

Ready for Grace

Listos! Are You Ready? Pt. 4

It's great to be back with you – thanks for the birthday wishes and thanks to Pastor Connor for stepping in and letting us get away. We are continuing today our fall series on how to be *listos* – how to be *ready* for what God wants to do *through us* in this world. Now, Jesus, the night before he was to die, put his disciples through a kind of intensive training course. And we find that in John chapters 13 through 17. He was about to send *them* out into the world. This was his last chance before he died to speak to them. And John 13–17 is actually the longest, single body of teaching we have in the New Testament from Jesus.

And so what we're going to do – we're not going to get through all of it – but we are going to spend a few months here at the end of the year submitting to the same training regimen, as it were. We're going to listen to the teaching and see if we can get *listos* along with the early disciples. And we've entered into some of the most – I think – striking, counter-cultural, upside-down narratives in all the Bible. Because when Jesus knew this was his last opportunity to train his disciples before his death...he started the training with the foot washing.

We started looking at this two weeks ago. He gets up out of his place as the guest of honor and he puts on a towel, picks up a basin of water and begins to wash their feet. This *has* to be incredibly significant, *filled* with meaning, or he wouldn't have started his very last training session with it. And it's important for *us* because he's training people to represent him in the world. So what does it mean? And we're looking at it for three weeks. Last time, we saw that it is filled with symbolism that tells us who he is, who Jesus is.

This week, we're going to look at the second part of the account; the foot washing goes from chapter 13 verse 1, all the way to verse 17. Today we're looking at this section in which it tells us not who he is so much as what he came to give us. What he came to *give* us! What Jesus offers us. And then next time, we'll look at what the foot washing means for our relationships with each other.

But we are getting ahead of ourselves! We need to read the Scripture for this morning, which is **John 13:6–11**: “*He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus replied, “You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8 “No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.” 9 “Then, Lord,” Simon Peter replied, “not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!” 10 Jesus answered, “Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you.” 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one was clean.*”

And that's called "foreshadowing"! Now, what is it that Jesus comes to give us? His salvation. But what do we learn here? We learn we have **a deep problem**, there's **a twofold cure**, and we also learn **how we can get it**. We learn here there's a deep problem, and there's a twofold cure for that problem. And we also learned here why and how we can get it.

So first, What is the problem? Well, I think you see it in **v.8** where Peter says, "*You shall **never** wash my feet*". And Jesus answered, "*unless I wash you, you will have **no part** in me*". Now, last week, we talked about the foot washing itself, what did that mean? People in that part of the world, who were invited to go to a banquet, they would take a bath of course before they went, but when they got there, because they wore sandals and it was a hot, arid climate, their feet would be very dusty, would be very dirty.

And in order to sit down at a table at a great banquet, you had your feet washed, so that you were clean from head to toe as it were. But foot washing was something that was very foul – 2,000 years later I don't even have to build a case of that, that's how universal this is - and it was considered something that only the *lowest* ranking slave would be made to do. But here's Jesus Christ, the guest of honor, who suddenly gets down on his hands and knees and begins to wash the feet and it's unconscionable, it's offensive, it's shocking.

Probably *all* the disciples were shocked, but Peter's the only one that speaks out - and that's typical of Peter, very impetuous - and he says, "Are you going to wash my feet, you will *never* wash my feet." Now that sounds, on the surface, like it might be humble; It might be a good way for Peter to acknowledge, "well you know, you're too great to be doing this." But there's more to it probably than that.

He's *insulted* too. You can just tell, *he's* insulted. Why? Because he's essentially saying, "Look, if we can't find another slave to do this, let's just not do it. I mean, am I *that* bad off, am I *so* socially unacceptable?" See, why *do* you clean before you go into a nice banquet? Because dirt and stench *is* relationally repugnant. I was on an airport shuttle last week next to a guy who smelled so bad it made my eyes water. And even after we physically separated, his essence remained!

