

How God Erases Shame
Isaiah 53:1-6

June 24, 2018

1 Who has believed what we have heard? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?
2 For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
3 He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. 4 Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

This is one of my favorite Old Testament passages. I personally like to spend time reflecting upon its meaning. I encourage you to read all of Isaiah and pay special attention to chapter 53. There is one very important point here that I would like to emphasize - God laid upon him the penalty of us all.

I read in the Secret Place devotional about someone in a conversation and the other person said "I find it hard to believe that God forgives all I have done, just like that." At first I thought "well it is just like that." Then the author went on to explain that it is not just like that. It took a great deal of suffering and pain. It took spilt blood to erase shame.

I think the contemporary lesson for us is to realize this; to realize and acknowledge that it took suffering, shame, and spilt blood. My attitude is you have to respond to it - you have to - you can't take something like this for granted. The gift is so great there is no way that you can respond in kind to such a gift. So, all we have to offer is the self. We offer ourselves out of love and appreciation. We offer thanks. To help put this into perspective I will use a real life example. I have a brother that is financially much better off than I am. He often gives me gifts that are of a greater value that I can pay back. Financially I cannot return the favor. But what I carry within me is love, appreciation, and thanksgiving. How I respond is that I express my love, appreciation, and thanksgiving through the relationship.

In our modern society we worry about the decline of the church. All of us mainline protestant denominations are in the same boat. There are lots of theories, books, and ideas that address this but the trend does not change. What I find interesting is that Israel faced the same problem - a community in transgression. People take God for granted and fail to realize, or acknowledge, or appreciate the extent of the sacrifice. So, they fail to respond to it and take the sacrifice for granted. The offering of thanks is missing because the love and appreciation is missing. So, the relationship is broken. It is a lapsed relationship. However, in human relationships, if you love someone you will visit, call, and write. If you love someone you will reciprocate. If they reach out to you, you will reach out in return. Many times I ask someone "what's keeping you out of the church?" Each person has a different excuse and people make up all kinds of excuses. Usually they blame the church or God. But it all boils down to the same thing. The broken relationship does not come from God and it does not come from anyone else. The broken relationship comes from the individual. I am going to repeat that for emphasis. The broken relationship does not come from God and it does not come from anyone else. The broken relationship comes from the individual.

Sometimes I think people just don't get it. They don't have the tears flowing, there is no break down real moment of realizing and acknowledging that God forgives all I have done. Many just don't care. But God took someone else's suffering and pain, someone else's spilt blood to erase our shame. The suffering Savior is the answer. What we are thankful for is the suffering Savior. Who are we in debt to is the suffering Savior. Who it is that saves us is the suffering Savior. We are here because of the suffering Savior. I want to make sure we get this connection. When your mother gave birth to you she suffered. She suffered pain - intense pain - for you. She suffered so that you could live. Therefore, you owe your mother, we all owe all of our mothers, a debt of gratitude because she chose this. She chose to have you and to suffer for you.

In the Bible there is a spiritual quest for an answer to the tragic pattern of sin. How to replace sin and punishment by a wholeness that embraces God's compassion and righteousness. Again I take the privilege of repeating a concept for emphasis. In the Bible there is a spiritual quest for an answer to the tragic pattern of sin. How to replace sin and punishment by a wholeness that embraces God's compassion and righteousness. So, Jesus surrenders to the will of God and takes the consequence of the sin of the whole community upon himself even though he was innocent. The servant serves God's purpose while the people are distant from God. But the people do not realize they are distant. The people think it is something else but it is never something else, it is always the self. The priests performed atoning sacrifices and the prophets preached repentance and punishment and the pattern repeats over and over again. But then something new is introduced into the world to fix the tragic sinfulness of humanity.

Now I ask you to imagine that you hear for the very first time "do not sacrifice an animal. Instead God has taken an innocent human being. God has allowed the punishment that you deserve, and the punishment that everybody else deserves, and put it on this innocent person to restore the people to righteousness." Let that sink in and absorb the concept. This is an audacious alternative and it is the will of the Lord. So, God arranged our salvation through the one closest to the heart of God - the Son of God. The kind, gentle, and obedient servant is the one that was designated for pain, suffering, disgrace, and sorrow. How God erases shame is the blood sacrifice of Jesus. The question for you is how do you respond to that? How do you respond to God taking your shame and placing it on Jesus? Your response depends on how you value the relationship.