

Curse and Shame into Glory

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 December 2019

Preacher: Rev Andrew Coghill

[0 : 00] Now the context of this chapter 3 in Galatians is that Paul is taking issue with those who having received the gospel and having been born again by God's spirit and awakened to that relationship to Christ which they have, have then sort of, if we can say, settled down into a way of believing that they somehow can gild the lily and add to their righteousness and please God more by turning back again to the law and doing the things of the law and thereby clocking up more kind of merit or righteousness.

As though there was anything to be added to what they have received in Christ. And the point that Paul is making here is that, don't you get it, he's saying to them, if you want to be justified by the law, you know, it says, Cursed is everyone, verse 10, that continue with not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them.

Now, you know, people make reference to this elsewhere in the epistles where they say that if you say you don't commit any murder, that's great. But if you do commit adultery, well, that's you've breached the law.

Or if you keep all these ones, we can break that one. Well, that's you, a lawbreaker. You're going to be judged as a lawbreaker. And as we've said so many times in the past, if you think in terms of the law of the land, the police are not concerned with how many years you have been a law-abiding citizen.

If they're going to charge you or arrest you for something, they're concerned with the thing you've done just now. They're concerned with your breach of the law and where you have broken it.

[1 : 43] It's not enough to say, yeah, for just a minute, look at all the other 999 laws that I keep. Look at all the good things. I've faithfully been a law-abiding citizen for however many years I've lived.

Don't you take account of all these years of my being a good citizen before you charge me with this one little breakage of the law? They'll just say, well, we're not concerned with that. We're not charging you for these good years.

We're charging you for the thing you've done wrong. And that's the way it's always going to be. The law is always going to just hang over your head, waiting to catch out the thing you do wrong.

And this is Paul's point here at verse 10. Cursed is everyone that continue, not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. Which means, since even though we may not be caught out by the law of the land or by the laws of men, God sees everything that you do.

God sees every thought in your mind. He hears every word that you think, even if you don't utter it with your lips. You are under, in that sense, complete and total divine surveillance.

[2 : 53] And therefore, the evidence is already there in God's court of judgment. We cannot escape it. We are under the curse. We are condemned if we're going to go by our own supposed righteousness.

What do we need if we are cursed? We need basically somebody else to stand in our place and take the curse for us. Which is what verse 13, which is the verse I'd like us to look at today, is all about.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. But it is written, Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.

And this comes back again to the crucifixion of our Lord. And how this is the absolutely central point, together with his resurrection, of our salvation.

And this is what Paul makes reference to in verse 1. You know, foolish your nations, who hath bewitched you that you should not have made the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

[3 : 54] What you believed in was Christ Jesus crucified. His death upon the cross is what you believed and trusted in to take away your sin. It is as though sometimes you see in maybe these crime films or TV films or whatever.

If somebody's got a gun and they're about to shoot somebody, and their friend jumps in the way and takes the bullet for them. So they're busy dying and bleeding out and their friend meanwhile is okay.

Because it's not that the gun wasn't fired. It was. It's not that the gun wasn't being aimed at the original intended victim. It was. It wasn't that the gun wasn't on target.

It was. And the bullet was flying through. It's just that somebody else got in the way and took the bullet for them. And this is what Christ is doing here in becoming a curse for us.

It's not that the judgment of God somehow goes soft. It doesn't. It's not that God somehow turns a blind eye to our sin. He doesn't.

[5 : 02] The judgment goes straight and true as the bullet fired from the gun. It's just that before it hits us, somebody else gets in the way and takes the punishment, takes the bullet for us.

The gun has been fired. The bullet has gone in its course. But somebody else takes it for us. Christ here takes the curse for us because there is a curse in the breach of the law.

That's what Paul says there at verse 10. Curses is everyone that continueeth not in all things which are written in the book of the law. Now you go back to your crime scene thing there.

The person fighting the gun is not aiming at the one who gets it. They're not aiming at the person who gets in the way. They are not their intended victim.

They know whom they intend to shoot. They know whom they are aiming at. God knows where the judgment ought to be directed. But his innocent, clean, perfect divine son stands on the breach, puts himself in the way, so that all that is hit by the judgment is Christ in his perfect holiness and purity.

[6 : 22] He has redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us. He becomes the target.

As it is written, Curses everyone that hangeth on a tree. In other words, his crucifixion is part of what soaks up the curse for us.

