

BEATING SHAME

Series: This is who I am
November 1,, 2020
Edgar King
Identity, Shame
Luke 15:17-24

So we have been talking about ID and last week about our identity in Jesus as believers. When we put their faith in Jesus are sons and daughters of God. What that means is that they are saints, not sinners. And that even when we fall into sin, we come to God as father and not before him as sinners. Same thing, different relationships and posture.

And I imagined some of the believers struggled with the idea of calling ourselves saints and holy. We often preferred the more humble I-am-a- sinner-saved-by-grace. And I call this false humility because it as acting out of fear that finally we have or might do something so bad, God will reject us. So we are being as careful as we possibly can. This actually is the voice of the biggest identity thief.

The other thing we know about sons and daughters is that they are heirs to their parents. They get an inheritance. I think our families are human beings are just beginning to catch up culturally with what God intended. Because now in most parts of the world daughters have an equal right to inheritance.

So I wanna borrow from that picture of inheritance today. Being a child often means there is inheritance. And what that is changes from culture to culture and with changing economics. Our parents no longer leave us plots of land.

As God's sons and daughters, we have an inheritance in him. The language often used by Paul is that we are co-heirs with Jesus. He is not supra-heir or master heir and the rest of us any less. No, we are co-heirs with Jesus. If you have put your trust in Jesus, that is some cool stuff.

But isn' the saddest sight someone who has no idea what their inheritance is? Okay, walk with me. If your parents had a farm, property or company and you were the heir but you were 6 years old? What difference would it make? You would be on the property and the manager would be over you.

However, when you come of age what should keep you from your inheritance? Yet if you do not know who you are? Could you even step into your inheritance? So what could keep us from our inheritance in God? The Identity thief, shame.

When I asked us to complete the statement, 'I am...' we all kinda went with some broad ones. Race, nationally, sexuality, profession, maybe even political affiliation. And I have said that those are not unimportant, they are just secondary. They are not who we are.

Yet there is a darker side of this. For so many there are also other answers to that question that we often never say out loud. "I am a fool, I am not good enough, I am ugly, I am a failure, I am a sinner, I am a bad person.

We are all familiar with the voice that has said to us, “Never tell anyone about this because they will know you for who you truly are”. It is why we have the phrase skeletons in the closet. Because there are things we are convinced that we should never let out or people will know who we are: That is the voice of shame. But here is God’s voice instead.

Instead of your shame, you will receive a double portion and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance

Isaiah 61:7

This is the promise and truth I want us to talk about today.

Let’s pray

So what is our inheritance as believers, to begin with? It’s God’s Kingdom. It’s the very presence and power of God. Its joy, peace, healing, love, intimacy with the father, celebration, comfort in times of grief. It’s the good life, holiness. That is what is our birthright as sons and daughters of God.

Sonship and daughtership does not take for granted that all is grace, neither does it forget that one is a child of the father and that cannot be taken away. We do not decide to be someone’s child, we are born or adopted into a family. It is completely the prerogative of the father. And it is exactly what Paul says in Ephesians, that it is God’s choice that we are his children.

Yet somehow people find it easier to take the posture of shame. So how does shame look like in the church? How do many people reject their identity as sons and daughters of God and keep away from their inheritance?

Shame looks like being uneasy with being called a saint and we much prefer the phrase, “Sinner saved by grace”. Shame tells people that they do not deserve the extravagant love of the father, no matter how it expresses itself. It sounds like believers saying, “I am sinner, I am a terrible person, I am unworthy fo God’s love.”

Shame will take the voices of culture and the people who had authority over us in our formative years. And when they said we won’t amount to anything we believed them and carried it to adulthood. When they said we were bad when we made a mistake. And now every time we fall into a mistake we repeat that to ourselves and say we are bad. You see, shame does not say I have done something bad, shame says I am bad.

Shame takes your sexual failure and calls you an adulterer you go, “Well, I did that so I guess I am that”. Shame will take your theft and call you a thief and you will go, “well I guess I am that” Shame will take your struggles with weight and calls you too thin or too fat and therefore undesirable.

Instead of, "I have done something bad, Shame says, "I am bad."

Here is a more familiar picture of what shame does to children of God. When someone is struggling with particular failure and they go, "I won't do it again.", "Great it's been a whole week clean.", "Oh my word I have been clean for a month, I have not texted them I have not watched that for a month. Finally, I can say I am a Christian. Finally, I can join the prayer team. Finally, I can serve. I think now I am in a good place to talk about God"

Oh, I have been praying each day for weeks now. I think I am doing well. You see what's happening? We are on a rat race. Then what happens? They crash and all that just fizzles. And the voice of shame tells them, "You knew you couldn't do it. You know you are not good enough?" You could not even go a full year"

Here are other ways it sounds like in church, "I will never be that again" We grew up poor and I will never be that again. My dad drank silly I will never sit next to a glass of wine. I need to get married to someone from this race because they are this and that.