Because dirt and stench just makes you recoil. And if somebody comes up to you who's very dirty and stinks, you can't embrace them, you recoil. And so of course, you have to be clean to be in respectable company, and so Peter understands that. And yet here's Jesus doing something so *drastic* and he's saying, "Come on, it can't be that bad. Am I *that* bad? That, you know, if we can't get somebody else to do it, then let's not do it. Am I that bad?"

And what does Jesus say in verse 8? He says, “unless I wash you, you have no part with me”, which is his way of saying, “Yeah, you *are* that bad. Yes, it *is* drastic what I’m doing, but you have got a problem, Peter. And only I can solve it. And only *drastic* measures will cure it. It’s that bad.”

Well, now clearly, Jesus is talking at a symbolic level here, right? He’s not actually saying that *literal* dirtiness is going to mean he has no part with me. In fact, the word “part” that you see in verse 8 - “You have no *part* with me” - it’s a Greek word Jesus uses, that usually means “an inheritance.” In normal Greek vocabulary, the word actually meant to “disinherit” somebody. So “you have no part in me” means you’re out of the will, you’ve been written out of the will.

But of course, that’s not what the word means in this case. The inheritance that Jesus Christ gives us is eternal life, and so Jesus is actually saying, “If I don’t wash you - and of course it *will* take drastic measures – but if I don’t do that, you cannot be saved, you cannot have eternal life.” Well, then what does the dirt represent? Because if “the water”, in a sense, represents “eternal life” – we do baptisms, right? - what does “the dirt” represent?

And the answer of course, the dirt and the stench and the uncleanness is one of the Biblical metaphors for sin. So in **Psalm 51:2**, King David asks God to, “*Wash away my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin.*” And **Acts 22:16**, at the end of his sermon, Paul says “*And now what are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.*”

Now, you’ve got to be careful here, because there’s no *one* metaphor for sin - the Bible uses many metaphors for sin - there’s no *one* metaphor that gets across *all* the freight of what the Bible means by sin. But I think you can begin to see what the metaphors have in common. Dirt, stench, is *alienating*. When someone is dirty and stinks, it puts a barrier. It’s difficult to embrace them. And so one of the ways that we get this across is through the image of uncleanness. And **uncleanliness means there’s a barrier between you and God**, you’ve got to be washed.

Let me show you how almost all the metaphors work like that. Here’s another metaphor for sin, and that is it’s a debt. So let’s just say you have a friend. And one day, that friend attacks you physically and *robs* you. Now, the next day, that friend comes to see you and you’re in the hospital. And the friend says, “you know, I’m really sorry. Let’s just be friends again.”

And you're going to say, "No, it's not *quite* that easy. There is a barrier between us. You owe me, you owe a debt. I mean, justice has to be done. This was wrong, this is illegal. In other words, something must be done about the barrier between us. You're going to have to pay, there's going to have to be some kind of penalty." So that's another metaphor for sin; sin as a debt that has to be paid.

But – debt, uncleanness - what they all do is they're saying sin creates a barrier between you and God - just like it puts a barrier between you and other people - but it puts a barrier between you and God. And Jesus is saying, "Yes, this is shocking, drastic behavior, I've come down *so low*; but it's the *only* way that you can be saved. It's the only way that we can deal with this problem."

Now, I think it's important to keep in mind that Peter - who doesn't really feel he's that bad, and he doesn't really feel like he really needs such drastic measures - he has many heirs today. We are a very Peter-ish culture. In general, there's probably more Peters around than there ever have been. What do I mean by that?

Well, we live in a culture that says guilt is really not that big a deal anymore. Yes, in the past, people were racked with guilt but we've come to see, what? Our modern culture is marked by this idea; there is only *one* moral absolute and that one moral absolute is that everyone should feel free to *choose* their moral absolutes.