Now, this of course is quoting from Deuteronomy chapter 21, verses 22 and 23. If a man hath committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, to be put to death, and thou hangeth on a tree, his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day. For he that is hanged is accursed of God, that thy land be not defiled, which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance. That's the last two verses of Deuteronomy 21.

It's not entirely clear why somebody who is hanged on a tree should be more accursed than somebody, for example, who is stoned to death, or somebody who is beheaded, or somebody who is simply run through with a sword, or killed by any other means of execution, or battle, or whatever it may be.

[7 : 38] It's not clear to us why that particular form of execution should incur the curse. And it may simply be that the purpose of hanging a person there publicly is so that it's not just that they're dead and covered with a pile of stones, as Achan was when he committed the accursed thing in the book of Joshua there, or that others who are dead and then buried, that the corpse is left there to hang.

That it is there as a public spectacle. And in other words, their continuing display of the corpse may be part of the curse, part of the shame.

Because cursing and shame are bound up together, at least in Scripture, and certainly I suppose for us too. If you think about it, you know, the land, the earth, creation is under the curse because of Adam's sin.

And Adam's sin, of course, brings shame. Shame is part of the devil's weaponry, and it has been from the very first. You know, Adam and Eve were created naked, and they weren't bothered. But as soon as they sinned, they became aware of their nakedness. They became aware of their situation, of their status. Why suddenly it was a problem when it hadn't been before.

[9 : 08] It was a problem because now they were conscious of sin. And this is the power that shame has. To expose what we are and what we are guilty of.

Somebody who, if it were possible, hadn't done anything bad, wouldn't have anything to be ashamed of, wouldn't have anything to be worried about. Their conscience would be completely clear, and no matter how much dirt a tabloid journalist tried to dig up on them or whatever, they

wouldn't find anything if they weren't guilty of anything.

Of course, things can be twisted and made to look like guilt, even when they're not, but they wouldn't have any actual guilt, so they wouldn't have any shame. Shame is bound up with the exposure of what we are and what we have done.

And part of the thing is that because of what Adam and Eve had done, what they were also became shameful. Because they were sinners. They had no covering.

They had no way to cloak their sin. They became ashamed of who they were, of what they were.

They became ashamed of their both physical and spiritual nakedness before God.

[10 : 25] Shame is about the exposure of sin or failure or inadequacy or what we are. Now, Christ, of course, becoming a curse for us.

There was nothing in Christ that was shameful. And yet, the death that he took upon himself was in one sense a shameful death.

Because the person who was hanged upon the tree, who was crucified, was made a public spectacle. Now, of course, executions in many different countries all over the world were often public executions until comparatively recent times in history.

And often they were extremely barbaric and grisly forms of execution. And that was deliberate. That was deliberate because the public that would gather to watch these executions were meant to be appalled by them.

They were meant to be scared by them, frightened to think of what was happening to this victim and what would happen to them if they became guilty of such a crime.

[11 : 40] And just to give you an instance of how terrifying life could be in some of these old and perhaps medieval times, in Tudor times in England, it was considered a capital, treasonous crime to imagine the death of the king.

I kid you not. To think in your mind to imagine the death of the king. To think about, you know, what's going to happen when his successor comes to the throne.

That's you imagining the death of the king. That's you guilty of treason. And treason in medieval England incurred the penalty of being hung, drawn and quartered.

Which I won't go into the grisly details of, but suffice to say, it was intended to terrify. It was intended to be so disgusting and so barbaric and so frightening that everybody would make sure they were never guilty of such treason.

It was meant to incur loyalty by fear. And crucifixion, of course, was likewise intended the same way.

[12 : 50] It was intended to terrify. The Romans were terrified by it when they first encountered it from the Carthaginians of North Africa. Carthage being roughly where Tunisia is now in Africa.

And the Romans were so terrified by it that they realised this was too good, a weapon of terror, not to use themselves on other people. But it was so horrifying to them that they tended to reserve its use for slaves and for convicted criminals.

Maybe also for political rebels as well. Jesus, of course, was not a criminal. He wasn't really a political rebel either. Although he was convicted on the charge of being king of the Jews, Pilate knew that Jesus was innocent.

Nevertheless, it was crucifixion the crowd demanded and crucifixion that he had to endure. It was intended to be a terrifying, humiliating form of death.