See, on the surface, there is nothing necessarily wrong with these decisions, it is what is fuelling them. We are no longer headed towards the desired future in freedom, rather we are running from a particular past that causes us shame.

The other extreme is just as bad. I would never own such a house I am Christian and some people suffer. Oh, I could never take a trip to the coast just enjoy myself while the world is too full of pain. Oh, I could never spend extravagantly on the people I love while the world has hungry people. Now, that is sometimes used by people who are not generous. People who would never allow themselves to experience joy because they think they do not deserve it.

People, who say things like, "She could never love someone like me?", "He surely could never go out with me?" We feel we squandered our inheritance in the first place and so we deserver so much less.

Fear of failure. Some of us are live lives working so hard, trying so hard not to fail. To be the best father, the best husband, to read the bible more or pray more. To run your business so that it does not fail. The problem is, we are doing it from a place of already believing we have failed. We are just running away from the voice we have given preeminence and believed. This is shame.

Only when the pastor prays? Familiar? Comfy?

Another familiar one, have you ever felt that something would only happen if the pastor prays for you? Quietly you are saying to yourself, "You know the things you have done, now way your prayer goes past the door." And partly because you have no idea what things the pastor battles in his own humanity.

Any of this familiar to any of us? Strange how many of us actually feel comfortable there.

It is a tragedy then when we then impute the voice of shame to be the voice of God. Then we never step into our identity and inheritance.

There is a story Jesus tells of a love-stricken father. The man had two sons whom he loved so much. And the younger one came to him one day and demanded that he is given his inheritance. So the old man takes his wealth because it was his to give and gives this young man as an inheritance.

The guy went out and really messed up. He used up all his inheritance messed up big time and found himself in the lowest place he could get to. He was hired to raise pigs and could only eat the food of pigs. And this was the lowest you can get in the culture.

So in this low place, this kid remembers home. Remembers his father, and who he is and his character. He realises that his father is the kind of person who treats even the servants so well. So he realises he has a place. This guy makes up his mind, he is gonna go back home.

Okay, I want to give us some context here. Jesus is a masterful storyteller. He is picking out images that resonate with his audience so he knows what impact it is having on his listeners.

For example, in this culture, your life only really begins after your father is dead. Until then you are known as the son of so and so. And you do not receive any inheritance until then.

Now my dad has shown me where my house should go, on his compound. I am old enough to no longer sleep in his house but one day when I become a man enough in our culture he then will show me my inheritance in form of land where I build. If it exists. That's similar here.

So asking your father for your inheritance is an insult. You are saying, you wish he was dead. You can do a better job than him.

Sounds familiar as believers? How many times do we wish God's spirit just goes silent when we really want to get into trouble? How many times do we also want to shut our conscience? How many times do we think we are better at running our own lives? That with this phone call and that decision we will be better at managing our peace, our joy and our love and life better? Same thing.

The second image, Jesus says this guy ended up with the pigs has such a big impact on his listeners. Pigs were hated and considered very unclean. So he ended up in the worst place possible of both physical, communal and spiritual darkness and filth. Any of you feel like you have been there before? Anyone hit rock bottom before? So this is what Jesus is telling them.

And if you have not yet hit rock bottom: where you have made choices that make you both physically, communally and spiritually at the lowest, you have a picture of what that could be, Jesus is saying imagine someone in that place.

Okay, we are all caught up, let's jump into the story. The kid has a brilliant idea

“So he had this moment of self-reflection: “What am I doing here? Back home, my father’s hired servants have plenty of food. Why am I here starving to death? I’ll get up and return to my father, and I’ll say, ‘Father, I have done wrong—wrong against God and against you. I have forfeited any right to be treated like your son, but I’m wondering if you’d treat me as one of your hired servants?’”

Luke 15:17- 24

All he wants is acceptance but does not think himself worthy anymore. He did squander his inheritance anyway, right? This is him completely covered in shame. Let’s see what happens when he gets home

The father looked off in the distance and saw the young man returning. He felt compassion for his son and ran out to him, enfolding him in an embrace, and kissed him.

The son said, “Father, I have done a terrible wrong in God’s sight and in your sight too. I have forfeited any right to be treated as your son.”

