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The Crucifixion of Jesus Christ: From Extreme Shame to Victorious Honor

by Marlene Yap

Introduction

I was blessed to be able to attend Sunday School at a young age. My Chinese father was a Buddhist and my mother, of Chinese, Spanish and Filipino descent, was a Roman Catholic. Although they were non-Christians then, they allowed me, together with my four siblings, to go to an evangelical Christian church. I am grateful for the Western missionaries who founded and pastored my church. They faithfully taught us the Word of God, and enhanced our skills in studying the Scriptures. However, I could have gained a deeper understanding and appreciation of Scripture if I had seen it from the standpoint of my own worldview, which is quite similar to the worldview of the Mediterranean culture in the first century.

The first-century Mediterranean society is mainly characterized by an honor-shame system. Likewise, the people in the New Testament, as well as its authors and readers, were shame-based in their worldview. The concept of honor and shame is a key to understanding the social and cultural aspects of the Mediterranean world.

According to Moxnes, honor is basically the public recognition of one's social standing.¹ Darin Land described it as "esteem in the eyes of others."² Honor is commonly classified into two types: ascribed honor and acquired honor.³ However, Zeba Crook suggests a more refined nomenclature for these two types of honor, namely, attributed honor and

¹Halvor Moxnes, "Honor and Shame," In *The Social Sciences and New Testament Interpretation*, edited by Richard Rohrbaugh (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), 20.

²Darin Land, "Honor Then and Now." (Class lecture, Asia Graduate School of Theology, Manila, May 18, 2016).

³Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh. *Social-Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 76; Moxnes, 20.

distributed honor, respectively.⁴ Attributed honor is inherited from the family at birth, depending on one's gender, family name, ethnicity, and rank. Distributed honor is conferred on the basis of virtuous deeds. It is also obtained through social advancement, through public accomplishments, when a benefaction is conferred, or through any kind of public challenge and riposte. Social interaction, religious life, and group loyalties are affected by values of honor and shame. The identities of individuals are influenced by their belonging to, and acceptance by, their family. Their success is thought to rest on the favorable ties they have with the community.⁵

Shame can be viewed either positively or negatively. To "have shame" is seen positively, connoting a concern for one's honor. To "be shamed" connotes a decrease in honor. It can refer to social insensitivity and results from the lack of concern for one's honor.⁶

The events leading to the crucifixion, the crucifixion itself, and the events afterward, all involved interplays of honor and shame. The significance of death by crucifixion, the characters and dialogues within the crucifixion passage and the supernatural phenomena that surrounded Christ's death, all contribute to understanding Christ's purpose for humankind. Viewed through the honor-shame lens, we can better appreciate the significance of how Jesus Christ, and his work on the cross, have reversed the cultural stigma of shame to become victorious honor. His death reveals his identity as the Son of God. On a broader spectrum, his work on the cross has radically shifted the honor-shame perspective on religious and social institutions (including kinship, gender, race, and social structures). On an individual level, his saving grace has granted not only a removal of guilt, but also a removal of shame and a reinstatement of honor.

I will thus attempt to make a condensed interpretation of the events surrounding the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ, using the social science critical approach of viewing Scripture through the honor-shame lens. This research will be limited to the crucifixion and death passage in Mark 15:21-41. First, the significance of the events right before the crucifixion will be discussed (15:21). I will then give a brief background of death by crucifixion. Following that will be a discussion of the crucifixion of Jesus (15:22-32). Finally, I will address the supernatural phenomena surrounding the death of Jesus (15:33-41).

⁴Zeba Crook, "Honor, Shame, and Social Status Revisited," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 3 (2009): 610.

⁵Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, 76.

⁶Joseph Plevnik, *Honor/Shame, Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, edited by John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina (Peabody, Mass.: Henrickson Publishers, 1993). 96.

Events Before the Crucifixion (Mark 15:21)

After the wrongful trial, the sentence of death and the scourging and mocking by the soldiers, Jesus was led out from the palace to be crucified (15:1-20). The victim of crucifixion was supposed to carry his own cross.⁷ However, maybe due to Jesus' weakness and exhaustion, the soldiers forced Simon of Cyrene to carry it for him.