Now, even the fact of his burial afterwards, crucifixion victims were not normally buried. They were either left there to rot or for the birds in the air to just peck them to bits and then their bones might be tossed in a pit somewhere or else they'd be thrown in a common grave either with paupers or other criminals.

[14 : 11] It was all but unique to have a crucifixion victim buried properly. And it's not without significance that all four gospel accounts specifically state that Joseph of Arimathea had to go to the governor, the ruler of all Judea, he had to go to.

Not to the centurion who was in charge of the execution party, not to some high-up Roman officer. He had to go to the governor himself. to beg the body of Jesus.

And if it hadn't come from the very top, it wouldn't have happened at all. But all four gospel accounts, Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, and John 19, all mention explicitly that he had to go to Pilate himself in order to secure the body of Jesus to be released to him.

Pilate unusually released this particular body. But the shame, the cursing of the cross was part of its terror.

And we mentioned with the children how if you're going to produce gold at the end of the process of mining and refining and so on, you have to be prepared to go through all the hard slog and all the work and all the difficulty of getting that precious metal at the end of the day.

[15:34] Now as far as Christ is concerned, those whom he is saving and redeeming, who have been chosen from all eternity, are far more precious to them than gold that perishes.

The book of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, talks about the Lord making up his jewels. They shall be mine, says the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels.

So in order to secure their salvation and their relationship with him for all eternity, Christ was prepared to go through this suffering and agony and shame of the cross.

He hadn't done anything to be ashamed of, but the cross itself was regarded as shameful, as a means of suffering, which was bound up not only with the horror of the death itself, but it was so shameful that people, you know, they couldn't even talk about it after the event without there being that sort of harsh tones of shame and sort of embarrassment and so on.

That was, of course, absolutely intentional. When the Romans crucified somebody, they would first of all scourge them.

[16:47] We've looked into the details of scourging in the past. It could very easily kill somebody the extent of the scourging which they undertook, tearing away the flesh almost to the bone with the kind of wits that they used.

It was not intended to kill the person by scourging because they wanted them alive when they nailed them to the cross. You all know exactly how a crucifixion takes place.

What probably we don't realise is that the public humiliation of the victim was intended not only to carry their cross or drag it, as it were, to the place of execution.

You know, it's the equivalent of making somebody dig their grave before you shoot them and put them into it. Only worse, you have to drag this instrument of your execution through the streets for all to see.

And then, when you were crucified at the end of the day, you wouldn't be crucified as so often religious art tends to depict.

[17:52] Jesus and the thieves on either side of them are always depicted with the modesty of the loincloth. Almost certainly that wouldn't be the case.

And I don't want to dwell on this point, but I do want us to recognise that the shame and humiliation of being crucified naked in front of everybody is part of what our Lord had to endure.

If we go to John's account of the Gospel, we see there, for example, it's 19, verse 23, the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments and made four parts to every soldier apart.

So probably for each victim of the cross there'd be four soldiers depending on. This is what was called a quaternion in the authorised version. Now if you think of when Peter was in prison in Acts chapter 12 at verse 4, it says that Herod had him guarded by four quaternions of soldiers, four groups of four.

So if there's four soldiers, what is the sort of clothing that an ordinary person in Jesus' day, an ordinary man in Jesus' day would wear? He'd have a sort of tunic that might go maybe to his ankles or slightly above that.

[19:06] There'd probably be a sort of outer garment or coat on top of that. There'd probably be some kind of waistband or kind of thing to tie it around to hold everything in place.

That's three. There might be something, shawl or a kind of turban thing that might go on the head. That's four. And there'd be the girdle or loincloth.

That's five. Now it is the coat that the soldiers do not want to tear. So they've already got a piece each of the clothing.

There's the fifth item. The soldiers when they had crucified Jesus took his garments and made four parts to every soldier apart and also his coat. The coat was without seam woven from the top throughout.

They said therefore among themselves, let us not rend it but cast lots for whose it should be that the scripture might be fulfilled which say, if they parted my raiment among them and from my vesture they did cast lots these things therefore the soldiers fought.

[20 : 07] There's nothing left for Jesus. There's nothing left for any of his fellow victims the thieves around him side of him. This was standard. It's not how it's depicted in religious art.

And that's one reason why of course it's again so wrong for us to make images of Jesus or pictures or whatever because it's yes, it's devoutly modest seeking to be but it's historically inaccurate. The shame and the public humiliation that was intended with crucifixion was not simply in the physical pain of the act itself it was intended as a spectacle.

