citizens into captivity. Some of the young Jewish men who showed particular aptitude were selected to be trained to enter the king's court. Among them was a young man called Daniel.

He did well in the king's service but he was, nonetheless, a captive. Daniel honoured those he worked for but his heart remained with his people whose unfaithfulness had brought shame upon them and, more particularly, dishonoured the name of the one true God they purported to worship.

If one word could summarise the feeling of the deported Jews, it was 'shame'.

Daniel feels the shame of his people acutely. His people were tasked by God to bring the knowledge of God to other nations. It was a noble task. Instead, they were unfaithful, and this had resulted in them going to other nations, but as captives who brought scorn on their God.

This was not God's plan. He designed you for honour, not shame. How, then, do we deal with things in our life that have brought us shame? There are three things we are called to do:

1) Be Informed by Scripture

In order to make sense of the grief and shame of his people's situation, Daniel turns to scripture. If you want to make sense of grief, this is the thing to do. Scripture gives Daniel three things"

- 1) It gives Daniel the reason why his people have suffered such indignity.
- 2) It helps Daniel understand that God foreknew these events and is therefore still in control.

- 3) It gives Daniel hope because scripture tells him that no evil can last forever. Jerusalem will remain desolate for only seventy years (vv.2-3). As such, with God, there is always hope, for God always brings new beginnings.

2) Be Restored by Confession

As a result of reading Scripture, Daniel knows pathway to hope. The key to his people's restoration is confession. Daniel therefore prays a remarkable prayer of confession on behalf of his people. (Like all good leaders and priests, Daniel identifies with his people completely. He does not plead his own righteousness.)

The way Daniel begins to pray is significant. He does not begin with his own agenda. The prayer does not begin with a "me" focus; it begins with a God focus. Daniel's prayer begins with praise.

The power of praise is that it corrects our perspective. Praise forces us to consider God's glories and God's possibilities. Problems look smaller when seen from God's perspective. Therefore, in the midst of his grief, Daniel begins to praise God (v.4). He does this because God is infinitely worthy of praise. He will not allow any adverse circumstances detract from the *fact* of God's glory and goodness. Daniel does not give first place to his problems but to God's greatness.

Daniel then contrasts God's faithfulness to his people's unfaithfulness (vv.4-5). In other words, Daniel makes it clear that it wasn't God who broke the covenant agreement between God and his people, it was his people. God had not abandoned his people because of some capricious whim. His people had abandoned God.

The anatomy of unfaithfulness is laid bare in verse 5 and 6. In order for a people to be unfaithful, two things are needed:

1. a determination to ignore God's law in favour of their own ideas
2. a determination to ignore God's prophets (and leaders) who proclaim God's principles and purposes.

How do we see this happening today?

In verse seven, Daniel mentions the dreadful shame that his people are burdened with. God's people have been scattered abroad by God's judgement. In verses 11 and 12, Daniel says that to make matters worse, the people had been forewarned that this judgement would come upon them. Moses had clearly recorded the blessings that would come from being faithful, and the curses that would come from being unfaithful (Deuteronomy, chapter 11).

This 'blessings and curses' form of speech follows the formula of a suzerainty treaty, which was known to people in those days. A suzerainty treaty was made by a conquering nation with the vassal nation it had vanquished. It stipulated the blessings that would come from obeying the conquering nation, and the curses and retribution that would come from disobeying it.

God's people should have read their scriptures and been forewarned of the consequences of being unfaithful to God. Daniel knows that God's judgement was

not surprising. He says in verse 14, *“God did not hesitate to bring disaster upon us”*.

Take a moment to ponder. How does this statement square with Daniel's comment in verse 9, *“The Lord our God is merciful and forgiving”*? A God who does not hesitate to bring disaster does not sound very merciful and forgiving.

The two comments resolve in this way: God must always be true to his word. If God has proclaimed that disaster would be the consequence of unfaithfulness, it must happen ...BUT, because of God's mercy, this disaster is not designed to destroy but to bring repentance and new beginnings.

Daniel confesses that sin had become so much a habit of his people, that they have forgotten how to repent and please God. Daniel says, *“Disaster has come ... but we have not sought the favour of the Lord”* (v.13).

Dear friends, if you are carrying shame, get informed of God's hope in scripture... and access that hope by repentance. Seek the favour of the Lord.

In saying what he does, Daniel makes sense of a national tragedy. Whilst some may allow disaster to convince them that there is no God, Daniel makes it clear that tragedy has happened because there *is* a God. The God whom they had forsaken had brought about a consequence that he had forewarned them about. He removed his protective hand from a people who were determined to ignore God. That's why Daniel says *“God is righteous in everything he does”* (v.14).

I want to say this very clearly: If you have been a victim of the evil of others or the victim of persecution, then you need carry no shame. You have simply been damaged by evil in a world that has chosen not to go down the path God intended. However, to all who do carry shame before a holy God, know this: God is inviting you to seek restoration by repentance.

3) Be Honoured by God's Covenant

Daniel then reminds God of his faithfulness in the past in leading his people out of captivity in Egypt (v.15). Why? Because his people again need to be led out from captivity, but this time, from Babylon. Daniel appeals to the righteousness of God that he knows not only insists on judgement but also insists on mercy (v.18).

