

DELETING GUILT Luke 22:54-62

(Video ... Thoughts on guilt ... 55 Seconds)

When I was about 7 years old, I was playing with a neighbor by the name of Mitchel in his back yard. They had a beautiful back yard. At that point in my life it seemed like it was acres in size. I went by that house this summer and come to a realization it was not much bigger than a postage stamp. Mitchel and I were playing when a cardinal landed on the beautifully landscaped bird bath. Being a typical boy ... I picked up a stick and flung it at the bird.

Remember ... I am a 7 years old boy that was ... what seemed like ... a quarter mile from the bird. That stick caught the bird across the feet ... dumped the bird into the water of the birdbath ... and he died.

I tell you that story ... not because I want you to believe that I was a very good thrower of sticks ... not to tell you that I have an aversion against cardinals ... I tell you this story because of the guilt and shame that immediately washed over me! I felt so bad about killing that bird that I just dropped where I stood and sobbed. (which, by the way, is not a real manly thing to do in front of your buddies.)

I left Mitchel's and went home. I sort of snuck into the house because I just knew that my mom and dad would know that I killed that bird and I just could not face them. I just knew that things would never be the same. I would no longer be looked at as their little boy ... I would be seen by them as the bird-killer.

And remember that prayer you used to pray as a little child before you went to bed ... "And if I should die before I wake". I told mom and dad that I did not want to pray that night because I thought for sure that God would take away my life for committing such a heinous sin!

And for the next several weeks ... every time that I heard a siren ... I was afraid that they were coming to get me and take me to jail.

When I think back about that true story ... I think of how a little boy's mind can play some crazy tricks on him. The police never threw me in jail. And mom and dad never stopped loving me. And God did not take my life for killing that beautiful bird that he had created.

You ever experienced anything like that? You felt so guilty of something that you did that you were convinced that you were done ... there was no future for you? And I am not really talking about something that you might have done when you were 7 ... it might have been just last year ... or the year before that. Or maybe just last week. Has guilt ever deemed you inoperable? You feel doomed. There is no hope.

This morning I want us to take a look at a character in the Bible that had that very same kind of thinking. He had not killed a bird ... it was something even more devastating. He had denied a good friend of his ... a very special friend!

Turn with me to **LUKE 22** and let me set the scene. Jesus and the apostles are in the Upper Room celebrating the Passover. The Passover was a really big deal for the Jews because it was a reminder of how God saved them from the Egyptians and brought them out of slavery.

Jesus is having that Passover meal with his special friends ... the apostles. Toward the end of the Celebration the mood turns from a very festive atmosphere to a grim one. Jesus tells Peter that Peter will turn his back on him.

You ever have anyone turn his or her back on you? They did something to betray you.

- Maybe it was a co-worker
- Maybe it was your own kids
- Maybe it was your mate
- Maybe it was one of your closest friends.

You just knew in your heart that they would never turn on you! They would stand by you no matter what. And then it happens. It was if they never knew who you were.

That is exactly what Peter did to Jesus ... Look at **LUKE 22:33** ... But he replied, "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death."

Peter's heart was good ... he would do anything for his friend Jesus. But when push came to shove ... he ran!

Look at **VERSES 54-62** ... ⁵⁴ Then seizing him, they led him away and took him into the house of the high priest. Peter followed at a distance. ⁵⁵ And when some there had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and had sat down together, Peter sat down with them. ⁵⁶ A servant girl saw him seated there in the firelight. She looked closely at him and said, "This man was with him." ⁵⁷ But he denied it. "Woman, I don't know him," he said. ⁵⁸ A little later someone else saw him and said, "You also are one of them." "Man, I am not!" Peter replied. ⁵⁹ About an hour later another asserted, "Certainly this fellow was with him, for he is a Galilean." ⁶⁰ Peter replied, "Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹ The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." ⁶² And he went outside and wept bitterly

Notice **VERSE 62** ... And he went outside and wept bitterly. You see ... Peter and I have experienced something in common. We both have done something that we felt extremely guilty about. And you know what ... I can just about bet you that there is not one person in here today that has not felt that same kind of guilt! We all have done things we feel guilty about ... right?

But here is the question that is really most important ... what have we done about it? Have we paralyzed ourselves? Are we still wallowing in guilt and have convinced ourselves that we are useless ... especially to God. Can he not accept us anymore ... let alone use us in some might way for the Kingdom's sake?

I am so glad that the Bible does not stop with **LUKE 22:62** ... when it comes to Peter's life. I am glad that there is more to the story!

Let's jump over to John's account of the gospel ... **JOHN 21**. By this time ... Jesus has been crucified and raised from the dead. The apostles are out in a boat fishing. Jesus appears on the beach and yells out to them ... they end up back on the beach with him and he fixes them breakfast.

Now look at **VERSES 15-17** ... ¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." ¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

I really do not think that it is a coincidence that Jesus asks Peter three times if he loved him ... How many times did Peter deny him on that night around the fire? He denied him three times. And three times Jesus asks him if he loved him and then tells him each of those three times to get back to doing the kingdom work of feeding his sheep.