And therefore, mottos of our modern times go like this, "You can't make me feel guilty because you can't can't tell me how I have to live my life, you have *no right* to tell me how to live. Every human being is free to determine right or wrong for themselves. So you can't put your guilt trip on me, you can't put your values on me. I'm free to decide how to live my *own* life."

And that's the reason why many people today are Peter-ish, in the sense that they say, "You know, our parents and grandparents, they struggled with guilt, they were racked with guilt all the time. But we're modern people, we're free-thinking people, we're not racked with guilt. Guilt is not a big problem for us today."

Yeah, *but*...here's one thing that everybody seems to say *is* a big deal; books about this fly off the shelves, TED Talk videos on this get millions of views. And that is, not guilt, but *shame*...and over the last 30 years, at least in Western culture, there have been a number of people who have come along and they have taught this. They said, "well, guilt is kind of old fashioned; guilt is 'I feel bad about *what I've done*. I've broken the moral law. I feel bad about what I've done."

“But shame is different. Shame is feeling bad about *who you are*. Guilt is feeling bad about something I’ve done and I can’t make right. But shame is something more all-encompassing. Shame is sort of deeper. Shame is more encoded, it’s more difficult; shame is just feeling bad about you who you are.”

And one of the one of the experts on this today is Brené Brown from the University of Houston. She defines it like this: “Shame is the intensely powerful feeling or experience of believing we are flawed and therefore **unworthy of acceptance or belonging.**” (, *I Thought It Was Just Me*). It’s a persistent sense of being *unworthy* - unworthy of love. Unacceptable. Not as I ought to be, not embraceable, dirty.

Now, I am a big fan of Brené Brown, I have read several of her books. And I suppose if you want to separate guilt and shame along those definitions, that’s fine. But we’re still left with the same problem deep down. However you define it, it still comes to – I think – the same existential crisis. There’s a feeling of being unclean, of feeling like I’m not fit for respectable company.

I mean, about 100 years ago, Franz Kafka, wrote a great novel that kind of nails this. He wrote the novel *The Trial* about a man, Josef K, who was arrested and he’s never told what he’s accused of. He doesn’t

know what he’s done wrong – and he protests his innocence - but he’s still under arrest. And at the very end, one of his prison guards stabs him and kills him. That’s how the book ends.

And in one of his diaries, Kafka explains what he was trying to get across. He says, talking about modern people, “The state we find ourselves in is sinful, quite independent of guilt.” Sinful, but independent of guilt, and you see what he was saying? He was saying, “Look, we say we don’t believe in God, we don’t believe in the moral law; we don’t believe in hell, we don’t believe in judgment. You can’t make me feel guilty. You know, everybody has to decide what is right or wrong for themselves.”

And *yet*...we still feel like sinners. We still feel like there’s something wrong with us, we still feel *shame*. We still have a sense of condemnation that we can’t shake. We still have a sense of being an imposter. We still feel like we’re *unworthy*. Why is it that some of you work too hard and you keep saying, “I gotta stop”, but you can’t? Why is it some of you just can’t say “no” to helping people. So you just swim right out to people, and they drag you under with them. Why are others of you are absolutely afraid of commitment? You *don’t* get close. Because you don’t want anybody to actually get in there and really see what you’re like.

Well, I know what the experts are going to say; it's shame, you don't feel worthy. That's right. And Franz Kafka says, even though you still don't believe in guilt, you don't believe in maybe heaven, you don't believe in God, you don't believe in judgment or any of those things...you still feel like a sinner? Yeah, you do. You still feel like you're dirty. You're soiled. You're fouled. There's something wrong with you.

The Bible says the reason why you can't get rid of that - even if you say I don't believe in God or moral law at all, even if you say I'm a relativist - the reason why you can't get rid of it, because the Bible says that deep down inside - Romans 1 and 2 tells us - deep down inside, we *know* there is a God...we know we owe that God everything...and we know we're not giving Him what we owe Him. And there's something wrong, we *feel* something wrong. It's a memory trace in the human race, and it's called shame. So that's your deep problem and we've all got it, and even if you don't believe in guilt, you've still got it.

