Shame Became Love

SCRIPTURE

“And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” — Colossians 1:20 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

The cross is one of the most recognized symbols in the world. It appears on jewelry, buildings, gravestones, books, clothing, and even national flags. Yet to the Romans, the cross was not beautiful. It was an instrument of torture, shame, and death, reserved for the condemned. Wearing one would have seemed as strange as wearing a guillotine or an electric chair today. Jesus entered that place without guilt of His own. The innocent Son of God accepted the death of the guilty. He did not endure the cross because Rome overpowered Him or because heaven had abandoned its purpose. He embraced it to make peace between the Creator and His creation. Through His blood, the symbol of condemnation became the sign of reconciliation. Hebrews says that Jesus endured the cross “for the joy that was set before him.” He despised its shame because He could see beyond the suffering.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for making peace through the blood of Christ’s cross. Keep me from treating it as an empty symbol. Let its shame expose the seriousness of sin, and let its love assure me that You have done everything necessary to bring me home. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Colossians 1:19–22
- Hebrews 12:2
- Romans 5:8
- Philippians 2:5–11
- John 13:3–17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the cross transform our understanding of shame and love?

2. Read Colossians 1:19–22. How does this passage deepen today's understanding of God's work in our lives?

3. What would it look like for you to respond to an experience of shame with the assurance of Christ's love?

Let This Mind Be in You

SCRIPTURE

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” — Philippians 2:5, 8 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

Before the cross came the incarnation. The One who hung at Calvary was not a common criminal or a menace to society. He was the Son of God. Yet He made Himself of no reputation, took the form of a servant, and entered the weakness of human life. Jesus did not suddenly become self-sacrificing on the day He died. His death was the culmination of the way He had always lived. He humbled Himself in Bethlehem, served in Galilee, washed feet in the upper room, submitted in Gethsemane, and remained obedient even unto death. He died as He lived - surrendered to the Father and poured out for others. We rightly celebrate the life and death of Christ. But Paul does not tell us merely to admire His humility. He says, “Let this mind be in you.” The cross is not only something Jesus accomplished for us; it reveals the mind that must be formed in us. The mind of Christ does not cling to position, protect reputation at any cost, or insist on being served. It willingly stoops. It obeys when obedience is costly. It chooses the Father’s will over self-preservation. That kind of surrender confronts our pride far more deeply than wearing a symbol or speaking warmly about sacrifice. Ask where the mind of Christ is needed in you today. Is there a task you consider beneath you? An apology you resist because it might lower you? An act of obedience you have delayed because it costs too much? The road to the cross began with humility. If we would follow Jesus to Calvary, we must first follow Him into service.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You humbled Yourself and became obedient unto death. Let Your mind be in me. Free me from pride, the need to protect my reputation, and the desire to exalt myself. Teach me to take up my cross and serve others with the same humility and love You have shown me. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Philippians 2:5–11
- John 13:3–17
- 1 Peter 2:21–23
- Colossians 1:19–22
- Hebrews 12:2

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does the mind of Christ reveal about humility and surrender?

2. Consider Philippians 2:5–11. What does this passage add to the main lesson of today's devotional?

3. What would it look like for you to give up a desire for recognition in order to serve someone?

Take Up Your Cross

SCRIPTURE

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me... whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” — Matthew 16:24-25 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

Jesus never told His followers merely to admire His cross, venerate His cross, or appreciate His cross. He said, “Take up his cross, and follow me.” The gospel gives us everything through Christ’s sacrifice, but receiving that gift brings us into the same pattern of self-denying love. We often want a cross that saves our life while allowing us to remain lord of it. We want forgiveness without surrender, discipleship without inconvenience, and resurrection without death to self. Jesus speaks plainly: whoever lives only to preserve the self will lose life, while whoever yields life to Him will truly find it. Taking up the cross does not mean manufacturing misery or seeking suffering for its own sake. It means that self is no longer the highest authority. Christ becomes Lord of our desires, time, relationships, ambitions, possessions, and reactions. When His will and ours conflict, the cross marks the place where we choose Him. This choice is usually made in ordinary moments. We take up the cross when we serve without recognition, remain gentle when provoked, tell the truth when dishonesty would be easier, give when keeping would feel safer, and forgive when resentment feels justified. The wood may not be visible, but the surrender is real. Which part of your life are you still trying to save from Jesus? The cross does not promise to preserve the old life with a religious covering. It promises something better: the life we lose for Christ is found in Him. Self-denial is not the destruction of everything good; it is freedom from the small kingdom of self so we can enter the life of God.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I do not want only to admire the cross while refusing its call. Show me where self still rules. Give me grace to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow You in the ordinary choices of this day. Let me lose my life in You and find the life that is truly life. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Matthew 16:24–26
- Luke 9:23–24
- Galatians 6:14
- Philippians 2:5–11
- John 13:3–17

