

Jesus' Kingdom Movement

The Gospel of Matthew

Jesus Heals Us From Shame

Matthew 9:18 – 26

Introduction: What She Learned About Vulnerability

A few years ago, a student named Jean* entered her freshman year at Boston College. That's where I met her. My first impression upon meeting her was this: Jean is a hard core runner! She was serious about running the Boston marathon, a feat that I think you have to be half crazy to do. I later found out that she started competitive swimming in 9th grade. By the time she was a senior, she was doing the long distance event, the 500 yard freestyle, in 5 minutes and 30 seconds. For someone who just started swimming in high school, that is amazing. I swam competitively for 10 years, so I should know. But the athletic intensity was a way to numb the pain she felt. Jean's mom was physically abusive. She had almost no positive feelings towards her mom. Throughout her life, Jean developed a work hard, play hard attitude. So she did well in school and sports, and she also drank a lot of alcohol and partied. But when she came to BC for her freshman year, she saw the emptiness of it all, and gave her life to Jesus. As she grew spiritually, she had the chance to lead a small group. At first, she carried in the old attitude of a student and athlete, that she always had to be better than others. But that stressed her out, and she knew something was wrong with that. She felt a good deal of shame about her past and her struggles, and didn't open up. But the time came where she did share with one other young woman the pain and struggles she had. And lo and behold, the friend responded to Jean with thanks. Jean later shared with a small group what she had been through, and what she continues to wrestle with, and once again, people responded by being encouraged. Jean was surprised. She came to discover for herself the truth that Paul said, 'When I am weak, then he is strong.' Jesus was healing her sense of shame.

Relevance:

Shame: the definition I'm using is when we feel like hiding things about ourselves because we fear rejection. Shame is a social thing. We either feel like we don't want other people to know something about us, and quite possible we feel like we are defined by that secret thing. We feel defensive about something that we feel defines us in some way. It negatively affects us, so we struggle with that sin. We feel insecure. We feel imperfect. We feel like change is hard, and hard to talk about. We feel how someone else thinks about us is hard to talk about.

Why do we feel this way? I'm sure it's different for all of us, but there are probably common themes. For me, at some point in my youth, I came to expect all the authority figures in my life to keep a running tally of all the things I'd done wrong and make me feel even more ashamed by the sense of separation between me and them. My mom, for instance, was usually more critical than understanding. When I was young, she took me to the mall to run errands, and she would walk forever, it seemed. My feet would get sore, so I complained. Her response was invariably, "I walked so many miles in Japan to get to school, and then I got home and helped my parents in the field. How can you be so weak?" It was a decade later that I learned that I'm flat-footed, so my feet get tired without the right kind of shoe support after walking longer distances. I also learned after ten years of competitive swimming that I wasn't a complainer by personality. While I think it was valuable for my mom to teach me endurance, she could have displayed more understanding first, without criticizing me right off the bat.

Similar criticisms came from my dad. When I was about seven, my dad started to help me do math. A mathematics major himself, he would scowl at my mistakes, but said nothing about my good answers. He sometimes lectured me in strong tones. "You've got to learn faster. You've got to pay attention more. Why are you so slow?" I felt intimidated. When Dad, on his way to work, took me to school the next morning, he would drill me impatiently again. I felt like something was wrong with me if I didn't know things, even though I was at or near the top of my class in math. I grew up with a fear of my dad tinged with resentment and shame. I was naturally competitive to begin with, so had he been more patient with me and more encouraging, I might have been less afraid to fail, more easy-going about losing, more talkative and sportsmanlike in general, and more able to take risks in learning situations. If he had accepted my limitations as a child and said, "Son, let's look at this together," or, "Learning this is just a part of growing up," then I would have been less frightened of asking questions. I would have been less afraid of making mistakes, and I may not have felt like I myself was a mistake. But I grew up with a gut-level fear

that all teachers would be critical of me because his mentoring style played up my failures and magnified them to me.