Secondly, **What's the twofold cure?** There's a cure, and that's what's interesting about this, it's a twofold cure that Jesus says, "I have come to do this. *I'm* the only one that can do it. I'm the *only* one that can actually solve it - "unless you let *me* wash you" - see, you cannot inherit eternal life. "I know what I'm doing is drastic, but it's necessary."

Well, what is it that he brings? In v. 9, you actually see there's a twofold cure. Jesus answered, 'Hey, if I don't wash you, you can't have eternal life!' Peter says, 'well, then what? Give me a whole bath.' That's in verse 9. Okay, you know, talk about pendulum swings? Emotional Systems Theory would have a field day with Peter. Let's find some self-differentiation, buddy.

"No! You'll *never*, never, ever wash me? Oh, *everything*, please wash everything?" Manic much? And Jesus says, (v.10), "*Those who have had a bath need only wash their feet, their whole body is clean.*" Those who had a bath need only to wash their feet. And what Jesus is talking about is two things. Now again, he's speaking *metaphorically*, and here's he's in essence extending the metaphor. "Look, Peter, you have come here, you took a bath, and you walked over here and you don't need another bath. You just need to have your feet washed." And he's playing on the common experience that people had in those days.

But clearly, he's being metaphorical and he's saying "My salvation has a once and for all - a one and done - unrepeatability aspect to it. And yet at the same time, it has a repeatable aspect. So this cleansing from sin - that I can bring you - there's an unrepeatability, one and done, aspect. That's the bath. But then there's a need for foot washing, there's a repeatable aspect also!"

Now, Jesus does not explain what that is, and if we didn't have the rest of the Bible, we wouldn't know because he doesn't explain it here. But guess what? We *do* have the rest of the Bible and in the rest of the Bible, here's what we learn. First of all, in **Titus 3:5**, Paul says, here's how we become Christians. He says, “[*God*] saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through **the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit**,” And the word he uses there *lutron*, is literally a bath. And what he says is, when you become a Christian, you're born again; the Holy Spirit comes in, your heart is regenerated, and there's a sense in which the Holy Spirit *washes* you.

Your sins are washed away and now you are acceptable – the uncleanness is gone. You *are* huggable because as it says in **Romans 8:1**, “*Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*” And again, not because of *any* “righteous things we have done”, but because you've been washed by the water of the Holy Spirit, poured out by Jesus Christ the Son. And subsequently God doesn't look at your record when He sees you if you're a Christian - you believe in Jesus Christ - God sees Jesus' record.

And so what this is saying is that the very moment you become a Christian, when God looks at you, He sees something clean and beautiful. He sees you in Jesus. So that's great. And that's one and done, it's unrepeatable, you don't need it again. You're clean. This is why we don't encourage re-baptisms here. “Yeah, but Anthony, I backslid.” Ok, but God didn't.

But... well then, what's the foot washing thing? What's that metaphor mean? Well, in **1 John 1:9**, we see that “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.*” That's an ongoing dynamic. In fact, James actually says that we should confess our sins *to each other*. That is to say, we should should *admit* our sins to each other, and then to go to God together to get forgiveness.

So here's what we want to know: *Why?* I mean, if the first moment that we believe we're pardoned so that our sins will never bring us into condemnation, why do we need to keep coming back and confessing our sins? If we've been bathed, why do we need a foot washing? That's what Jesus is saying, you need *one* bath, and *multiple* foot washings. Well then, why? How does that work?

Well, at its core it comes down to the nature of our relationship with God. It's not just a legal relationship. It's a family relationship. Think of a family, maybe *your* family. It *is* a legal relationship. A parent has legal custody and responsibility for their children. But it's more than that. So imagine a family of parents and children. And let's just say one of the children disobeys, very flagrantly violates what the parents said. Maybe insults the parents, says terrible things and runs out of the room.