But the father turned to his servants and said, “Quick! Bring the best robe we have and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet. Go get the fattest calf and butcher it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate because my son was dead and is alive again. He was lost and has been found.” So they had this huge party.

The father sees him from afar and runs towards him. He has seen his son. Not some guy with no wealth, not some guy who looks like he has been sleeping around pigs, not some guy who stink, he sees his son.

Again another important image. The old man runs. If he is as wealthy as the story suggests, he should not be running towards anything let alone someone who hurt him like this. This would be considered him disgracing himself.

And Jesus knows what impact this story is having on his listeners. They all knew that the old man in the story represented God. Subtly, like many believers they all believed that this young mad deserved what he was getting for disrespecting God in that way. What is shocking them is the old man’s response.

They are not too sure if God should respond in this way. They are surprised that the father still saw a son in this kid.

Before he says a thing he is embraced and kissed. Before he says sorry, and look, he has a lot to be sorry for. Why? He is a son. He is not a runaway, he is not belligerent, he is a son.

He does what believers often do, we give the shame apology. He finishes his 'I am' statement with something that is not his true identity. He says, "I am unworthy to be called son!" As if he had a choice in the matter, to begin with. This is what shame does.

Even the inheritance we squandered had nothing to do with us. It was all about the generosity of the father. The father's love is extravagant. He is being reckless.

It drives me crazy when I see families split because of inheritance disputes. You would think they'd worked really hard to be born into those families. No, it's all generosity.

And as if the father does not even hear him, He goes, "come on, don't just stand there clothe him. Not that robe, the best one. The one I use when special guests are around. You, go start a fire and slaughter that cow we were fattening for Christmas."

Yet when you come back to the father, he sees, son and daughter. He takes off your clothes of shame and gives you his of glory. He clothes him in clothes that fit who he has always been. This is not a new identity he is getting Even from afar and filthy, he was still son. In fact, the prodigal father runs after you because of his love-stricken heart. Nothing can take your identity from you.

Now imagine him in that party mopping and pretending he should not be served and does not want sit next to his father because he feels unworthy. What would be wrong with this guy? He is literally wearing the old man's best robe? Yet if he carries his shame with him that is how he would act.

Wouldn't it then be very sad that as believers would sit in God's presence and still say they are not worthy? Wearing the robes God has willingly put on them and sitting at the party that God has thrown for them, they still go I am not worthy.

Because there will be: joy, peace, holiness, honour, glory and the kingdom of God yet you will not be allowing yourself to enter in because you think you do not deserve it.

Sadly some of you walk around carrying the burden of shame. Calling yourselves everything God has said you are not. Its time to surrender that.

How do we heal shame? Vulnerability and intimacy. If there is one thing that this kid got right, is that he went back to the father. He exposed his filth and his failure and his need for the father.

Shame says, do not tell anyone, love says let me hear you out. Shame says, “If they know who you are they will not love you,” Love says, “I know who you are and you are safe here despite your story.”

Shame starts to die when stories can be told in a safe place and openly. The cure for shame is vulnerability. See when we fully known, fully accepted and fully loved, what could the world possibly throw or say about us, about our past that would change that?

This is what God is inviting you to. God sees you from afar, long before you have gotten to the gates where you think acceptance happens. And he sees his son or his daughter and the glory on them. Asking will you trust me with the rags, the filth, the fear, the self-hatred, the sin.

So will you come to the altar? Don't hide. Will you accept the good things I give you in life, will you accept the peace? Will you accept love? Will you accept freedom?

So today humour me differently. Hold to the front of your mind that one story that you never tell anyone because then they will know who you truly are. I am not going to ask you to tell anyone but I sure hope you find people who love God and love you enough to listen. But today, I want you to give that story to God and finally decide that it does not define you. That it is not who you are. You are God's child dressed in Holiness. All you think you have squandered was God's to give and He will give it again. So lift your head
God says come to me and I give you a new identity. And we come full circle to something I have been referring to. God in his wisdom put us in families so that somehow we can start having a glimpse of what it is like to be held by God.

If shame dies in a place where stories are told in safety, it is unto us to intentionally create such spaces in our families and our churches

And God in his wisdom chooses to use the church. I don't know why yet it means that the church, believers have to create spaces where people can share their stories in the safety of God's love.

Because some people will not begin to know how to be intimate with God or vulnerable before him because they have never experienced that in their homes or in their churches families.

And somehow we know deep within us it is what we are invited to. We are all so scared of vulnerability because we sense the power yet when we see it displayed we all think, that is the most courageous thing ever.

That's our hearts saying that is what we are invited to this and we know it.