As I've thought about this, I've also realized how the body language of shame made powerful and lasting images in my mind. What are the images that come to your mind when you think of feeling ashamed? The look of disdain or contempt, the folded arms, the shaking of the head, the pointing finger. Each of these gestures communicated something to us. The look of disdain or contempt communicated a sense of disbelief: "I can't believe you're such an ignorant child. You're so slow-learning. You're an irresponsible child. Your mistakes are almost unforgiveable. Don't you know what a burden you are to me?"

Shame complicates our relationship with Jesus and with others. And as much as I want to speak gently about shame and the things we feel ashamed about, I feel I must also say some challenging things, too. First, when we feel ashamed, we assume that other people will reject us if they know what we hide. So *we assume other people are fundamentally unkind*. Before they've had the chance to prove they are kind or unkind, we assume they are unkind. Is that fair to them? Second, we hide areas where we have grown or want to grow spiritually from others. *Jesus wants to show other people where he is at work in us, yet we are too embarrassed to talk about it*. So we lessen Jesus' reputation to maintain our own. Is that fair to Jesus?

Context:

Shame distorts our perception of Jesus and others. So we are going to look at two people in this story to see how Jesus draws two people together to deal with their shame internally and towards each other. We are still in this section of Matthew 8 – 9 where Jesus does ten miracles by his word. Just as God spoke ten words to bring Israel out of Egypt, so in Matthew 8:1 – 9:38, Jesus does ten miracles by his word to bring humanity out of sickness, demonic oppression, and death. Here is the structure of this section:

Text	Subject	Issue	Jesus' spoken word
8:1 – 4	Miracle 1	Uncleanness, leprosy	Jesus...touched him, <i>saying</i>
8:5 – 13	Miracle 2	Illness, suffering	Just <i>say the word</i>
8:14 – 17	Miracle 3	Fever, demons	He cast out the spirits <i>with a word</i>
8:18 – 22	Teaching 1	Jesus requires everything	
8:23 – 27	Miracle 4	Stormy sea	He... <i>rebuked</i> the winds and the sea
8:28 – 34	Miracle 5	Demons	He <i>said</i> to them, 'Go!'
9:1 – 8	Miracle 6	Paralysis	He <i>said</i> to the paralytic
9:9 – 17	Teaching 2	Jesus has come for sinners	
9:18 – 26	Miracles 7 & 8	Uncleanness, death	Jesus turning and seeing her <i>said</i> ... He <i>said</i> , 'Leave...'
9:27 – 31	Miracle 9	Blindness	He touched their eyes, <i>saying</i>
9:32 – 34	Miracle 10	Mute, demons	The mute man <i>spoke</i>
9:35 – 38	Teaching 3	More workers for the harvest!	

Let me read the text first, so we can watch the story unfold. It goes quickly. ^{9:18} While he was saying these things to them, a synagogue official came and bowed down before him, and said, 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' ¹⁹ Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did his disciples. ²⁰ And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak; ²¹ for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will get well.' ²² But Jesus turning and seeing her said, 'Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.' At once the woman was made well. ²³ When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, ²⁴ he said, 'Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.' And they began laughing at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been sent out, he entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ This news spread throughout all that land.

Out of this little story I see a few points to make about how Jesus rebukes our shame while he heals the underlying issues. First, because Jesus offers to heal us. Second, because Jesus makes his work in us public. Third, because Jesus brings people together. Fourth, because Jesus himself endures people's scorn.

Jesus Offers to Heal Us: v.18

Healing #7: The synagogue official's daughter



We start with character #1: the father whose daughter has just died. He is a synagogue official. How does he deal with shame? The father has to overcome public shame because of a few reasons. First, if something bad happened to you, or your young daughter, many Jews at that time assumed that you did something wrong, and God was punishing you. So the fact that his daughter just died wasn't just a painful thing, it was a shameful thing. Second, Jesus was a renegade rabbi. The Jewish leaders in the mainstream didn't endorse him. So for the father to be a synagogue official – a man of the establishment – and come to this rogue teacher, was shameful. That carried some embarrassment with it.