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is the difference between appreciating Christ's cross and taking up our own?
2. How does Matthew 16:24–26 help clarify the spiritual principle in today's reading?
3. What would it look like for you to yield a selfish preference in a way that honors Christ?

Crucified with Christ

SCRIPTURE

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me... I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” — Galatians 2:20 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

Paul did not speak of the cross as a distant event with no claim upon his present life. He said, “I am crucified with Christ.” The old ruler of his life had been displaced. “Nevertheless I live,” he wrote, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” The old person of selfishness, pride, greed, envy, and vanity belongs on the cross. So does the temper that is quick to anger, the tongue that judges and criticizes, and the desire to dominate, manipulate, or control. The cross does not decorate that old life. It brings it to an end. This is not self-improvement by religious effort. Paul’s confidence was “the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” We surrender because we are loved. Christ does not merely command us to die; He joins us to His death and then lives His resurrection life within us. That is why Paul could glory in the cross alone. The world celebrates power, glamour, intelligence, applause, and human achievement. The cross empties those trophies of their power over us. Through it, Paul said, the world was crucified unto him and he unto the world. Its approval was no longer his master. What keeps returning from the old life? Bring it honestly to Christ. Do not excuse it, polish it, or hide it behind religious language. Agree with the cross that it must die. Then trust the living Christ to express His patience, purity, courage, and love through you. The Christian life is not the old self trying harder. It is Christ living in a surrendered person.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, You loved me and gave Yourself for me. I bring the old life of pride, selfishness, anger, envy, and control to the cross. Be Lord within me. Live Your life through my thoughts, words, choices, and relationships today. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Romans 6:6–14
- Colossians 3:1–4
- Matthew 16:24–26
- Luke 9:23–24
- Galatians 6:14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does being crucified with Christ mean for daily attitudes and choices?

2. Read Romans 6:6–14. What connection do you see between this passage and today's Scripture?

3. What would it look like for you to surrender a habitual reaction that belongs to the old life?

Put Up Thy Sword

SCRIPTURE

“My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight... but now is my kingdom not from hence.” — John 18:36 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

The first Christians understood that taking up the cross could cost reputation, security, freedom, and life itself. They were scorned, excluded, and persecuted, yet they did not conquer by making others suffer. Their witness was shaped by the One who suffered for His enemies. Over time, the symbol of the cross became entangled with another kind of power. In the fourth century it was associated with Constantine’s military victory. Centuries later, crusaders wore it while fighting for Jerusalem. A symbol of self-sacrifice could now be used to bless conquest - not dying for enemies, but cutting them down. Jesus had already drawn a clear boundary. “My kingdom is not of this world,” He told Pilate. If it were, His servants would fight in the world’s way. When Peter drew a sword to defend Him, Jesus said, “Put up again thy sword into his place.” The kingdom would not be secured by force. The crusader spirit survives whenever we use the name of Christ to humiliate, dominate, or destroy another person. Today the battlefield may be Facebook, YouTube, a comment section, a church business meeting, or a family argument. The weapons may be words - even Bible verses - sharpened to wound and shame. We can win an argument and lose the Spirit of Christ. We can correctly identify error while displaying the very spirit we condemn. Before you strike in defense of truth, look at the cross. Jesus does not need a worldly weapon to protect His kingdom. Put down the sword of contempt, coercion, and cruelty. Speak truth, but speak it as one who is willing to suffer for another rather than make another suffer for you.