Should that child come back and say, "I'm sorry"? Should that child ask for forgiveness? Yes. That child has essentially sinned against the parents – there is a barrier to intimacy now. But...does that mean that now the child is not in the family? Does that mean the child's written out of the will? Does that mean the child is no longer legally attached to the family? Of course not. No, it hasn't changed the legal relationship at all.

Not only that, it hasn't *really* changed the attitude of the parents' heart toward the child. Those of you who are parents know that when one of your children rebels, yes, you're upset. Yes, you can get angry even. And yet, if anything, your heart is *more* drawn to the child, right? Because that's your child. Nobody else has that kind of power over your heart.

And so the sin of the child does not change the fundamental *legal* relationship. It doesn't even affect the fundamental *attitude* of the parent toward the child. But doesn't that child need to come back and say, "I'm sorry"? Wouldn't everybody agree with that? Of course you would. Why? The child needs to come back to *repair the fellowship*, to repair the daily fellowship with his parents. But also, if that child doesn't confess, that child is going to keep doing what they do and never grow and never mature and never get to the place where they don't do that anymore, that child needs to come back and *humble* him or herself and *repair* the fellowship between the child and the parent. And as they do that they're growing.

And that's exactly what Jesus Christ says has to happen. You need to realize that you are pardoned, and your relationship with God, you cannot suddenly fall into condemnation when you sin, but you need to come back not only to repair the relationship, but to humble yourself and change. And therefore, you need one bath and multiple foot washes. And do you see, by the way, how important this is? You've got to believe in both. Do you?

See, what if you only believed in the bath? All you believed is, once you become a Christian there's no condemnation, clothed in Christ Jesus and you're great! What is that going to do to you? It's going to harden you. And you're going to say, "Hey, I got my little 'Born Again' certificate, signed, sealed, I can live any way I want until the day I die, then I'll be fine." That'll make you a jerk. So if you only believe in the bath and not the need for the foot washings, it would make you a hard person.

But if you only believe in the foot washings and didn't know about the bath...what if you thought that every time you sinned you had to go back and really get saved all over again? What if you thought that every time you sinned, suddenly the relationship with God was totally broken, and now you have to go back and you've got to show how sorry you are and somehow get God's mercy back? That wouldn't make you a hard person that would make you an extremely *anxious* person, a very upset person.

You'd be a lot like Martin Luther was before he grasped the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Luther was a monk who had a good grasp on the concept of sin. Oh yes! You know, if you read the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus says, "Hey, if you just *lust* after somebody, you've committed adultery; if you just *envy*, you've committed theft; if you just *resent*, it's like committing murder."

And Martin Luther understood all that, but he *didn't* understand the idea that you're saved once for all. He didn't yet understand the idea of the once-for-all "bath" - that he was justified, that there was no condemnation - he didn't get that. He actually thought that every time he went to confess he was kind of completely redoing his relationship with God. Can you imagine being Luther's confessor? It's like every 20 minutes, "Oh my gosh, here's Martin again! What is it this time?" "Father, forgive me, when I was at lunch just now my neighbor has a bigger piece of bread than me and I coveted." Just manic. Why? Because, "I mean, you know, what if I died before I confess? The relationship is all on me."

You see, if you know the bath and not the foot washings, you become an antinomian - a hard person, a person who says, "I can live any way I want." But if you know the foot washing and not the bath, you become a legalist - an incredibly anxious person. But if you know them *both*...you not only have a rest and a peace, but you also have the motivation to grow.

You know in a marriage - at least in *my* marriage - it's rather alarming how often we have to say, "Will you please forgive me? Would you please forgive me?" You'd think after 28 years...nope. It's scary how often that has to happen, and probably not good how often it happens, but one of the most amazing things about that is it makes the love stronger. It makes you a different person. You grow.

