How Deep My Shame Memory Verse: 2 Corinthians 7:10

March 3rd, 2024 Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

During this Lenten season we have been using the great modern hymn “How Deep the Father’s Love for Us” to walk us through the story of the gospel. We began with a focus on the title and discussed the character and nature of God’s love. This is a love that is self-sacrificing, a love that prioritizes the other. Last week, we discussed, How Deep my sin. We took a step into the world of archery as we saw how the bible characterizes sin as missing the mark. The fact is, we all miss the mark, we all fall short…our sin runs deep.

Today we turn to something related to sin, something we experience because of sin and that something we call shame: “How Deep My Shame”. If we think of sin as the act of wrongdoing, shame is the emotion we feel because of wrongdoing. In short, when we miss the mark, we feel bad…we feel regret, we feel the effects of our failure.

SLIDE 2: shame is the emotion we feel because of wrongdoing

When I as a small boy, I had a plastic toy lawn mower, the kind that you could fill with soap and blow out bubbles. I remember taking a few laps with my mower in our small yard, pretending to cut the grass in neat, straight lines. Pretending is fun for a little while, but when I came across my mother’s flower bed in the middle of the yard, I realized that I could actually mow with some tangible results. I took my plastic machine, and ran it up and down the tulips until not one was left standing. I had finished the mowing…but why didn’t I feel accomplished? I felt instead a sort of sick feeling in my gut and I knew I was going to face consequences for my actions. My dad was at work, and I didn’t want to face my mom, so I spent the rest of the afternoon playing quietly in my room, strategically avoiding my mom.

I just want to be upfront; this shame is in fact a God-given gift, a natural, built in deterrent that informs us of the nature of our actions. It is good to feel bad when we do something wrong. When we sense a blind spot in someone’s perception of their own actions, we attempt to correct, to make sure that person in question knows that their actions ought to induce shame. We say things like, “Shame on you!” “You ought to be ashamed of yourself!” Or the more British, “Have you no shame?” In other words, what you did was wrong…you should feel bad about it.

We see the reality of shame perfectly illustrated in the very first instance of sin ever recorded. READ Genesis 3:6-8

**SLIDE 3: Genesis 3:6-8**

In Genesis 3 we see both Adam and Eve partake of the fruit of the tree they were not allowed to consume. Immediately after eating, they both realized what they had done and they both had the same emotional reaction…shame.

**SLIDE 4: Shame drove Adam and Eve to hide.**

The shame they experienced drove them into a futile attempt to hide from God. How does one hide from God? Of course, there is no hiding from God who is all knowing, but that does not stop us from trying. How many times have we struggled with a particular sin, a sin we just can’t seem to kick, a sin we fall into over and over again…these sins separate us from God. Just like Adam and Eve trying to hide from God, we too try to avoid our Maker. Sin can very quickly put a damper on our prayer life for example. If I am ensconced in a particular sin, a good example for me is giving way to my short temper. I know I’m cool and even keeled here at church, but I’ll tell you, at home, there can be some rough days. And, I must confess, at times, my temper leads me to sin. So after a day filled with yelling and losing my cool, I am much less eager to spend time in prayer and seeking the Lord. I am filled with guilt, regret and shame. I know I should have handled myself differently….I know I messed up and that sin a driven a wedge between me and my heavenly father. Not only that, but my lack of self-control has also served to separate me from my own kids and my wife. Sin separates; it makes us want to hide.

Distance in these relationships is not what God would want. This is precisely why we can say sin is so destructive. It separates, divides…creates a wedge. But the love our heavenly Father has for us is deeper than we can understand. When it comes to this problem of separation, he is willing to do something about it.

In 2 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul acknowledges that there had been some tough words spoken to the church in the past. Most likely, Paul is referring to his first letter to the church in Corinth. In First Corinthians, Paul has a few sections of strong words for the church. Imagine for a moment that Paul were writing to us here in Forest Lake. How would these words land on you? How would they make you feel? To begin with, Paul is very critical of the divisions that are allowed to exist within their church community. Paul accuses them of being worldly minded and not ready for real spiritual food. Later in chapter 5, Paul admonishes the church for tolerating the antics of a man living in sexual immorality. He tells them that their boasting is not good. Paul also has critical words for them concerning the way they carry out the Lord’s Supper in their meetings. First Corinthians is filled with correction and scolding, but it is also filled with truth. Paul has reasons for saying the things he says, and as we all know, truth is hard to hear. And, Paul can admit here in Second Corinthians, that his words caused the church to feel sorrow for the ways in which they were missing the mark. But Paul says in Second Corinthians 7:8-10 READ.

**SLIDE 5: 2 Corinthians 7:8-10**

So there are two types of sorrows, one that is from God and drives us to repentance and ultimately salvation. The other sorrow is from the world, and only leads to death.

**SLIDE 6: 1. From God; drives us to repentance 2. From the world, leads to death**

Which type of shame meets us in the midst of our struggle with sin? It might very well depend upon the sin in particular, or may very well depend on the day of the week. We can’t always know how we are going to react to shame in our lives. Will it drive us to seek out God, or drive us to try to hide away?