But in this case, he was desperate enough, and loved his daughter enough. 'My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.' When we feel shame, we are tempted to hide the best and most precious thing about us: our deepest needs. But this father brings himself and his family out into the open. It's as if Jesus, by being in that area and healing people, had been beckoning to him in his pain and in his loss. 'Don't give into the temptation to hide, the pressure of shame. Come to me.'

Illus: In the Harry Potter story, Severus Snape didn't want anyone to know that he had cherished an unrequited love for Lily Evans Potter, Harry's mother. Lily Evans had married James Potter, and Snape was furious about that. He betrayed the Potter family to Lord Voldemort, thinking that Voldemort would only kill young, one year old Harry, and perhaps James Potter as well, leaving Lily alive and alone. Voldemort wound up killing Lily as well, though. Snape grieved and thought it was a mark of weakness. Dumbledore tried to correct him. He said to Snape:

"You know how and why she died. Make sure it was not in vain. Help me protect Lily's son."

"He does not need protection. The Dark Lord has gone –"

"The Dark Lord will return, and Harry Potter will be in terrible danger when he does."

There was a long pause, and slowly Snape regained control of himself, mastered his own breathing. At last he said, "Very well. Very well. But never – never tell, Dumbledore! This must be between us! Swear it! I cannot bear...especially Potter's son...I want your word!"

"My word, Severus, that I shall never reveal the best of you?" Dumbledore sighed, looking down into Snape's ferocious, anguished face. "If you insist..." (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, p.)

Snape still felt ashamed of his love. Sometimes we're embarrassed when we bring forth our deepest needs, what is actually the best of you and me. We don't like Jesus for making us come out to him publicly. Every time I tell my own story, I say that my parents' divorce has something to do with my coming to Jesus. It took a long time for me to get over my embarrassment about my weakness: my lack of emotional stability, my selfish ways of trying to stabilize my own life, my lack of meaning, my lack of foundation for finding other people valuable. And yet, that is all part of my story, and part of reality. At some point, I felt the Lord saying to me, 'Why are you ashamed about this part of you? I think that it's a very good part of who you are. A wonderful part.' I've come to enjoy talking about all that because it helps other people understand what I felt and how Jesus met me. Self-sufficiency is the illusion. It's our needs that are the reality. Our need for Jesus is the best part of us.

So this father publicly comes to Jesus with his needs, just like the leper in 8:1 – 4, the centurion in 8:5 – 13, townspeople in 8:14 – 17, and everyone else. Jesus does his work in us publicly. And what a relief that Jesus agrees to come visit the home. But according to v.19, just as 'Jesus got up and began to follow him, and so did his disciples,' there is an interruption. Another person struggling with shame comes forward.

Jesus Does His Work Publicly: v.19 – 22

Healing #8 The hemorrhaging woman



Enter character #2. In v.20 – 22, 'And a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years, came up behind him and touched the fringe of his cloak;²¹ for she was saying to herself, 'If I only touch his garment, I will get well.'²² But Jesus turning and seeing her said, 'Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.' At once the woman was made well.

This woman is dealing with shame of a different sort. It comes from her own body, a hemorrhage she's had for 12 years, which is a chronic, abnormal condition, possibly a fibroid tumor of the uterus? It was at least embarrassing. She might have suffered physically, but we're not sure. Chronic loss of blood might have meant anemia and physical weakness for her. But the biggest cost was social. How is she regarded by other people? As unclean, untouchable, outcast. How come she can approach Jesus in a crowd? Because, as a Middle Eastern woman, she's cloaked and veiled. No one can recognize her. Otherwise people would not let her through. How does she feel in approaching Jesus? Timid, afraid, nervous, self-conscious, but also hopeful. Why does she touch the fringe of

Jesus' cloak? Why? The fringe or hem symbolizes the authority of that person. That's why David cut off the fringe of Saul's garment in the cave, initially to show his authority over Saul (1 Sam.24:4), but immediately felt bad that he had violated the king's authority (1 Sam.24:5 – 15). So what is the woman doing? Trusting in Jesus' authority, trusting that Jesus has the power to heal.