Whose idea was it that the apostles were fishing that night? **JOHN 21:3** tells us it was Peter's idea. We can only speculate as to why Peter returned to what his job was before he started following Jesus ... but I wonder if it was because he thought he was not worthy to do Christ's work anymore. I wonder if he thought ... "I feel so guilty of my past. Surely Jesus cannot use me anymore."

We certainly cannot know what Peter was thinking ... but we can know what we think ... right? Have you ever thought that? Maybe you are thinking it right now. "Jim ... you don't have a clue what all I have done in my past. It is **so** bad! There is no way God wants to have anything to do with me ... He cannot possibly love me! ... Let alone allowing me to do his work." Friends ... that is stinking thinking! **That is saying you don't believe God can overcome your past.** And you could not be further from the truth.

Take a look at some of the Bible characters that God loved and used even though their past stunk:

- Abraham was a liar
- Jacob was a deceiver
- Noah was a drunk
- Moses was a complainer and a murderer
- David was a murderer
- Elijah was a coward
- Rahab was a prostitute
- Paul was a persecutor
- And Peter was a denier

The list can go on and on and on. When you read the Bible, you see that God specializes in erasing the past and giving people a new start! And that includes you and me! **It does not matter what your past holds ... what matters is if you allow your past to hold onto you!**

Friends ... when you are a Christian ... you are not who you were ... you are who you are!

“That sounds so great Jim! How do I let go of my past? How do I set myself free from guilt? How can I walk with Christ free from what once was?” I am glad you asked ... Let me share with you three steps ...

1 ... REMEMBER WE CANNOT CHANGE THE PAST

You ever say or do something that you wished you had not said or done? You wish you could somehow turn the clock back to before that time and erase it?

David Wheeler ... a good friend of Vicki and me ... a professor at JU ... preached a youth revival for us at Southern Heights back when we were doing youth ministry. He was preaching and said something that he really did not want to say. So what he said next was ... “Wait a minute ... back that tape up and erase what I just said.” Well, the fact is that there is no way he could go back in time and erase what he said.

We cannot go back in time and erase things in our past that we are ashamed of. What is done is done. I am sure that Peter would have given anything to be able to reverse time and undo what he said and did around that fire that

night when he denied Jesus three times. But he could not. All he could do now was accept the fact that he had done it.

Agathon ... as quoted by Aristotle said “This only is denied even to God: the power to undo the past.”

—AGATHON, quoted by Aristotle in

Nicomachean Ethics

I can remember as if it were yesterday what went through my mind when I killed that bird. I can remember going over to the birdbath and picking up the bird and trying to set it back on the side of the birdbath as if it were still alive. But the bird kept falling back into the water. I had to come to the understanding that what I had done could not be undone. The bird was dead ... and I killed it.

Has that been you? Have you tried to undo what was done? It cannot be done. You have to accept the fact that you cannot change the past.

BUT ... we do not stay in that past! We can move on! We can overcome!

2 ... RECOGNIZE THAT GOD FORGIVES OUR PAST

Most of us had to read “The Scarlet Letter” by Nathaniel Hawthorne when we were in school. If you remember there was a woman by the name of Hester Prynne who committed adultery in the book. The Puritan community in which she lived made her wear a red colored letter “A” on her dress so that everyone would know what she had done. The letter was her symbol of guilt ... her bondage to the past. Every time she wore the letter she was reminded of what she had done.

I don't know if you are aware of it or not ... but God has a Scarlet Letter too. But his letter is not an “A”. It is more like the lower case “T”. It looks like this ... (**Show picture of a cross similar to a lower case T**). We don't call it a ‘t’ ... we call it a cross. And here is the irony of this whole thing ... it is scarlet too. Not because someone painted it red ... but because it was stained with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Do you know what takes place between Peter denying Christ three times and Christ reinstating him into ministry? The cross!

The cross is God's way of removing the shame of the past. It is his way of breaking the chains and setting us free!

Listen to **2 CORINTHIANS 5:17** ... ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁷

Friends if you are still holding on to the shame of your past ... you don't have to! You can be set free! You can leave it in the past and move on! You can be a new you! But you have to trust in the forgiving power of God the Almighty!

3 ... REALIZE THAT GOD RESTORES OUR FUTURE

Just letting go of the shame of the past is not enough! Jesus did not just ask Peter if he loved him three times. Each time ... when he asked if he loved him ... he gave him a future ... He reinstated him to do ministry ... to feed his sheep!

God does not forgive you and release you from your shame to put you out to pasture ... unless of course ... it is to feed his sheep.

Friends ... it does not matter how dark your past has been ... your future can be as bright as God wants to make it! He has a ministry for you to do ... just like he had one for Peter to do.

If you are an Olympics fan you might know the name ... Usain Bolt. He is known as the fastest man alive. If you have ever seen him run there is something you might notice ... he never looks back! He keeps his eyes on the finish line.

Jesus put it this way in **LUKE 9:62** ... Jesus replied, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

There are too many Christians who are running the race of life and they keep looking back! If that is you this morning ... will you quit looking back? Will you allow God to forgive you and set you free of the guilt you are carrying? Will you allow him to restore you to his kingdom work?