Paul goes on in verse 11 READ.

**SLIDE 7: 2 Corinthians 7:11**

Godly sorrow, Godly shame produces two things and the first is what Paul calls an eagerness to clear ourselves, that is, a desire to be innocent, a desire to be seen as pure. We acknowledge our guilt, we know it cannot be denied, yet we desire to be guiltless. In addition to this desire, Godly sorrow also produces what Paul describes as a longing or a readiness to see justice done. This is the difference between the accused man who, no matter the evidence, maintains his innocence and refuses to work with law enforcement. Their goal is to duck any consequences, to get away with it as it were. The other picture here, is someone in the same circumstances, yet they are willing to come clean, they confess their wrongdoing, they assist law enforcement in any way that they can so as to ensure that justice gets served. To confess, we know, is not a magic phrase. It may assuage guilt, but it does not undo consequences…justice must still be served. But the one who faces their consequences with Godly sorrow in their heart, is open to the kingdom and will receive forgiveness. The one who tries to cling to innocence, who tries to cloud the truth, this one is far from the kingdom, and God’s forgiveness cannot be received. We see this reflected in the two criminals who were crucified with Jesus. One is not trying to dodge guilt but instead has allowed his shame to create in opening to God’s kingdom. The other man, tragically, does not.

Sin is what we do, shame is our response to it, and shame can nudge us in one of two ways…toward repentance and life, or toward separation and death. Does it really just all boil down to such a simple choice? Some would say that is what life is: us living out a string of choices. Deciding between right and wrong and sometimes trying to hedge our bets when we are not too sure which is which. Nelson Mandela, the former president of South Africa, made choices that helped dismantle the apartheid regime that existed at the time. He made choices that helped establish free elections. But those choices that helped bring justice and freedom were also the same choices that led him to be arrested four times for a cumulative sentence of 27years. But Nelson is quoted as describing our choices in sort of a blessing form. He said, “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.”

**SLIDE 8: “May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.” - Nelson Mandela**

I’ll be honest with you, I could not track down the source of this quote , but the internet seems to think he said it. Regardless, Nelson Mandela is a great example of someone who operated according to what he hoped for and not what he feared.

All Christians are called to the same. Our great hope is to be with God, united with him. Our fears and our sins, these are what cause the separation. Can we make choices based on what we hope for? Can we lay fear aside when it comes to decisions? What do we choose when we are presented with options between right and wrong?

I would say this is the same choice God has always presented to his people. This choice we have all been given is biblical. Earlier in our service we read a passage from the book of Deuteronomy. Moses is preparing to die, but before his passing, he wanted to ensure that God’s word to his people was crystal clear. After relaying all the laws and special rules that God’s people were supposed to follow, all the ways that they were conduct themselves in the promised land, Moses offers up a summary of it all; he boils it down to a choice: There is life and there is death…choose life!

**SLIDE 9: There is life and there is death…choose life!**

He goes on to say that we choose life by loving God, obeying his voice and, I want to highlight this last one from verse 20…we choose life by clinging to him.

**Slide 10: We choose life by clinging to God.**

How much distance is there in the act of clinging? To cling is to keep close…there is no separation. These choices laid before us are made much easier when we hope to cling to the God who loves us and gave himself for us. The decision between right and wrong is much more easily made when we hope to cling to God in the end.

The book of Hebrews in the New Testament, fleshes out the results of our decision to cling. Our clinging to God results in confidence. READ Hebrews 10:19-22.

**SLIDE 11: Hebrews 10:19-22**

Jesus open us for us what the text calls a “living way” and when we choose this way, we then draw near, or one could say cling to God with all certainty, there is a confidence that comes from our faith. So when I mow down the flower bed, my shame presents a choice: cling or distance myself. Repent or hide. Life or death. I remember I chose distance…I didn’t fess up, I didn’t apologize…I just felt bad and avoided my mom. I remember my dad eventually found me hiding out in my room and he asked me why I did that to the flowers. I had no good reason. But looking back, I can see that my parents valued their relationship with me more than the flowers. Time and time again this reality would play out. They valued their relationship with me more than the subpar grades I brought home, more than the car I backed into a light post, more than whatever poor choices I might have made in my life. Your heavenly Father is no different. He values a relationship with you more than the highest wall of shame you might try to hide behind.

**SLIDE 12: God values a relationship with you more than the shame you might try to hide behind.**

He values a relationship with you more than all the distance sin has inserted into your life. You were made to cling to him.

This morning we have an opportunity to do just that; to draw near to our heavenly Father, to choose to cling to him. We have an opportunity to allow our shame to drive us to repentance and ultimately life. We don’t call it “Holy Communion” for nothing. At this table we literally come into union with God, we draw near, we cling.

**SLIDE 13: We cling!**

Through his death on the cross, Jesus bridges any and all separation. Sin can no longer stand when we choose to love God, obey him and cling to him. This is the certainty of our faith and, depending on our choices, it can be the result of our deep shame. Amen.