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The Grace of Guilt Genesis 42

In 1970 Katherine Ann Power was a student at Brandeis University in Boston, on a full-ride academic scholarship. She was a leader in the radical anti-Vietnam war, anti-government group, the National Student Strike Force. She and several other students planned to raise money to buy weapons for the Black Panthers by robbing a bank. Katherine drove the getaway car. The robbery went bad and a policeman Walter Schroeder was shot and killed. That night began 23 years of running from the law and listed on the FBI's most wanted. By the late 1970's the pursuit had cooled and she moved to Lebanon, Oregon settled down in the Willamette Valley, under the assumed name of Alice Metzinger. She started a family married a local butcher and started a restaurant business. She was an active part of her community and had every reason to be at peace. But she wasn't. At age 44 she was desperately tired, depressed and tormented by guilt of what had happened 23 years earlier. Finally, in September of 1993 she turned herself in, explaining, "I am now learning to live with openness and truth, rather than shame and hiddenness."

Guilt will not go away with time. Guilt cannot be escaped by running and hiding or wearing a mask, or pretending it never happened. Guilt has a way of coming to the surface even if it takes 20 years or more to work its way up...it will eventually come up. If one has unresolved guilt inside, God will convict your conscience and not let you rest until it is dealt with. Freedom only comes by facing the truth, with people and with God. Guilt of course is just the symptom. We want the guilt to go away, we want the pain and bad feelings to go away...but it never will until the root offense has properly been dealt with. The source of that

freedom comes only from God. Guilt is a symptom that exposes our sin, exposes our problems and motivates us to turn to God. So in a very real sense, guilt is our friend, guilt is a good thing. Guilt is a grace of God. Guilt is telling us something is wrong and needs to be fixed. Guilt is screaming at us to do something to make it right. Guilt is given to us by the grace of God.

I am not talking about “false guilt” where one blames themselves for something that happened totally outside of their sinful actions. This includes self blaming for bad choices made by another person, or perhaps someone you were wanting to rescue but were unable to, or perhaps some tragedy of life crushed in that simply happened. You might say to yourself “If only I had called 30 minutes earlier. If only I hadn’t taken that job. If only I had gone over there the day before.” That is usually false guilt. I am talking this morning about the guilt we feel when we know we have sinned and messed up and the weight of that is heavy on our shoulders.

For some of us after years and years of hoping that time and hiding with take away the guilt, perhaps some of us have dulled our conscience and have seared our guilt. We are still taking on damage, problems won’t go away in our lives, we simply don’t feel it anymore. We can see the damage we have done to our lives, but we don’t feel the guilt of our own personal responsibility for what we have done.

Its much like what happens to those who have Hanson’s disease or leprosy. Some had believed inaccurately that the Hanson’s disease bacteria is what causes the flesh to rot away. But it was discovered that what the bacteria causes, is insensitivity to pain in the limbs. If you are infected with Hanson’s disease and hit your finger with a hammer you don’t jump and scream ouch!, because you feel no pain. There are no pain warnings shouted out to the body, so there is no immediate response by the body to the pain. The brain sends no healing resource to

fix the problem, the body does nothing to attempt to heal itself, and the flesh rots away.

Perhaps this morning there are some of us here who have been trying desperately to dull the pain of guilt, with busyness, alcohol, pleasure, drugs, thinking that guilt is the problem. Perhaps you have spent years thinking time will heal your guilt. Perhaps you have been hiding for 20 years hoping it will go away. It will not. Sooner or later God will bring you to a place where you will have to face it. Sooner or later the guilt will become so great that you must turn yourself into God, surrender, in order to discover peace and freedom for the very first time in your life.

Joseph's brothers didn't know it but they were about to be confronted with their guilt. They had stuffed it away hoping after 20 years the pain would go away. It would not. They had been hiding their lies and sin from their father Jacob, but it would not fade. Confrontation of guilt looks on the surface like a bad thing. No one likes being exposed. But really guilt is a grace of God, for it gives a chance for real freedom and release...life. This morning we will be looking at how we can embrace the grace of guilt and walk in obedience to God along that path. What might be the steps that God walks us through in this path toward healing and forgiveness? Where might you be on that path?

Turn in your Bibles to the first book in the Bible, Genesis chapter 42. As I read watch how God begins to revive the dull consciences of Joseph's brothers. Let me pick up from 41:57 READ v.1-17.

