

## **SERMON: Sunday – 12 December 2021 – Rev Alistair Cowper**

### **I will change their shame into praise**

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Philippians 4:4-7

“Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice”.

It's not always easy to be always rejoicing is it?

Paul, who wrote these words from prison awaiting probable execution, has discovered the pearl of great price, the wisdom beyond wisdom, the peace that surpasses understanding, the joy that is like a spring overflowing from within, despite the circumstances he was facing.

But I want to think of one of the reasons for people to not feel joy as being because of shame.

Shame must be a robber of joy because God tells us in today's Hebrew Bible reading that the Lord is the One who turns shame into praise.

So what do we mean by shame and how can we let God deal with it?

According to one definition, shame is an unpleasant self-conscious emotion typically associated with a negative evaluation of the self (Wikipedia).

Now sometimes that negative evaluation comes about as a result of feeling bad about something we have done that was wrong. And in the case we might rightly feel ashamed of our behaviour. In such a case it's up to us to try to do something to correct that - we might need to apologise and be forgiven for it. This is sometimes referred to as guilt because it's shame as a result of what one has done.

But sometimes shame comes about as a result of something someone else has done or said to us. That kind of shame can be hard to deal with.

Examples of shaming - Yorkshire CC and the idea of how some people were made to feel less than enough because of their ethnicity and skin colour. It seems incredible that such racism still exists but clearly it does.

Some of you might have been watching the TV series on at the moment called 'Impeachment' about the Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky affair. Its scandalous to watch the abuse of power and see how Monica was made to feel such shame and have the blame heaped on her. Yes she made a mistake but who's sin was the greater?

Brene Brown has studied shame and she says that.

Shame is a focus on self, guilt is a focus on behaviour. Shame is "I am bad." Guilt is "I did something bad." Guilt says I'm sorry. I made a mistake. Shame says, I'm sorry. I am a mistake.

(I thought it was just me: Making the Journey from "What Will People Think?" to "I Am Enough", 2007)

The people of Israel had both guilt and shame.

She had her oppressors. And she had oppressed others.

In Zephaniah 3 verse 19 Yahweh, the LORD, says I will deal with all your oppressors.

Verse 15, The Lord has taken away the judgments against you.

In the prophets words, the Lord promises to deal with shame, to change it into praise.

I like to remember Adam and Eve in Genesis 2 before the fall where it says they “were both naked, and they felt no shame” (meaning they had no shame).

(Genesis 2:25).

So there is God’s intention for humanity. To live without shame and to live in praiseworthy fellowship with God and with one another.

The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

So if we’re feeling ashamed about anything, whether it is something we have done and can fix or whether it’s something that has been done or said to us or about us, let’s take God at his word, to not worry about it, to pray about it, honestly, even if that means shouting and lamenting, crying and longing, and let’s look for the signs of praise breaking through where once shame was in control.

The Lord says, I will change (your) shame into praise.

May it be so, this day and forever.

Amen.