This brings us to question the whereabouts of the disciples, who should have been the ones to help Jesus at this time. The reason for their abandonment of Jesus is usually associated with the fear of being arrested, due to their connection with the convicted criminal. I contend that it was more due to shame than fear. One can look back and ask why they left their professions to follow Jesus in the first place. Were they expecting something? According to Malina, the social interaction in the first-century Mediterranean society functioned through a principle of reciprocity referred to as the "dyadic contract." This contract informally binds persons of equal status such as "colleague contracts," or persons of different status such as the "patron-client contracts."⁸ The "patron-client contract," also referred to as the patronage system, involves two parties of unequal honor status, in terms of possessions, power, and influence.⁹ The client would rely on the patron's resources, and reciprocate by giving loyalty and honor to the patron. These disciples were the clients who left their professions to follow Christ. Although he was not wealthy, nor even had a place to lay his head, the disciples would likely have seen Jesus as having both earthly, and spiritual, power and influence.

In line with the patron-client concept, it could be that the disciples were expecting some increase in honor, or a gain of power, in exchange for their loyalty to Jesus. This was evident in the request of James and John to sit at Jesus' right and left side in the kingdom of God (Mark 10:37).¹⁰ This can also explain the reason Peter rebuked Jesus for predicting his own death. Peter expected Jesus, as the Messiah, to

⁷Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*. Word Biblical Commentary, eds. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker, vol. 34B (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 499.

⁸Malina, 100; The Filipino value system includes a certain form of dyadic contract referred to as "utang na loob," literally debt from the inside" or "debt of gratitude." This is established when one party receives assistance and is then morally and socially obligated to reciprocate in the future (Felipe L. Jocano, *Filipino Value system: A Cultural Definition* (Metro Manila, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 1997), 80-2).

⁹*Ibid.*, 100-1.

¹⁰A parallel passage in Matthew 20:21 depicts the mother of James and John as the one doing the similar request. In line with the honor and shame concept, the honor bestowed on the sons also brings honor to the whole family.

overthrow the Roman Empire and establish his rule over Israel. However, Jesus was arrested instead. All of this led to the disciples' disappointment, resulting in shame. There was also a suggestion that it was due to shame that the young man, possibly Mark, would rather run away naked than be identified with Jesus (Mark 14:52).¹¹ Likewise, Peter's betrayal, aside from avoiding trouble for himself, was a result of shame in being identified with Jesus.

So, with the absence of any disciples, Simon of Cyrene was chosen by the Roman guards to assist Jesus. Simon was a passerby, and most probably did not know Jesus personally. The need for force may have been due to his reluctance, or refusal, to do it. In my culture, it is shameful to be associated with a condemned criminal, much less to do something for him. So, it could also be shameful for Simon of Cyrene to be identified with Jesus, who was condemned to die, which was why he had to be compelled to carry the cross.

Simon was probably a Hellenistic Jew who resided in Jerusalem, or who came for the feast. He probably later became a Christian, which accounted for his sons' names, Alexander and Rufus, to be mentioned.¹² Most scholars have pointed out that these two sons must have been known to the original readers of Mark. They were prominent leaders at the time of Mark's writing, and the mention of the sons' names signified the authenticity of the event.¹³ However, I would take it as an act of honoring both father and sons. In my culture, a mention of one's family connection with someone famous is always honorable. So, this could be the case here.

Death by Crucifixion

Since we do not practice crucifixion now, we need to go back in history to see how crucifixion was viewed in order to better understand its implications. The shameful implication of the cross may be alluded to in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 21:23 states that, "if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.

¹¹Malina, 100-1.

¹²Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave*, vol. 2. The Anchor Bible Reference Library: A Commentary of the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 913.

¹³Frank J. Matera, *Passion Narratives and Gospel Theologies: Interpreting the Synoptics Through Their Passion Stories*. Theological Inquiries: Studies in Contemporary Biblical and Theological Problems, ed. Lawrence Boadt. (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1986), 41.

