**Despising the Shame**

Heb. 12:1-2

Introduction:

1. In one weekend He changed the whole course of human history. But why did He have to die on a cross?

2. Why must God humiliate Himself so? No other religion has as its central event the humiliation of its God.

3. Why **did** Jesus die on a cross? Why would God endure such a thing?

4. Let’s begin in Heb. 12:1-2.

“Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us lay aside

every encumbrance, and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with

endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter

of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat

down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

5 “For the **joy** set before Him . . . **despising** the **shame**!” Now there are three words that don’t regularly occur together: joy, despising, shame.

Discussion:

I. The shame associated with the cross.

A. Those in the first century who read this letter would have little difficulty in understanding

the shame associated with crucifixion.

1. G. F. Hawthorne (ZPEB, “Cross,” p. 1038) says, “Death by crucifixion originated

somewhere in the E. Alexander the Great seems to have learned of it from the

Persians. Rome borrowed the idea from the Phoenicians through Carthage, and

perfected it as a means of capital punishment.”

2. Josephus indicates that crucifixion in Palestine was a most common sight

(Antiquities, 17:10.10; 20:5.2; Wars, 2:12.6; 13:2,14.9; 5:11.1). The crucifixion of the

robbers with Jesus lends support to this idea. He speaks sometimes of thousands

crucified at a time.

3. Besides being a torturous way to die, it was slow, helpless and public. It was often

accompanied by mocking.

4. Deut. 21:23 pronounces a curse on anyone who hangs on a tree. It is my

understanding that some were actually crucified on trees. Paul uses this language in

Gal. 3:12-14 of the crucifixion of Jesus.

B. Our focus tends to be on the physical pain associated with the cross. Medical

authorities have described the physical aspects of crucifixion, what happens to the body

during the process and how the victim suffers and then dies of asphyxiation and

exhaustion. The author of Hebrews mentions nothing of this, nor do the gospel

accounts. The author of Hebrews instead refers to the shame associated with it.

1. Crucifixion was something reserved for the lowest of the low.

2. Romans reserved it for slaves, robbers, assassins, and the like.

3. The condemned were flogged and mocked. Jesus was given a crown of thorns and

purple robe and verbally accosted. Then the condemned were forced to carry the

cross beam to their place of execution as the people watched. From what I

understand crucifixion often occurred by the roadside for all passers by to see.

Instead of being great tall structures they were 9-12 feet high, placing the crucified at

eye level so the sight could hardly be avoided. Victims could linger for days and

their bodies could be left to rot there.

C. The following description is given in the Wikipedia article, “Crucifixion.”

While a crucifixion was an execution, it was also a humiliation, by making the condemned as vulnerable as possible. Although artists have traditionally depicted the figure on a cross with a loin cloth or a covering of the genitals, the person being crucified was usually stripped naked. Writings by [Seneca the Younger](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seneca_the_Younger) state some victims suffered a stick forced upwards through their groin.[[21]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion#cite_note-Seneca_1946-21)[[22]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion#cite_note-22)Despite its frequent use by the Romans, the horrors of crucifixion did not escape criticism by some eminent Roman orators. [Cicero](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cicero), for example, described crucifixion as "a most cruel and disgusting punishment",[[23]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion#cite_note-23) and suggested that "the very mention of the cross should be far removed not only from a Roman citizen's body, but from his mind, his eyes, his ears".[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion#cite_note-24) Elsewhere he says, "It is a crime to bind a Roman citizen; to scourge him is a wickedness; to put him to death is almost parricide. What shall I say of crucifying him? So guilty an action cannot by any possibility be adequately expressed by any name bad enough for it."[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crucifixion#cite_note-25)

D. And so the author of Hebrews says that Jesus despised the **shame.**

II. But what does it mean to **despise** the shame?

A. The Greek term (kataphroneō) literally means to think down upon, therefore to think

slightly of.

1. It is used in Matt. 6:24 where Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters,

for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and

despise the other.”

2. It is used in 1 Cor. 11:22 where Paul asks, “Do you not have houses to eat and drink

in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”

3. So, to despise a thing involves devaluing it, to think slightly of it.

B. So Jesus looks on the shame of the cross as if it is nothing.

1. But we know that it was severe. We know that it was severe to Him. His agony in

the Garden of Gethsemane indicates this. He prayed three times, “Let this cup pass

from Me” (Matt. 26:39ff). He said, “My soul is deeply grieved” (Matt. 26:38). Luke

says, “In agony . . . His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the

ground” (22:44).

2. The situation was severe enough that the Father sent an angel from heaven,

strengthening Him (Lk. 22:43).

C. Yet the text says, “He despised the shame.” In other words, He thought “little or

nothing” of the mocking, the curse, the pain, the humiliation, and the shame that He

bore.

D. How was He able to do that? What motivated such diminishing of the shame? The

author of Hebrews says that He did it for the joy set before Him? Joy?

III. What is this **joy** set before Him?

A. Jesus experienced joy in accomplishing the Father’s will. And that will involved . . .

1. Saving us from the humiliation associated with our sin.

2. Saving us from the wrath of God (Rom. 5:6-11).

3. Reconciling us to God (Rom. 5:6-11).

4. He paid the penalty of our debt (Col. 2:13-14).

5. He secured peace (Eph. 2:15-16).

6. As He looked at what His humiliation accomplished the hostility of sinners against

Himself was considered as little by comparison.

B. That should make us aware of the value of what we have at His expense.

1. All such discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful, but when it

results in the peaceful fruit of righteousness . . . well, we can endure it.

2. This is the author’s point in the text in Heb. 12:1-2.

a. This whole section (Heb. 10:32-12:13) stresses our need for endurance.

b. See 10:36; 11:25, 26; 12:1, 2, 3, 7.

c. We are to look to Jesus as the model of endurance that we not grow weary and

loose heart (12:3). He despised the shame for the joy set before Him.

d. We need to despise the shame for the joy set before us.

e. The writer reminded them of the shame they had endured earlier and

admonished them not to shrink back. He said, “When you have done the will of

God, you will receive what was promised (10:36). Jesus Himself sat down at the

right hand of the throne of God (Heb. 12:2) and we have received an

unshakeable kingdom (Heb. 12:28). Therefore we live by faith (Heb. 10:39)

enduring whatever shame there is, entrusting our souls to Him who judges

righteously (1 Pet. 2:23) and preserves us alive (Heb. 10:39).

3. Therefore through Him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, in

thanks to His name! (Heb. 13:15). Let us lay aside every encumbrance and the sin

that so easily entangles us (Heb. 12:1). Let us do good and share (Heb. 13:16) and

offer to God acceptable service with reverence and awe (Heb. 12:28).

4. Brings new meaning to James’ statement: “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when

you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces

endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect

and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:2-4).

C. He considered it a joy to give himself to alienation, humiliation and shame to bring us

into relationship with Him.

Conclusion:

1. Will you accept the shame of the cross?

2. Will you follow Jesus?