So the point is, that it's a twofold cure that Jesus Christ has provided – you need a one-time bath and you need ongoing foot washings. And everybody's got the problem. Everybody is dirty. Everybody is like Peter. And Jesus says *this* will cure your shame. This will cure your guilt. This will deal with that sense that you're unclean. This is the cure.

So we come finally to ask the question, **How do we get this cure?** How do you actually grasp this cure? How is it even *possible*? See, or put it this way, *why* is it possible and *how* do you actually grasp it? Why is it possible? How is it possible? And so let's answer those questions here on the third point, first of all, why is it possible? I'll tell you why...Jesus tells you, v. 7, "*You do not realize what I'm doing but later you will understand.*" What is he referring to? What is he talking about? Later, after *what*? The cross and the resurrection.

This whole lesson is pointing to that. Not just his words, but even his physical actions. What does it mean that Jesus is down on his knees fulfilling the humble role of a lowly servant? He's acting out what Paul later talks about in **Philippians 2:5-8**, "*In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing*

by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!"

No doubt Paul was thinking about this story. And so when Jesus is down on his knees, acting like a slave, washing Peter's feet, it's a symbol of what he's going to do when he goes to the cross. And so what Jesus is saying is, "this will all be made clear when you see me go to the cross." Because what happened on the cross?

Why would the cross be the answer to your shame and your guilt? Why would it be that? Well, keep in mind that Jesus Christ wasn't shot, of course, he wasn't poisoned, he wasn't decapitated - there's a lot of ways to execute a person. He was crucified! Why? Because crucifixion was the most *shameful* possible death. It was a shaming death. You know that.

A person being crucified is stripped *naked*. While you're dying on display for everyone to see you are naked. Why? It's a shaming. He was spit on, remember? That's shaming, "This is what I think of you." He was mocked...all to shame him. Then finally, they crucified him on a garbage dump – out with the feces and the excrement.

In every single way, Jesus Christ was experiencing a *shameful* death. He was getting the shame you deserved. He was being treated *truly* as unworthy of love and belonging. He was getting the shame we deserve so that we could have our sins pardoned and turn to the Father and know that we are clean and beautiful and fragrant in His eyes, in His sight.

You know, then what are you supposed to do with that? You see, that's *why* it's possible, that's the reason why the cure is possible - it's the great exchange - because Jesus took the shame we deserved; that's why it's possible that we can be free from our own guilt and shame. But you say, "Well, how do I actually get a hold of that?" By *looking!*

Now here's what I mean by that. By looking at the cross. Go read the modern books on shame. Listen to the TED Talks. What do you do with the shame? And all the shame gurus say the same thing. That very often, shame comes because there's a voice. You know the voice. I gave a presentation last week that I was kind of anxious about and it went well. I mean it went *really* well. And then...that night the voices started up! "Who do you think you are? Who are you to tell anybody anything? They're probably all mocking you now. If they knew who you really were they wouldn't listen to a word you say. You're not any good at this." You know the voice.

And all the books and the videos say what you need to do is you need to *argue* with those shaming voices. Don't just listen, don't just accept it, *argue* with it. I'm here to tell you, don't do that. You know why? You will lose. See the shaming voice will say, "You're not a person like that". And you'll say, "Well, yes, I am!" And you know what? The shaming voice has a *much* better memory than you do. Because the shaming voice will say, "Okay, what about last Tuesday at 8:30?" You will always lose because the shaming voice wants you to look at *yourself*. And the more you look at yourself, the more evidence you're going to see. There's another way to go.

In *Pilgrims Progress* - it's an old allegory, you know, about the Christian life. In fact, the main character is *named* "Christian" - it's not subtle folks! Christian is journeying along and he's got this huge burden on his back and it's just crushing him. It's the burden of shame and guilt. And he doesn't know how to be relieved of his burden. So he seeks some advice.