Daniel does so because he understands the significance of his people being in a covenant relationship with God. In the Middle East, during the Bronze Age, the strongest bond that could exist between two people was a 'blood covenant'. If you entered into a blood covenant with someone, it could only be dissolved by death. God entered into a covenant with Abraham, who, by divine permission, handed it on to successive generations of the Jewish people. This meant that God was duty bound by his namesake to help his people. It also meant that God's people carried the name and reputation of their God in everything they did.

Because this covenant had been violated by God's people, Daniel confesses, *“Our sins ... have made ... your people an object of scorn”* (v.16). He goes on to say in verse 18, *“see the desolation of your city (Jerusalem) that bears your name”*. By saying “your people”

Dealing With Shame

and “your city” Daniel is saying that because God is in a covenant relationship with his people, he too shares the shame of his people.

This, of course, points to the wonderful truth that there would come a day when God would come to Earth as a person, Christ Jesus, to take the shame and punishment of the sins of all people, and pay the price for them by dying on the cross.

Daniel points out to God that it is God's glory which is at stake, not just the glory of his people. The covenant tied God to his people. The surrounding nations thought the Hebrew God must be weak. They didn't understand that God was bringing judgement on his own people. As such, God's glory was at stake. Daniel therefore says, “*O Lord, hear and act! For your sake, O my God, do not delay, because your city and your people bear your name*” (v.19).

Six hundred years later, Jesus ate a meal with his disciples. He lifted the cup of wine and said, “*This is my blood of the covenant*” (Mk 14:24). In making that statement, Jesus again offers a covenant relationship to all who accept him as Lord and Saviour.

Therefore, the Christian church is in covenant relationship with God. We carry his name – and God cannot allow us who carry his name to be shamed. You may be persecuted and hurt by a broken world, but you will not, in the judgement of history, carry shame. This is why Jesus said that “the gates of hell would never overcome his church” (Mt 16:18). If it did so, it would violate God's covenant.

God may well bring judgement on our evil; God may allow hardship to refine us; but God's intention is that we carry no shame before him or before the world.

God's covenant brings us honour. Know it, protect it and celebrate it.

Conclusion

Will you allow Scripture to give you hope when shame accuses you?

Will you repent and seek God's restoration from shame?

Will you embrace the covenant with God that places you beyond shame?

Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

Benediction

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may count you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may fulfil every good purpose of yours and every act prompted by your faith. We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thess 1:11-12)

This service was prepared by Dr Nick Hawkes (2022) for HopeNet SA

KID'S CHURCH or KID'S TALK or SUNDAY SCHOOL

You are not alone

2 Chronicles 20:1-26

You will need:

a model city, made out of a shoe box. Put the lid aside and cut crenulations in the top of the box to make it look like a castle wall. Cut the lid into four strips. bend the long edge of the each strip at right angles so that the strips all stand up when placed on the ground. Draw lots of matchstick men armed for battle on each strip. Each strip then becomes an army. Make one "army" half the size of the others so that it fits easily inside your shoe-box city. (You can ask the children to help as much as is practicable.)

Talk with the children about bullying.

A bully is someone who uses their strength, power or abilities to make weaker, less able people feel bad. People can bully others:

- with hateful words
- by never saying kind words
- by threatening to hurt someone
- by actually hurting someone.

Never bully anyone. Jesus tells us to love one another (Jn 15:12), even our enemies (Lk 6:35). Quite often, people who were bullied themselves become those who bully others. Never bully someone else because someone bullied you.

If someone is bullying you:

1. Tell a good person in authority who can do something about it. Don't keep silent.
2. If they keep bullying, try and avoid them as much as possible.
3. Forgive and forget those who have bullied you. If you continue to remember your hurts, it will continue to spoil your life.
4. Pray for God's help, for Christians are never alone.

It is not only people who get bullied, whole nations can get bullied. Large nations can send their army to destroy weaker nations so they can steal their riches.

Tell the story of 2 Chronicles 20 and enact it with the props you have made:

One day, three armies of three nations joined together to bully a small nation. The armies of the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Meunites ganged up together to destroy the city of Jerusalem, the capital of the people of Judah.

However, the king of Judah (with the strange name of Jehoshaphat) knew he was never alone. He remembered that God had made a covenant (a promise)

Dealing With Shame

to always help his people of Judah. Jehoshaphat therefore prayed to God for help.

God answered his prayer. God told a prophet called Jahaziel to tell the people of Judah to not be afraid but to stand firm. They were not alone. God would fight this battle for them. (Read 2 Chron 20:15-17).

(If you like, you can make two different coloured “pipe-cleaner” figures to represent Jehoshaphat and Jahaziel.)

Jehoshaphat was delighted and everyone went to bed singing praises to God. They started to sing again when they got up next morning to prepare for battle.

However, when they went out to battle, the people of Judah discovered that the three armies coming to attack them had attacked each other. The people of Judah therefore won their battle without doing a thing because God had made a promise to help them.

Tell the children that they are never alone. Teach them this verse:

God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you” (Heb 13:5).