Jesus heals her *publicly*. That's not what she expected. She came quietly, and secretly. But Jesus does his work publicly, even when the problem is deep within us. Can you imagine how she felt when Jesus stops and speaks to her in the big crowd? She just wanted to get in and out of there. But Jesus stop, turns to her and says, 'Daughter, take courage; your faith has made you well.' People around her would have asked, 'Hey, what were you just healed of? Who are you? Ohhhhh...you're *that* woman! Underneath that cloak and veil, you're the woman who has lived on the outskirts of our town for the last twelve years! Yeah, you had that thing with your body, uh, down there...'

When we are ashamed, we try to hide the work of Jesus in us. But Jesus doesn't let us. I'm not saying that he has us share with everyone at every time, even those who aren't ready. Indeed, in Mt.7:6, when Jesus speaks of not throwing pearls before swine, he tells us to use discernment. But when the time comes and the situation is right, Jesus will have us share publicly. *His healing of our sin is inevitably public, just as his healing of our bodies is inevitably public.* And he will bring us to the place where we care about him getting the glory through our weakness, more than caring how people perceive our weakness. Even in the ways we are still 'works in progress', and are still wanting Jesus' healing and transformation in us, there will be times where the Holy Spirit will say, 'Now is the time to publicly touch his garment, his authority. Take courage.'

Jesus is Bringing People Together: v.19 – 22

The third step that Jesus takes to dismantle shame is the fact that he is bringing people together. This is where the two stories in this passage weave together. The word 'daughter' ties the two stories together. The father says, 'My daughter has just died' in 9:19. But on the way to his house, Jesus calls the bleeding woman 'daughter' in 9:22.

Synagogue official: The 'Insider'

- 9:19 'My **daughter** has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live.'



Bleeding woman: The 'Outsider'

- 9:22 But Jesus turning and seeing her said, '**Daughter**, take courage; your faith has made you well.' At once the woman was made well.



The insider-outsider dynamic is also tying the two stories together. It is the synagogue official's daughter who died. They are the insiders, socially and religiously. They are respectable and so on. But Jesus calls the hemorrhaging woman 'daughter.' She is the outsider, the outcast, the unclean one. Hence, the bleeding woman is the 'inside

story' of the synagogue official's family. We are invited to interpret the outside story by the inside story. The insider is on the outside, and the outsider is on the inside.

The Structure of the Story

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²³ When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, ²⁴ he said, 'Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.' And they began laughing at him. ²⁵ But when the crowd had been sent out, he entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up. ²⁶ This news spread throughout all that land.

This has got to hit the synagogue official hard. Jesus is inviting him to think of the hemorrhaging woman as his own 'daughter.' After all, this woman is unclean for bleeding just like his daughter is unclean for being dead. Yet he didn't rush to Jesus on the woman's behalf even though he did for his own daughter. It's even possible that the synagogue official is the one who told the hemorrhaging woman to leave the community. We don't know that for sure, but synagogue officials would have known who is in and who is out of the local community. How does the synagogue official feel about the woman, especially while his daughter is on his mind? He was probably annoyed. How does he view the hemorrhaging woman's interruption? As interfering. But Jesus is bringing these two people together.

Jesus means for us to see our own stories reflected in another person's story. When you choose not to share because people have already rejected you, and you perceive that they won't receive what you're saying, you are using godly discernment, and that's probably fine. Or if you're with people of the opposite gender and you hesitate from sharing details about your sexual struggles because of the impact it may have on them, that's probably fine. But when we feel *ashamed* to share about ourselves with others, because we're just defensive and protective of our own story, we are making assumptions about them: assumptions that they are hostile and unfriendly. Those assumptions are *uncharitable*, and, I would argue, *sinful*. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13:7 that love trusts, or entrusts one's self to others. So shame in that sense is actually sinful because it assumes things about other people that may not be true.

