

May 31 & June 1, 2025

Shaped and Shattered | *For the Pain*

Leviticus 4:18-20, John 1:29

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Guilt and shame can come from many different parts of our life, and guilt and shame bring significant pain with them. The mistakes we do not intend to make and the intentional decisions that lead to pain for ourselves or others leave us broken. Yet God desires for us to be made whole, to be forgiven, and calls us into that wholeness, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

There we were, just the three of us sitting in a conference room and it was completely silent. Something big was going on. The other two in the room were husband and wife and the husband had just declared that his wife had something to share. That was when the room went silent.

She was looking down at the floor, she hadn't made eye contact with anyone yet. After that moment of silence, I encouraged her that this was a safe place to share but if she didn't feel safe with me, I would invite someone else to be with them. She said that she was fine and as she started to cry, she shared how ashamed and embarrassed she was.

She shared with me how she had stolen from her company and had been caught. The company was not going to press charges if she repaid all that she had stolen, but she was fired and had to endure the shame and guilt of cleaning out her office, walking out of the building in front of her co-workers, many who had become friends and knew what had happened.

She then shut herself in her house and wouldn't leave, wouldn't answer any phone calls and her husband had become very worried. He had finally convinced her to come in and talk – but it wasn't just a talk – it was a confession. Confession... a ritual that has been used for generations of people, who are filled with pain, shame and guilt, to free them-selves for new life.

When the ritual of confession is used correctly, confession is incredibly powerful, as it was in this instance. The darkness receded. She made eye contact, and you could tell that new life was a possibility for her. That's the power of God who meets us in our brokenness.

And when we read through Leviticus, we see that God has been meeting God's people in their brokenness from the beginning. Let's do a quick review of where we've been and how we've gotten to this point. God hears the cry of the people, people who had been in slavery for generations. There is a battle between the God of Abraham and the gods of Egypt. The God of Abraham, wins, the people are freed, and they head out in search of a new land. They are called, freed for a purpose. They are freed for Shalom and not Empire.

God calls them into new order, a new order where justice, mercy and community are expected, and worship is at the center. They build a house for God, called the tent of meeting. God is present – you never have to worry about where God is ever again. And not only that – but you can come near to God. You can eat a meal with God. And God uses systems and rituals that they already know, they already are familiar with, to cement their relationship.

And for the first time – in generations – the people are encouraged and given a way to express their joy. This new life, this new order – will bring joy – expect joy. However, God is God and God also knows who we are – especially in community. God knows that people will and can hurt one another – even unintentionally. But God tells the people – that in this new ordering of the world, when someone hurts one another – when community has broken down, there is a way back. When you realize your guilt – when your brokenness comes to the forefront of your reality – when you've had to clean out your office and take that walk of shame – God says – there is a way back into community.

And God makes no distinction about who... here is Chapter 4 of Leviticus. Lists of who will sin... individuals, the whole community, even the ruler

and even the priest himself. God says everyone is going to mess up. Everyone...Here is a way back.

In the book of Leviticus, the word for “homecoming” is atonement. The Book of Leviticus mentions atonement 43 times. And one chapter in particular... Chapter 16 right in the middle of the story gives instructions for the big atonement. This whole book of Leviticus is centered around God’s plan to wrap up sin, individual sin and communal sin and get rid of it.

Now, why is that significant... It means that at the very beginning of this new order, God’s eyes and heart were wide open. God knew who these people were. Shattered people... not the perfect – everything’s all put together persona that so many Christians try to project. God knows that’s not true and gives you and me a way back and way to be shaped through atonement, through forgiveness. God’s been in the shaping those who have been shattered for far longer than we’ve imagined, and now for us in our day... Jesus gives us that assurance, Jesus is our way back. The Gospel of John puts it this way.

²⁹ The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (Joh 1:29 NRS)

But there is this interesting line that is repeated in Leviticus 4. With each category, the priest who sins, the whole community who sins, the ruler who sins, and the ordinary person sins the line that is included is “is made known.” When the sin is made known either to the priest, the ruler, the whole community or the individual that’s when the benefits of forgiveness are present.