You shall not defile your land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance.” Although the word “tree” was used in Deuteronomy, and its allusion to the cross was not the original meaning of the text, the New Testament writers consciously interpreted it to pertain to the cross (Gal. 3:13).¹⁴ Moreover, recent findings in the Qumran scrolls have some evidence connecting the expression, “hang upon a tree” to crucifixion.¹⁵

The cross was evidently regarded as shameful in the New Testament. Hebrews 12:2 exhorts us to “look to Jesus, . . . who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

Some of the ancient historians and statesmen also wrote about crucifixion. The Roman statesman Cicero described it as “the most cruel and disgusting penalty,” (Verrem 2:5.165) and the “most extreme penalty” (Verrem 2:5.168).¹⁶ The Jewish historian, Josephus, called it “the most wretched of deaths” (Jewish Wars 7:203). Seneca, another Roman statesman, wrote, “Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly wounds on shoulders and chest, and drawing the breath of life amid long drawn-out agony? He would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross” (Dialogue 3:2.2).

In the contemporary world, methods of capital punishment such as hanging, firing squad, electric chair, and lethal injection all pale in comparison to crucifixion. Some modern societies have even abolished capital punishment, because they say it violates human rights. Some have denounced public execution and advocated for more privacy in capital punishment.¹⁷ People have developed new drugs for lethal injection, to lessen the pain.¹⁸ Crucifixion in the first century, however, had the full-blown package of extreme pain, suffering, and disgrace. Malina and Rohrbaugh described the extreme negative shame of the crucifixion of Christ: “Jesus is nailed naked to a cross to be seen by one and all, the ultimate in public degradation and humiliation.”¹⁹

¹⁴Ibid., 3.

¹⁵Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “Crucifixion in Ancient Palestine, Qumran Literature, and the New Testament,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978): 511.

¹⁶Andrew Ruth, “A Bit More History Regarding Crucifixion,” <http://www.oaklandpresbyterianchurch.org/a-bit-more-history-regarding-crucifixion> (accessed June 9, 2016).

¹⁷Pro-Con.org, “Historical Timeline: History of the Death Penalty,” <http://deathpenalty.procon.org/view.timeline.php?timelineID=000025> (accessed June 14, 2016).

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Malina and Rohrbaugh, 276.

Crucifixion Event (Mark 15:22-32)

Malina referred to another honor-shame concept in the first-century Mediterranean society, called “status degradation rituals,” which describes what went on with the crucifixion of Jesus. Anthropologists use the term, “status degradation rituals,” in referring to “a process of publicly recasting, relabeling, humiliating, and thus re-categorizing a person as a social deviant. Such rituals express the moral indignation of the denouncers and often mock or denounce a person’s former identity in such a way as to destroy it totally.”²⁰ Jesus was honored as the “Son of God” in Mark 1:1. His enemies planned to destroy him by undermining, and devaluing, his standing among the people. They went through specific steps to humiliate him, denounce his public identity and credibility, ultimately leading to his death by crucifixion.²¹

Golgotha, which means “place of a skull,” was located outside the walled city of Jerusalem. The crucifixion took place outside the city, which heightened the shame of Jesus’ death, since it separated him from the people of Israel.²² This was near some widely travelled roads so that the execution could be easily seen, and serve as a warning to those who might break Roman law.²³

Wine mixed with myrrh was offered to him, but he did not take it (Mark 15:23). It is uncertain if the drink served as an act of mercy, or as a mockery.²⁴ Brown regards this act as being done in the context of mockery, although the action itself may not be a mockery.²⁵ If it was an act of kindness, it is ironic that the ones who offered the wine were the Roman soldiers.²⁶ His refusal to take it may be due to his commitment to drink the full cup of suffering.²⁷ His undertaking to accept the full extent of suffering led to the revelation of his true identity, as will be seen later.

The soldiers divided his garments and cast lots for them (Mark 15:24). This may confirm that Jesus was stripped naked in the view of all, which was the usual practice at that time.²⁸ The act of dividing the garments and casting lots for them can also be seen as furthering the shame and humiliation.

²⁰Ibid., 272-3.

²¹Ibid.

²²Matera, 41.

²³Robert H. Stein, *Mark*. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2008), 710.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Brown, 940.

²⁶Ibid., 941.

²⁷Ibid., 941-42.

²⁸Matera, 42.