In fact, shame is primarily a feeling we have when we find our sense of identity in what other people think about us. And since Jesus calls us to find our identity in him alone, shame is always something he rebukes as he heals the underlying issues we have. Shame is a barometer to us of our own idolatry.

Jesus Endures People's Scorn: v.23 – 26

The fourth victory Jesus scores against shame is the fact that he is the one to endure people's scorn. Check out v.23 – 24. ²³ When Jesus came into the official's house, and saw the flute-players and the crowd in noisy disorder, ²⁴ he said, 'Leave; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.' And they began laughing at him.

In this case, Jesus alone knows what life and death truly are. To Jesus, physical death is only a form of sleep, and that's what he calls it. True death, spiritual death, is something else entirely. But this physical death Jesus can undo. So in v.25,²⁵ But when the crowd had been sent out, he entered and took her by the hand, and the girl got up.²⁶ This news spread throughout all that land.

Sometimes it is embarrassing to believe that Jesus can heal because it seems primitive in an age of sophistication. It's strange to say that Jesus does have power to heal. And there are times when he moves us to take a risk. Now in this case, Jesus shoulders the mockery of others by saying that the girl has not died but is asleep. This draws the mockery of people. 'What are you talking about?' 'Where have you been? Don't you know the girl is dead?' In many ways, Jesus spares the father here. Instead of having the father say this to all the people – some of whom were professional mourners who were paid to be there – Jesus does it. And there is a sense in which Jesus has faith for the father, too. It is Jesus' faithfulness that is at work here. So Jesus is the one who endures the shame of being faithful.

What happens here is a microcosm of Jesus whole life. It's appropriate at Christmas to recognize that Jesus enters into our shame and overcomes it. At his birth, he took on the shame of entering into corrupted human nature and being born as a helpless human baby. He was already a public spectacle as shepherds and magi looked at him while he nursed at Mary's breast and pooped uncontrollably. Throughout his life, he took on the shame of having to grow into human maturity, all the while being different than everyone else. In his ministry, he bore the shame of associating with everyone who was outcast and unclean. At his death, he took on the shame of being publicly being identified as a criminal. He was mocked and accused of misleading the people and then physically stripped naked and lifted up for all the world to see. In Jewish symbolism of being hung on a tree (Dt.21:22 – 23), he bore the shame of the curse upon himself. There is no shame we could endure that goes beyond what Jesus endured. And when we are scorned, it's only our small participation in Jesus of what he did for us. Now the girl's father gets to participate in what Jesus is doing, even though Jesus bore the brunt of the scorn.

The lesson here is that people's scorn is ultimately directed at Jesus, not us. We may feel like it's directed at us, but the reality is that it is not. They are scorning Jesus. And he, in his faithfulness, actually takes it.

The Trouble With Shame

Jesus' Action

- Jesus offers to heal us
- Jesus does his work publicly
- Jesus is bringing people together
- Jesus endures people's scorn

When We Are Ashamed

- We imply Jesus does not really heal people
- We make our own reputation more important than Jesus' glory
- We assume other people are only hostile
- We don't allow Jesus to take the scorn and embarrassment

Here's a summary of how Jesus rebukes shame and heals the underlying issues in us. First, Jesus offers to heal us. But when we are ashamed, we are saying that he does not actually heal us. Second, Jesus does his healing work publicly. But when we are ashamed, we are saying that our own reputations are more important than Jesus' glory. Third, Jesus is bringing people together. But when we are ashamed, we divide people. We assume that other people are hostile and will only scorn us. Fourth, even if other people do scorn us, Jesus endures people's scorn. But if we are ashamed, we don't allow Jesus to take the scorn and embarrassment. We think it's just directed at us, and we become afraid.

All in all, Jesus' invitation to us is to be vulnerable. How and when those opportunities come up, I don't know. But I do know that Jesus' healing of us is meant to be known by others. So don't be ashamed. Know your identity in Jesus. Be set free from shame.