God is saying that you have to be aware of your sin before forgiveness free’s you. And here is when it can get a bit tricky. It doesn’t mean that God won’t forgive those who are not aware of their sin, God is making it loud and clear who benefits from forgiveness. Forgiveness doesn’t benefit God; forgiveness is for us. God doesn’t need forgiveness. We do. And if you are not aware of your sin, forgiveness doesn’t free you. You won’t even seek forgiveness. It’s as if you didn’t know you were sick

so there is no need for you to go see a doctor and get the medicine. Or if you only see the sin in others, it’s easy to point the finger away from you. If you don’t have shame for your actions, you’ll never take that walk of shame and change never happens for you. You will not know the freedom of forgiveness.

And what is sin? Leviticus 4 has another repeated phrase... “commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them” (Lev 4:2 NRS). These folks have been given the commandments, commandments that focus on healthy community. To care for the widow, the orphan and the immigrant. Don’t be like the Amalekites who attack the most vulnerable. God says, the new order, this new community is to be shaped by Shalom, not empire. Put the most vulnerable in the middle and move at their pace, not at the pace of the strongest. To do anything else is what it means to sin in God’s eyes.

For some of us we have grown up in a religious system, like the Footloose movie where it was considered a sin to dance. However, in that movie, and usually in real life, dancing was not what was breaking Shalom. Fear was the driving force, and the Empire of control was leading the way. Now if any social behavior breaks Shalom, well then that is worth the conversation, but God’s focus is on how our individual and communal behavior affects Shalom, how our individual and communal behavior breaks Shalom.

And usually, we get caught up in individual and communal behavior that breaks Shalom because we are afraid. We are afraid for our “way of life”. We are afraid for our future. We are afraid of change. We are afraid and we begin to lose the story. We begin to not trust that story. This constant and consistent story throughout scripture of God’s embrace and welcome of us and the other is either ignored or blatantly disregarded because the pull of Empire is strong.

I was 19 years old. A camp counselor at Luther Crest bible camp and it was amazing. I had never felt that level of permission to be as creative as I could be. I was also joined by several other camp

counselors who took that same creative ball and ran with it. And we did. What we didn't realize was that we had formed a very powerful clique. Because we were pushing the boundaries of creativity others were being left behind and we were not mature enough, or maybe even cared enough to bring others along. We wrote the funniest skits. We led campfires with the most energy. All the kids, at least we thought so, wanted to hang out with us. And we were the best camp counselors there had ever been or would ever be.

What we didn't know was that the rest of the counselors thought we were massive jerks and so did the camp director. We were all about the Empire of our own immature egos and we were shattering Shalom wherever we went. That was until we became aware of our shalom shattering. And we literally took a walk of shame from the camp director's office into an all staff meeting where apologies were extended and forgiveness was given. The rest of that summer and the next 3 summers each of us grew and were given positions of leadership where we paid deep attention to Shalom and relationship. Trust the story... Shalom.

That experience was deeply formative for me and when I see any of those fellow counselors even to this day we warmly embrace and welcome one another because we know that God has warmly embraced and welcomed us. It doesn't mean that we don't mess it up and all of us have had to take walks of shame and probably will until our final embrace and welcome to eternity.

This is true of all of us and why God gives us this amazing gift of recognizing when and how we break shalom and gives us a way from moving through the pain of shame to forgiveness and new life. Now I am not asking any of us to take the walk of shame this morning but if you've ever known the amazing grace of God's forgiveness you are a witness. But I will challenge all of us to reflect on a couple of things.

The first is where is fear driving you to break shalom? Where are you shattered? How is your ego blinding you to behaviors that are shattering shalom? Where are you shattered? Here is a not-

so-secret secret... we are all shattered. And here is another not-so-secret secret, God already knows, and instead of condemning us, God gives us a way back home and uses forgiveness to shape us. God gives us away through the pain. And ultimately sends us the greatest gift we could ever be given.

"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

Will you trust the story? God hopes so.