As a part of the status degradation of Jesus, they put an inscription on the cross. The inscription of the charge against him read, “The King of the Jews” (Mark 15:26). It had a pretense of wanting to honor Jesus with the title, but it was really a great dishonor. This title was meant to be a mockery by Jesus’ opponents.²⁹ This was meant “to show how Romans would deal with anyone who would try to rule in their place. As it stands, it serves to insult the Judeans by portraying their king as a naked slave for all to mock.”³⁰ Despite this mockery, the enemies of Jesus inadvertently declared the reality of his honor, because He is indeed the Christ and King of Israel!³¹

Another step of the status degradation was crucifying Jesus between two robbers, one on his right and one on his left (Mark 15:27). A pretense of honor and sarcasm can be noted in placing Jesus at the center. In Filipino culture, as was mentioned above with the case with Simon of Cyrene, it is likewise shameful to be associated with dishonorable persons, such as criminals, or even people with a base character.

The climax of Jesus’ status degradation was the succeeding instances of verbal abuse and malicious mockery by three different sets of people. As described in Mark 15:29-30, the first group to mock Jesus was the bystanders who derided him, wagged their heads, and said, “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” The wagging of heads is a fulfillment of Psalm 22:7-8, which states that “all who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads; ‘He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!’”³² It was also a common gesture of contempt.³³ The reference to the destruction and rebuilding of the temple was an interesting precursor to the supernatural event that occurred after Jesus’ death, recorded in Mark 15:38, which will be examined in the next section.

The chief priests and the scribes then mocked him, saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe” (Mark 15:31). There may be no obvious reason as to why the bystanders hated Jesus, but there were conspicuous reasons as to why the religious leaders wanted to exact vengeance on him. Their hatred for Jesus can be understood through another concept in the honor and shame paradigm, known as the perception of limited good.

²⁹Stein, 713.

³⁰Malina and Rohrbaugh, 275-76.

³¹Narry F. Santos, *Turning Our Shame into Honor: Transformation of the Filipino HIYA in the Light of Mark’s Gospel* (Philippines: Life Change Publishing, Inc., 2003), 223.

³²Stein, 714.

³³Ibid.; see also Lamentations 2:15.

In the first-century Mediterranean world, all goods, including honor, were seen to exist in limited amounts. Individuals who want to improve their social position, therefore, have to do it at the expense of others. One's claim to honor will be perceived as a threat to the honor of another; thus, it needs to be challenged. Honor is attained through the social competition of challenge and riposte.³⁴ The religious leaders had been involved in a number of challenge-riposte dialogues, which ended in victory for Jesus and defeat for the religious leaders. Their disgrace caused an increase in honor for Jesus. They, on the other hand, felt robbed of their honor. This resulted in an increase in their hatred against and envy of, Jesus, which also explains their desire to kill him. This furthermore explains their harsh gloating and derogatory remarks against him.

The third group of mockers was composed of the two who were crucified with him (Mark 15:32).³⁵ It seems more natural for these two thieves to sympathize with Jesus, since they were similarly nailed to the cross. But they reviled Jesus instead. The dynamic of honor and shame was also at work here. It seems probable that they hoped to divert the shame they felt, from themselves to Jesus, or maybe make Jesus more shamed than they were, so they appeared honored in comparison. The three sets of insults markedly emphasize the honor degradation of Jesus.

It is worth noting how Jesus maintained his silence amidst all the accusations. Although he cried out loudly twice in 15:34 and 15:37, neither of these was retaliatory. He kept his composure and uttered no vengeful words.³⁶ In Filipino culture, insults and mockeries are hurtful and shameful. Even if the accusations are not true, not having the opportunity, and freedom, to disagree with them and voice one's defense is very difficult. However, Jesus kept quiet throughout all their abuse. In his humility, Jesus taught us that silence is more powerful than words. I have learned that silence connotes humility and has more impact than self-defense.

The Supernatural Phenomena Surrounding the Death of Jesus (Mark 15:33-39)

Mark recorded two supernatural events associated with the crucifixion: the darkening of the sun (Mark 15:33), and the tearing of the temple curtain (Mark 15:38). There was darkness over the whole land for three hours. Then Jesus cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God,

³⁴Malina, 95-100.

³⁵Matt. 27:44 and Luke 23:39-43 are parallel passages although Luke refers to only one of the thieves as the mocker.

³⁶Santos, 222.

why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). This was the only saying Jesus made from the cross that was recorded by Mark. It is unclear as to why Mark emphasized this cry. There have been various suggestions as to its implications, such as an expression of Jesus' intense suffering, Jesus' struggle against the power of evil, the emphasis of Jesus as the Son of God, or the depth of his emotion.³⁷ Another concept related to the honor-shame paradigm may help us discern Mark's unspoken logic.

