

## **John 18:1 – 19:42**

### **Jesus died for that too**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

When you think about Jesus dying on the cross for you, how do you usually describe what he has achieved? I suspect the most common answer amongst you would be something along the lines of "Jesus paid the price for my sin". Another fairly common response might be that on the cross "Jesus defeated sin, death, and the power of the devil". The scriptures use quite a few different concepts when describing the effect of Jesus' crucifixion, and there's one more that I want to give as an example. In Hebrews 12, when it encourages us to persevere in the faith, it says:

For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

(Hebrews 12:2, NIV)

What we have in these three different descriptions of Jesus' crucifixion, are the three different social dynamics that you find in every human society both past and present. Every society has a dominant dynamic, but all three are present in some way. The first one, about paying the price, reflects a guilt-innocence dynamic. This is all about whether you are guilty of breaking the law, or you are innocent. And if you are guilty, there is a price to pay. This is the dominant dynamic in our Western culture. We have a strong legal system and are very concerned about the rule of law. And your standing in society is determined by how much you can remain guilt-free. We see this in other passages like Romans 8:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

(Romans 8:1-2, NRSV)

No condemnation, no declaration of guilt, but instead a declaration of innocence because we belong to Christ Jesus.

My second example of Jesus defeating sin, defeating death, defeating the devil, is all about power. This is the least common social dynamic, but it contrasts power and fear. Your standing in society is determined by how much power you can exert over others and how little fear you have of someone else's power.

The text from Hebrews is all about honour and shame. This social dynamic is the main driver in a lot of Asian and Middle Eastern cultures. The honour-shame dynamic means you are more likely to choose right behaviour on the basis of what your social group expects of you. It's not a matter of law or guilt or conscience, but of what is approved by those in a significant position in the community.

In an honour-shame culture, you gain honour by impressing those in a position of higher honour, and you are shamed by going against the community's expectations. Since this is the dominant dynamic in the Middle East, we see a lot of this in scripture. In Galatians 3, St Paul describes the effect of the crucifixion like this:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree". (Galatians 3:13, NRSV)

This comes from Deuteronomy 21:

If someone has committed a crime worthy of death and is executed and hung on a tree, the body must not remain hanging from the tree overnight. You must bury the body that same day, for anyone who is hung is cursed in the sight of God. In this way, you will prevent the defilement of the land the Lord your God is giving you as your special possession. (Deuteronomy 21:22-23, NLT)

There is great shame in receiving such a punishment, to the point that it would defile that land. This is not just about your community, but the very land God had given. This is why Jesus was not crucified inside of Jerusalem. The Jewish leaders would never allow such a shameful event to take place inside God's holy city. The shame would defile the city itself, and this just cannot happen to the city that contains the temple where God is present with his people.

We see this same idea of shame in the suffering servant passage in Isaiah that we always associate with Jesus, especially at his trial and crucifixion.

Reading from Isaiah 52:

He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. (Isaiah 52:2b-4, NIV)

This is a perfect description of being shamed and having no honour whatsoever. And we get to this point, to the shameful crucifixion of Jesus, because his actions, his teaching, his many disciples, had challenged the honour that the Pharisees had built up for themselves. Basically, they killed him because he had taken their honour, and in a society that is governed by an honour-shame dynamic, this is quite acceptable. If we look closely at the passion account, we see this dynamic of shame in almost every aspect of his betrayal and arrest and trial. His honour as a beloved Rabbi gave way to betrayal and abandonment. His reputation as a teacher gave way to mocking and taunting. His decency gave way to the shame of nakedness. His comfort gave way to the shame of torture.

The opposite of such shaming is boasting, hoping to gain approval. And we see this too in scripture, although with a twist. St Paul writes:

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14, NRSV)

So, the boast that we do have, the honour that we do have, is in fact the cross of Jesus, the thing which should otherwise be shameful.

St Paul also happily uses the idea of power when talking about the cross. In 1 Corinthians 1:18 (NRSV), he writes:

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

And again, in Colossians:

Jesus has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:13, NIV)

So, Jesus' death and resurrection was a demonstration of power. It showed he had power over sin. It showed he had power over death. It showed he had power over the devil. And because of all that power, we need not fear. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." (Psalm 23:4, ESV)

What all this means together is that Jesus' death on the cross for your sake dealt with your sin, your guilt, your breaking of the law, and it dealt with your shame, your loss of honour, and it dealt with your fear, your lack of power. Jesus on the cross turned all three of these social dynamics upside down. He, the only innocent man died a guilty man's death. He, the one who is honoured as Lord of all creation, died a shameful death. He, the one who has all power and authority, died at the hands of lowly earthly authorities who had no real power. And none of that took away his innocence, his righteousness, his honour, his standing, his glory, his power, his majesty, his authority over all things.

He took all of our worst things upon himself, putting them to death on the cross, and was not any lesser because of it. The dynamics of guilt and innocence, of honour and shame, of power and fear, are all broken through Jesus' death for your sake. And so now on account of Christ, you are declared innocent, your guilt is washed away, you are given an honoured place at the Lord's table, no shame in sight, and you are given eternal life and no longer need to fear death. All this because Jesus willingly went to the cross for your sake. Thanks be to God. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.