He goes to "Mr. Worldly Wise", and he says, "I'm just crushed under this burden. What can I do?" Mr. Worldly Wise says, "You see that hill over there? It's called the hill of morality. And at the top, there's a there's a house there. And in that house lives "Mr. Legality" and he will tell you how to be rid of your burden."

“That’s great!” So Christian starts to walk up the hill. And what’s weird is as he’s walking up the hill, as he’s struggling up the mountain of morality, he finds the burden is getting worse and worse and worse, it’s not getting better. He thinks, “Well, I thought the closer I get to the top, then the more moral I’d get, I’d be feeling better.”

But no, of course not. Because actually, the more you try to be a good person, the more you look at yourself, the more you’re going to see where you’re falling short. And he finally says, “forget this” and he leaves and he walks along until he sees another hill and at the top of that hill is something else, but he can’t quite tell what it is. But at the bottom of the hill there’s a grave.

So he starts to go up this hill and doesn’t get very far, until he suddenly can finally see what’s at the top of the hill. It’s a Cross. And when he *sees* that Cross, finally, to his shock, at that moment - he’s not even very far up the hill - but once he *sees* the Cross, at that moment, his burden falls off and rolls down the hill right into the grave and disappears forever.

And he suddenly is shocked. He says, “Well, I thought I’d have to get up to the top of Mount Morality to get rid of my shame and guilt - be a really good person. But it got worse and worse as I went up. But here, all I have to do is *look* at the Cross.” And

then of course the burden falls off, and so he just leaps for joy three times, and he sings this song,
“Blessed Cross! Blessed Grave!
Blessed rather be The Man
who there was put to shame for me.”

Don’t look at your burden, look at the cross! Let me finish with a story – a true story this time. Charles Spurgeon was a great Baptist preacher in England in the 19th century. He is widely known in minister circles as “the prince of preachers”. And he frequently told about how he became a Christian. When he was a young man, he visited a church in London. But there was a snowstorm and hardly anyone was there – maybe a half dozen people. In fact, the preacher didn’t even show up!

And so there was a layman – not from the educated classes, but at least he could read – so he got up and read the text for the morning. It was **Isaiah 45:22**, of course it would have been the King James Version, “*Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else.*” And then he began to give an impromptu sermon. Not very sophisticated. I love that this is how the greatest preacher who ever lived came to faith – I think God has a sense of humor.

So the man began to say, “My dear friends, this is a simple text. It says to be saved, we only need to look. It ain’t lifting your foot or your finger. It’s just look; you need not have gone to college to look, even a child can look; you need not be worth a 1000 pounds a year to look. Anyone can look. But the text says, ‘look unto *Me*’. Look to Jesus. Many of you are looking to yourselves, it’s no use looking there. The good book says, ‘Look unto me.’”

And Spurgeon writes in his memoir, ‘Then the good man lifted his arms to the heavens and began to cry out... The Lord says, ‘Look unto me, I am sweating, great drops of blood. Look unto me, I’m hanging on the Cross. Look unto me, I am dead and buried. Look unto me, I rise again. Look unto me, I ascend to heaven, Look unto me, I’m sitting at the Father’s right hand, look unto me.’

And Spurgeon says, after the man had been going on a couple of minutes like this, he noticed him sitting under the gallery, and he knew he was a visitor, and he fixed his eyes on Spurgeon and said, “Young man, you look miserable. And you’re always going to be miserable - miserable in life and miserable in death - until you obey my text. Young man, look - look to Jesus Christ - you have nothing to do but look and live.”

And here’s how Spurgeon says it, “The blow struck home and I saw it at once. I’d been waiting to do 50 things to find God. But when I heard that word, ‘look’, the cloud finally was gone. Like when the brazen serpent was lifted up, the people only looked at it and were healed, so it was with me. So I looked and I looked and I looked, until I almost could have looked my eyes away.”

How do you deal with your shame? Don’t look at yourself. That’ll just make the shame worse. Look to Jesus dying on the cross for you. He can make you clean. He can get the stain out.

Let’s pray...