Honor in the first-century Mediterranean society was tied to a person's identity, and a person's identity depends on belonging to, and being accepted by, the family.³⁸ It has always been presumed that honor exists within one's own family.³⁹ The honor among the family is grounded in trust and loyalty. Thus, the cry of Jesus was not a cry of despair, nor a shout of victory, but was rather an expression of anguish to God the Father, who forsook him.⁴⁰ Looking at this verse through the honor-shame lens impacts me as someone raised in a shame-based culture. In Filipino culture, it is indeed most hurtful and disgraceful, to be disowned by one's own family. The cry of Jesus can thus be understood as both intense sorrow from the weight of the world's sin, plus the feeling of being abandoned by his Father.⁴¹

Some of the bystanders heard him and thought that he was calling Elijah (Mark 15:35). Someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, simultaneously mocking him (Mark 15:36). It is hard to determine whether the offer of wine was to be seen as a kind gesture or an act of mockery. The offer of wine, also seen in Luke 23:36, could be an attempt to prolong Jesus' torture and keep him from dying quickly.⁴² This would be consistent with the status degradation ritual being perpetuated by his enemies.

Jesus then uttered a loud cry and breathed his last (Mark 15:37), and the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom (Mark 15:38). This calls to mind the earlier reference to insults from bystanders who taunted Jesus for declaring the rebuilding of the temple three days after its destruction (Mark 15:29).

There were two curtains in the temple: the one within the sanctuary before the holy of holies, and the outer curtain separating the sanctuary from the courtyard (Jewish Wars 5,219). It is uncertain which one Mark was referring to. Some scholars favor the former one since this could

³⁷Stein 715-16.

³⁸Malina, 30.

³⁹Ibid., 38.

⁴⁰Matera, 46.

⁴¹Brown, 1051.

⁴²Stein, 716.

signify the direct access of Jesus' followers to the Father.⁴³ Others, myself included, prefer the latter one, which would have been visible to the public when the curtain was split in two.⁴⁴ This is an event that can better be seen from the honor-shame viewpoint. It is important to note that women, outcasts, and foreigners were prohibited from entering the inner courts of the Jerusalem temple; thus, the tearing of the outer curtain connotes a paradigm shift from the exclusivity of the Jewish male population.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Mark did not specify which curtain was torn, although the tearing of the curtain signified the end of the temple cult and the access of all people to God's glory.⁴⁶ With Jesus' death, the function of the temple came to an end.⁴⁷ Many scholars view the tearing of the temple curtain as an act of divine judgment on the sanctuary and the nation.⁴⁸ However, through the honor-shame lens, I would contend that it was an affront to the Jewish attachment to the whole religious and political system. The nation of Israel, its religious leaders, and its people, took pride in their temple and religious rituals. Earlier in the ministry of Jesus, upon coming out of the temple, one of the disciples exclaimed about the beauty, and magnificence, of the temple stones and buildings (Mark 13:1). Jesus then predicted the destruction of the temple and the city (Mark 13:2).

The Jerusalem temple was a symbol of honor for the people of Israel. It was regarded as blasphemous when Jesus predicted its destruction. When the temple curtain was torn in two, their symbol of honor was ultimately defamed. The contemporary world has also witnessed how this worldview of connecting honor to structures is manifested. Although America and the world mourned the loss of many lives due to the atrocities of the 9/11 attacks perpetuated by Muslim extremists, these terrorists purposely targeted three edifices: the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and possibly the White House, which represented the nation's financial, military and executive powers. Part of the reason for targeting those buildings could have been to dishonor the country and its people.

The tearing of the temple curtain symbolized the opening of the door for the whole world to receive the good news of salvation, and to render

⁴³William B. Lane. *The Gospel According to Mark*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F.F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 575.

⁴⁴Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark*. Black's New Testament Commentary, ed. Henry Chadwick (Peabody, Mass.: Henrickson Publishers, 1991), 378.

⁴⁵Josephus. *Jewish Antiquities: Books XV-XVII*: trans. Ralph Marcus, Loeb Classical Library. (1963; repr., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 203.

⁴⁶Matera, 47.

⁴⁷Ibid., 68.