PRAYER

King Jesus, Your kingdom is not of this world. Forgive me for using truth as a weapon or defending Your name with a spirit unlike Yours. Teach me to put up the sword, reject contempt, and bear faithful witness with courage, gentleness, and self-sacrificing love. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- John 18:33–38
- Matthew 26:51–54
- Romans 12:17–21
- Galatians 2:20
- Romans 6:6–14

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Christ's kingdom reject the spirit of carnal force?

2. What encouragement or instruction does John 18:33–38 offer in light of today's devotional?

3. What would it look like for you to choose a peaceful response instead of retaliation?

By This Sign, Love

SCRIPTURE

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” — John 13:35 (KJV)

DEVOTIONAL

The world has often searched for a visible sign by which to conquer. Jesus gave His followers a different sign: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35). This is the distinguishing mark of the followers of Jesus.

Jesus did not tell His disciples that the world would recognize them by the power of their arguments, the size of their organizations, or the religious symbols they carried. He pointed to the way they loved one another. The sign of discipleship is not merely something we display on the outside; it is something that must be formed within us.

This does not mean that we cease to stand for truth. Jesus never compromised the truth in order to be accepted. But His truth was always revealed through a life of self-sacrificing love. If we use truth to exalt ourselves or humiliate someone else, our manner contradicts the very message we claim to defend.

Today, examine the sign that others see in you. In your home, your church, and your conversations, do people see a desire to conquer or a willingness to serve? Let the cross of Christ be revealed in the love with which you treat others.

PRAYER

Father, write the sign of Christ’s love upon my heart. In my home, church, conversations, and disagreements, keep me from seeking victory at another person’s expense. Teach me to speak truth with grace and to lay down my life so that hearts may be won to You. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- John 13:34–35
- 1 John 3:16–18
- Matthew 5:43–48
- John 18:33–38
- Matthew 26:51–54

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why is love rather than domination the distinctive sign of Christ's disciples?

2. How does John 13:34–35 support or expand the lesson we have considered today?

3. What would it look like for you to demonstrate love toward a person who disagrees with you?

Sabbath Summary & Reflection — WHICH CROSS WILL YOU TAKE UP?

SCRIPTURE

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” — Luke 23:34 (KJV)

SABBATH REFLECTION

Around the cross, different voices joined the same demand: “Save thyself.” Passers-by, religious rulers, soldiers, and an unrepentant thief all looked at Jesus through the instinct of self-preservation. Prove who You are. Come down. Use Your power for Yourself. Jesus refused. While others demanded that He save Himself, He thought of others. He entrusted His mother to the beloved disciple. While His enemies mocked and killed Him, He prayed, “Father, forgive them.” The cross of Christ is the cross that does not sacrifice others to preserve self; it sacrifices self to save others. This week we have seen the cross transform shame into love, reveal the humility of Christ, call us to self-denial, put the old life to death, disarm the spirit of conquest, and make sacrificial love the sign of true discipleship. Now the question becomes personal: Which cross will you take up?

Reflect: Where have you been content to admire Christ’s cross without accepting its call to humility, obedience, or self-denial?

Examine: In conflict, do your words carry the spirit of the sword or the Spirit of the crucified Christ?

Practice: Choose one concrete way to lay down your life today: release the need to win, forgive an injury, serve without recognition, or seek peace with someone you love.

The Roman cross sacrifices others. Christ’s cross sacrifices self. One wins arguments; the other wins hearts. One condemns sinners; the other dies to redeem them. As you rest this Sabbath, receive again the love of the One who gave His life for you. Ask Him to make the spirit of His cross visible in the way you treat those around you.

PRAYER

Father, thank You for the cross of Christ. Forgive me for every false cross that protects self and wounds others. Give me the mind of Jesus. Teach me to forgive, serve, surrender, and love. May the cross I carry reveal the Savior who laid down His life for the world. Amen.

FURTHER STUDY / ADDITIONAL BIBLE READING

- Luke 23:33–34
- Philippians 2:5–8
- 1 Corinthians 1:18
- John 13:34–35
- 1 John 3:16–18

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Which contrast between worldly power and the cross most challenges your life?

2. How does Luke 23:33–34 bring together the spiritual lessons of this week?

3. What would it look like for you to choose a concrete act of forgiveness or self-sacrifice this Sabbath?