There was a famine in the whole world. Through the word of mouth it came to be quickly known that Egypt was the only place that had food and plenty of it. V.1 we see Jacob talking with his sons who are now middle-aged men. He asks them, "Why are you staring at one another?" Several options; 1. Could be the boys were standing looking at each other because they were so hungry they couldn't think straight. 2. Could simply be a metaphor Jacob used to say, "get going boys and start

packing for Egypt we have no other options.” 3. Could be the sons didn’t want to make the long 250-300 miles long dangerous journey to Egypt on an empty stomach. 4. It could be they were staring at each other because they all remembered Egypt was where Joseph was headed toward after they sold him as a slave. The mention of them heading to Egypt reminded them of their guilt. God will do that. God will bring painful circumstances back into our lives to remind, and revive our guilt that has been dulled.

Confrontation:

The first step on the path to reviving our guilt is confrontation. The boys were soon going to be face to face with what they have been trying to hide from for 20 years. So the boys, at least 10 of them head down to Egypt. V.4 says that Jacob kept Benjamin home because he feared harm would come to the boy. Trust is difficult to regain and rebuild once it is lost. V.6 the brothers arrive in Egypt. Amazingly Joseph was the one in charge of evaluating foreign requests for grain. Imagine his surprise when in walks 10 of his brothers. They didn’t know it was Joseph. He was clean-shaven and had the Egyptian headdress and clothes and spoke fluent Egyptian using an interpreter. Joseph had changed quite a bit since they had last seen him. He had been only a 17-year-old boy and now 20 plus years later was almost 40. They bowed their faces to the ground before Joseph. V.9 describes how that sparked a memory of his dreams as a kid where God revealed to him one day his brothers would bow before him.

Now at this point Joseph could have revealed his identity. He could have rushed down and said, “Brothers, It is I, Joseph. How is father? How is the family? Show me pictures of all your kids.” But he doesn’t because he needs to test them. He needs to know if they have changed. He needs to know if Benjamin really is being treated well or being abused as the favored son just like he was. He needed to know their attitude

toward God. They need to be confronted and Joseph needed to know who he was dealing with.

So, Joseph falsely accuses them of spying on Egypt to expose their weaknesses, just like the brothers had many years earlier falsely accused Joseph of spying on them to expose their weaknesses. Joseph throws them in prison for 3 days just like they had thrown him into a pit and just like he had spent time in an Egyptian prison. The brothers came to plead for food. Joseph had come to them bringing food and pled for mercy in the pit.

V.10 Joseph accuses and the brothers defend; We are not spies. What spies would travel in a group of 10, being all brothers. We are honest men and your servants. That was what Joseph wanted to test. Had they changed? Were they now honest men? Were they now ready to serve? V.12 Joseph says “I don’t believe you” and learns more about his family.

V.15 “you will be tested” And indeed they were being tested. All of you will stay here in prison and one will go back and get younger brother Benjamin. Joseph wants to know. Will they turn against each other? Will they betray each other to save their own necks. Joseph is giving his brothers a taste of what it was like to be tested. After the brothers spent some three days in prison, Joseph has had time to think. He decides instead to keep only one of the brothers as a hostage and send back the other nine. The first option was too harsh and might be more than his fathers heart could handle. Plus they would need all the men to carry back enough grain for their families and Jacob may not believe the report from only one brother. So, we pick up the story again in v.18 READ (18-24)

Realization:

The first phase of restoring our guilt is confrontation. Face to face the brothers and Joseph. They didn't know it yet, but the testing had begun for them. Next comes the realization stage. In v.18 Joseph starts pressing them to see this whole confrontation has been designed by God. It probably rocks them on their heels when he reveals to them, "...for I fear God, Elohim". I fear the God of Abraham. This must have hit with a realization that God is moving to deal with their sin, because in v.21 we see them standing around looking at each other, much like v.1 where they are standing around staring at each other. I believe the guilt was bubbling to the surface longing for them to deal with the real problem underneath. "truly we are guilty concerning our brother, we would not listen therefore this distress has come upon us." They are seeing perhaps for the first time their own guilt. They are sensing God's hand in this whole matter. They are seeing a direct connection between their sin and their present difficulty. That is a KEY step to reviving our guilt. When we begin to see a connection between our sin and God and difficult circumstances...that realization lets us know we are on the right path to forgiveness and freedom. The brothers are seeing for the first time, this must have been what Joseph felt like when he was pleading with us for his life. This is the realization phase. The weight of guilt is heavy upon them, but that guilt is not a bad thing. Guilt is a measure of God's grace. For without guilt there can be no eyes opened to sin. Without realization of eyes opened to sin there can be no forgiveness, no repentance, no healing. If you are feeling the weight of God right now, don't get angry at the guilt. Don't bother trying to hide from it or anesthetize it. Guilt is your friend. Guilt is like the pain you feel when you put your hand too close to the fire. Guilt is the red warning buzzer saying, "get out of here, you are too close to the fire, you've burned your hand go get some healing." Are you feeling guilt right now? If you are, that softening is a good thing, a painful shameful thing, but a good thing. The first obedient response is to say, "I did this sin against God"