⁴⁸Stein, 717.

honor where it belonged. It also signified the lifting of the shame attached to women and outcasts. Jesus referred to a new temple, not built by hands (Mark 14:58). This new temple is a metaphor for the Christian community, which is composed of Gentiles as well as Jews.⁴⁹ Honor, in God's eyes, is beyond any physical structure or symbol. The tearing of the temple curtain is a reminder not to put one's trust in, or honor, things that do not really matter at all. It is also a reminder of God's love and grace for all mankind, regardless of race, status, or gender.

The culmination passage of the crucifixion and death of Jesus is a powerful confession from the one among the crowd least expected to give it, namely, a centurion. A centurion was an officer in the Roman army responsible for around eighty to a hundred soldiers.⁵⁰ This centurion was apparently in charge of Jesus' execution. In Mark 15:39, when the centurion, who stood facing Jesus, saw the way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"⁵¹ This exclamation of Jesus' sonship highlights the theme of honor.⁵²

In the interplay of honor-shame values, some ironies can be noted. A centurion was the first to recognize the close connection between Jesus' death and his sonship.⁵³ In contrast, the disciples had been with Jesus since the beginning of his ministry. They were witnesses to his miracles and teachings, and had even heard allusions of Jesus' impending suffering (Mark 8:31), yet they failed to acknowledge his shameful death as the key to his sonship. Likewise, the Jewish religious leaders were well-versed in the Scriptures, which referred to a messianic sonship in the line of David (Psalm 2, 89), but it was a Gentile who recognized Jesus as the Messiah.⁵⁴ "The climactic cry of the centurion that Jesus was the Son of God is the final unveiling of the secret surrounding Jesus' identity."⁵⁵ The crucifixion of Jesus led to a paradigm shift in the worldview of honor and shame.

Through all of these intricacies, the shame of Jesus' crucifixion and death turned into an avenue for Jesus to be honored (Phil. 2:6-11). What started out as intentional steps to disgrace him, through the public

⁴⁹Matera, 68.

⁵⁰Gary M. Burge, *A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2015), 12.

⁵¹Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 250 cites "Apollonius' Canon" which states that "both the head noun and the genitive noun either have the article or lack the article. It makes little semantic difference whether the construction is articular or anarthrous."

⁵²Santos, 224.

⁵³Matera, 42.

⁵⁴George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev.ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 160-1.

⁵⁵Matera, 79.

humiliation represented by crucifixion, the location of his crucifixion, and the mocking and gloating (by the Jewish leaders, the thieves and the crowd), eventually became the means by which Jesus was honored. His humble suffering and death culminated in his being honored with the title of Son of God.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The New Testament was written in the first century and thus must be read through its cultural perspective. Since the first-century Mediterranean society is, and was, basically shame-based, my understanding of Scripture increased as I looked at it through an honor-shame grid. Viewed through this lens, I had a better appreciation of the significance of how Jesus Christ, and his work on the cross, reversed the cultural stigma of shame into victorious honor.

Many underlying themes surrounding the crucifixion cannot be seen apart from the honor-shame lens. Various concepts in the shame-based society of the first century were helpful in unlocking the significance of the crucifixion passage. These include the patronage system, the shameful death of crucifixion, the status degradation rituals, the limited good concept, and the concepts of kinship, gender, social structures and religious symbols.

At the culmination of the crucifixion was the centurion's powerful exclamation of Jesus' sonship. This proves that the honor rendered to Jesus came through his humble suffering and shameful death. The climactic declaration that Jesus was the Son of God revealed the secret of Jesus' identity as the Messiah.

On a broader spectrum, Jesus' work on the cross radically shifted the honor-shame values present in social and religious institutions (including kinship, gender, race, and structures). The death of Jesus caused an honor reversal in the status of women, outcasts, and Gentiles, through the tearing of the temple curtain and the declaration of Jesus' sonship by a Roman centurion. On an individual level, his saving grace has granted not only a removal of guilt, but also a removal of shame and reinstatement of honor. Through Jesus' suffering and death, we see the depiction of extreme shame turning into victorious honor!

⁵⁶There is a great debate as to what the title of "Son of God" means. In "Military," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 549, I. H. Marshall writes that the "centurion may have meant little more than that Jesus was an innocent victim whose manner of dying showed his extraordinary character; the Evangelists saw that his words could have a deeper significance than he may have intended."

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