It was intended to humiliate. It was intended to utterly destroy the person concerned. They were to be cloaked in shame for their final hours and it would be hours perhaps days if they lived.

It was intended to humiliate. But Jesus takes all this shame. Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all the things which are written in the book of the law to do them but Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us as it is written cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree.

[21 : 27] this shame Christ absorbs and as he absorbs and takes it out to himself he's done nothing to be ashamed of. He has nothing to be ashamed of.

If I can say it reverently even Christ's nakedness is not shameful in his case because he has committed no sin. It is simply the body the Lord has given him in which he has been born and raised and grown up and which has now been so brutally scourged and pierced with the nails and crangled thorns and so on.

They intend to humiliate him but what in fact are they doing? They are bringing the shame not upon Christ but bringing the shame on themselves. This is what they are doing and Jesus says Father forgive them because they don't know what they're doing.

They don't realise the shame is theirs. See if we take again without wanting to be indelicate but if we think of an example from the word something that of course is wrong but widely used and that would be the sin of pornography and we might say that in pornography somebody is debased or humiliated or degraded by being exposed in this way and pictures taken of them and so on and that is one thing yes but also if you think about it there is total shame in the user.

Shame of the person the worst thing that somebody could be found with a relationship or not they could be found using it. They found viewing it. They would be the one who would be ashamed.

[23 : 04] It wouldn't be the girl or the woman or whatever in the picture. It would be the person using it. Their shame is that they are doing it and the shame of those who are crucifying Christ is that the shame effectively becomes theirs.

It's not his. He hasn't done anything. He is innocent. He takes the shame he takes the curse upon himself but they incur shame.

They incur the curse by what they are doing. Father forgive them for they know not what they do. And the curse will be theirs too that Christ takes that curse upon himself.

you see that which is considered shameful by the world if there is no sin in it is not shameful to God. In Acts chapter 5 verses 40 and 41 almost the last two verses the disciples after they've been preaching about Jesus and then Gamaliel advises the Jewish leaders not to overly persecute these men because they don't want to be seen to fight against God if it is of God.

[24 : 18] And to him they agreed that when they had called the apostles and beaten them whipped them they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus and let them go. And they departed from the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

You see the point here the fact that they have been whipped the fact that they have been beaten they have as Hebrews considered resisted unto blood they have shed their blood with what was meant to be shame in their being beaten in front of the Jewish council of the Sanhedrin they go home glorying in that so called shame because they have been counted worthy to suffer the loss of their blood to suffer that supposed shame for being Christians and Peter himself later writes in his letters he says make sure that if you suffer you don't suffer as a murderer a wrongdoer a lawbreaker in some sort of ordinary civil way but if anybody suffers as a Christian then that's a noble thing there's no shame in that there's glory in that and it's not for nothing you see bearing in mind that the gospel is good news of what Christ has done and if you were to say to a pagan what has

Christ done well he's gone to the cross and the crucified that's shameful why would you glory in that why would you be boasting about that and telling people about you'd want to keep that quiet that

the leader of your particular religious sect was crucified by the Romans he was nailed up to a cross naked in front of everybody and he died that way what a failure what a complete humiliation Paul writes in that context chapter 1 verse 16 of Romans for I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth to the Jew first and also to the Greek wherever you come from whoever you are this is the power of salvation which will save you save you because of what Christ has done no matter of your law keeping no matter of trying to rule keep or whatever is going to save you or impress God but the curse which we deserve the judgment that we deserve the bullet that is aimed at your heart and deservedly so

Christ gets in the way of that for those who believe in him he stands in their place he takes the bullet he takes the curse upon the cross Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us for it is written cursed is everyone that hang upon the tree in being crucified in being humiliated publicly in this way dying this death Christ has absorbed the worst that the devil and all his powers can do to him you know one of the worst things to my mind when I mentioned a little while ago all the gruesome medieval tortures and forms of execution they used to do publicly to people to me one of the sickest things about all these things is that somebody actually thought them up somebody sat down and worked out all these barbaric and savage methods of tearing people limb from limb or disemboweling them or whatever the case may be publicly or the worst things they could do to their fellow human beings somebody thought those things up and that is a measure of the depth and darkness of human depravity the depth of our sins that we can imagine openly and unashamedly we can imagine and get light in things that we could do to one another this is how deep and dark the stain the blood stain and darkness of sin upon the human race because we are all fallen and there is that darkness in each of us which if it is just tapped into none of us knows what we might be capable of such as the depravity the total depravity of human nature and its fallen condition this