Vertical shift

Next you must shift your focus from a horizontal focus that sees life only on a horizontal plane, only you and me and the circumstances of life. A horizontal focus will view problems strictly from a human point of view leaving God out of the picture. We tend to forget God and brush Him off to the edges of our lives until we get ourselves into an impossible situation. Only then do we remember the vertical. If we are going to revive our guilt that leads us to God and His forgiveness and freedom we must begin to see life with a vertical focus. That means God must be the thick of our decisions, choices, actions, our affections, our priorities. Isaiah 26:3 “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is focused on Thee because he trusts in Thee.” When we experience a vertical shift, we begin to sense that there is a holy God at work behind the circumstances of life to bring us from where we are now, to where we ought to be. When we experience a vertical shift, we begin to have a Godly fear. The brothers finally were beginning to sense that their sins were against God. That renewed sense of Godly fear is a grace, because it means we now know who is worthy to be feared, who really is calling the shots of our life, Who really does have all power and wisdom. Godly fear is a great grace because it means we know Who it is we must turn to for the guilt to subside.

Former slave trader ship captain John Newton was wracked with guilt. He feared no human, tough, calloused, hard and uncaring. Yet he came and surrendered his life to Christ seeing that God alone could deal with his guilt, he wrote the song “Amazing Grace”, and captured this truth in the line, “twas’ grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved”. John Newton “embraced the vertical shift needed to relieve all guilt and fear.

In v.21 this vertical shift is happening. They sensed that God was dealing with them because of their sins. They see a direct connection between their sin and their present difficulty. They sense God's hand in all this. The brothers were heavy with guilt right now, but that is a good thing for without guilt, there could be no forgiveness and no restoration. Joseph senses their guilt and are beginning to get back on the right track, he sees their softening heart and longs to reveal his identity and embrace them. He leaves the room filled with emotion, but returns because, he knows more tests must come. V. 24 he has Simeon bound up right before their eyes. Probably tied up in the very same way that they had tied up Joseph. Joseph looks for more signs of affection, compassion toward their tied up brother, sorrow? Simeon was the most violent of the brothers. Would the others abandon their brother as they had done to Joseph for money and saving their own necks? Tests. Tests will come to see if we will stay the course and keep our vertical focus on Him even when its hard.

v.25 Joseph sends the other brothers home with additional provisions and unknown to them, included the money they paid for in their sacks of grain. This money was discovered and v.28 it says they were dismayed, literally their hearts trembled like an earthquake. "What is this that God has done to us?" They are thinking vertical. They are seeing God's hand behind the circumstances. They know the only place to turn to have their fear and guilt subside is in God.

Have you been experiencing guilt and wanting it to just go away? Have you been hoping time alone will heal your guilty heart? Have you been trying to anesthetize your guilt with busyness, alcohol, drugs, work, hobbies, pleasure only to discover it doesn't go away? Perhaps you have so dulled your guilt you are able to sin and damage your life without remorse. Perhaps God wants to begin healing in your life. You're now feeling guilt and want it to go away again. And this morning you discovered that guilt is actually a gift from God. He wants you to begin

dealing with a root problem. Your sin. Guilt and sorrow over our sin and Godly fear are all blessings from God, they are gifts that lead us to the path of freedom and forgiveness.

The good news is that God did something about this root problem. He knew that all of us would sin and fall short. He knew the damage and hurt our sin would cause us and others. He knew our sin would separate from a great relationship with Him. So God did something about it. God sent His son Jesus, to our world. He sent Him here to tell us the good news that God loves us and is going to do something to solve our root problem of sin and the separation it causes. He sent His son Jesus to pay for our sin, to die on the cross so that we might have life and forgiveness and freedom. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in me shall not perish but have everlasting life." Today you can begin a walk of freedom and forgiveness. You don't have to have such guilt heavy on your shoulders. Jesus came to take away our sin and guilt and shame. If you are a believer I John 1:9 says, "if we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." If you have not yet said "yes" to following God, this morning would be a perfect time for you to begin your walk, your hike with God. Admit you're a sinner. Admit that you have been less than perfect and need Jesus. Affirm that Jesus did come to this earth and die to pay for our sins. Enjoy the fact that just as Jesus did not stay dead in the tomb, but God raised Him from the dead, so too we can be made alive. We will experience a new life in Christ. "If anyone be in Christ He is a new creation, old things have past behold new things come." Say "yes" to following Jesus this morning.