Christ has redeemed us from this Christ has saved us from if we are trusting and believing in him this great grace this power and glory this which ought to be and to the world is a weight and a burden of shame like Christ carrying his cross this great weight as meant to be a humiliation it's meant to be a shame but rather Paul writes 2nd Corinthians chapter 4 verse 16 for which cause we faint not but though our outward man perish yet the inward man is renewed day by day for our light affliction which is but for a moment worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory now that's what he means that while we look not at the things which are seen but at the things which are not seen for the things which are seen are temporal but the things which are not seen are eternal this weight of glory he means something which is substantial something which is not physically heavy but is something of substance something which will last this weight of glory whatever is the shame the humiliation that the world thinks and is able to inflict upon the

[30 : 26] Christian for the cause of Christ he or she is able to know these things are veritable battle scars they are metal ribbons of the Christian life and spiritual warfare they are the testimony that we are counted by God worthy to suffer such things for his name for his sake this eternal weight of glory what about the shame of the cross or we read in Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 do we not that Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame he knew it wasn't true shame the real shame was of those who did it against him the real shame is of those who have set themselves against Christ the real shame is in the sin that men and women commit not in the innocent sacrificial victim who soaks it all up and gets in the way of the judgment that is speeding toward our destruction and he stands in the way and takes the bullet for us takes the curse for us takes the punishment for us because cursed is everyone that hangs upon the tree and Christ takes that punishment for us you see unless we could come up with something equivalent to that ourselves we're lost we're cursed because we've broken the law we've failed

God we've sinned against him our sins just keep mounting up how are you ever going to pay it you can't unless somebody stands in the way the gun has been fired and the bullet is speeding towards you and most of us do not have the kind of reflexes that allow us to dodge a bullet somebody stands in our place and takes the punishment for us then the price of honour is fulfilled the so-called shame has been completely absorbed when you see a cross nowadays what do you think of do you think oh my goodness yes that horrible instrument of torture oh it's just like looking at a gallows it's just like looking at an execution instrument can't be able to look at when I think of the poor victims and how they were nailed to that thing and how they bled out and how they hung there for days oh that's a horrible thing to look at I just can't bear it or when you see a cross does it not rather point

you to and make you think of Jesus the cross has become to us now yet mindful of course that we shouldn't make raven images or anything but as a symbol it has become the symbol rather of Christ it has become the symbol of peace it has become the symbol of truth and righteousness it has become the symbol of glory that which was intended as the ultimate shame has absorbed all the shame and Christ through his suffering and death and resurrection has turned that cross into a symbol of peace and a symbol of glory and a symbol of triumph when we look at the cross we think of Christ when we think of Christ we think of glory and what he has done for sinners it has become the ultimate symbol of power divine power and righteousness and truth is the cross a cross upon which the price of sin has been paid for all who would trust and believe in him we are not intended to be always in fear and in dread and thinking oh I've failed here oh I've sinned and this oh I've done that it's good we should be mindful of our sin it's good we should confess our sin but we're never going to do enough to be able to pay for our sin the good news is that somebody else has already done that and that is the only way that our sin can be washed away is through what he has done not through anything we will ever do it is through

Christ alone Christ hath redeemed us brought us back from the curse of the law being made a curse for us but it is written cursed is everyone that hangs on a tree the curse of the cross the shame of the cross the humiliation that was intended Christ has absorbed and soaked up and taken to himself so that you and I if we believe in that sacrifice he has made we can be free we can be clean we can be forgiven and God is still righteous for doing so because he has absorbed and taken that curse himself so that the curse is put to death the shame is put to death the darkness and fear of separation from God is put to death the humiliation is put to death the life the glory the beauty the wonder the love of what the Lord has done is revealed and that is what the cross becomes and it is Christ who makes it that friends this is good news what Christ has done and if we receive that good news and receive that saviour he becomes our saviour he takes the curse for us he takes the poison for us he takes the judgement for us and if we don't want Christ well that is our choice that is your particular preference but at the same time if we will not have him to take the curse for us there is only the curse that remains for us and the shame and the darkness and the judgement forever it is good news what Christ has done that's not wasted let's stop