

Psalm 32
2018

"The Joy of Forgiveness"

March 4,

All right. Let's open our Bibles this morning to Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 is one of seven Psalms in the book of Psalms that are prayers or Psalms of repentance. This is the second one. It is introduced there at the beginning as "A Psalm of David. A contemplation." The word "contemplation" in the Hebrew is a "maskiyl." And "maskiyl" means to instruct by words, or if you will, to find good success by chewing on the words. You'll find that word "selah" three times in these 11 verses. The word "selah" is used in the Psalm to say stop and think about this. It's a rest note. It encourages you to not just read by. There are 13 of these "maskiyl," contemplation Psalms, in the 150. Saint Augustine carved this one in the wall next to his bed. He said he wanted to remember this in the morning and at night. This was something that was near and dear to his heart.

The context is certainly obvious. It is David's sin with Bathsheba. You can read the historical account in II Samuel Chapter 11. This Psalm along with Psalm 51 are two of the seven Psalms of repentance David prays about that same issue. It was a sin of lust at a time in David's life when God had presently blessed David. In fact, the nation of Israel was at its zenith in terms of power and influence and wealth and prosperity. Nothing else could have been done to the nation, they were doing so well. Under David's leadership they had defeated literally every enemy of the state.

By the time you get to this Psalm, David is no longer a young man. He is in his 50s. He's been ruling well over 20 years. He is enjoying a Desert Storm kind of popularity, probably by the fact that everyone had prospered so much. There was this unbroken streak of victories and expansion. And maybe that was the problem to begin with. Prosperity and power can leave you pretty vulnerable, and so I don't doubt that that contributed, if you will, to David's difficulty. There are few people in the Bible that seem to be able to handle all of that without being kind of overwhelmed by it.

It seems to me in the Bible, when you study characters of the Bible, there are a few folks that you run into that seem out of reach, guys like Daniel or Joseph. I never liked reading about them much. They don't do anything wrong. I like Peter. He's much more my style. He knows how big his shoe is and it fits right in his mouth. David seems to be a guy in many ways that seems to be in his faith and devotion out of reach, like they never saw the daily grind that we do, until you get to this story and then you find out otherwise. And that's true of all Bible characters. Everybody's got a chink in their armor and sin natures and they face the same struggles. No wonder the writer of Lamentations wrote that God's mercies -- because of His mercy, you're not consumed, that His compassion doesn't fail, that His mercy's new every morning. Great is His faithfulness. And that is especially true in David's life, and especially I should say in this story.

But if you read the story of David's fall with Bathsheba, you're aware of the fact that at least some of the contributing factors for David was when the summer came or the spring, and in spring the armies went back out to war after the cold and all, this was the first year David decided to stay home. While his armies patrolled his borders and kept his people safe, David decided he'd take a break. He didn't go to fight the battles of the Lord. He stayed home. Found a lot of idleness in his hands. He looked out of his window and saw a beautiful woman in his path, and it wasn't long before he began to take deliberate steps towards sin to be with this woman. And by the time he fell and things got worse, he worked really hard to cover it all up. The consequences of his sin for him and for the nation were staggering. Not only did the nation fall from its place of great blessing, but David and his family had a great fallout for years to come as well.

He had seduced a wife of one of his most faithful soldiers. He had arranged his death when he couldn't get him to come home and spend the night with his wife and blame his -- her pregnancy on him. He pretended for the next year-plus that nothing had happened. He pretended that all was well. He married the widow, had a child, while Uriah had been, her husband, killed in battle. During this year-plus, according to the scriptures, David hid his sinfulness. And as you might suspect, it haunted him every day. No way to hide sin. You can hide it from others; you can't hide it from God, and you can certainly never hide it from yourself.

After a year-plus or so, the prophet Nathan came to David, told

him a story of someone with power using it to control and manipulate someone that had very little. And David hearing the story was furious and he said, "That guy should die!" And Nathan said, "Yeah, that's you. God has given you so much and you took what little this man had, and his wife, for yourself." And David responded and said, "I have sinned against the Lord. I've done this evil in His sight." As tears of repentance flowed from David's life, God's mercy was found with him, forgiveness.

This Psalm is written about that experience. It is written after the facts. It is written so that we can get a perspective both of our sin and of God's forgiveness. I'll give you six words to remember, three P.C. words, P's and C's: Pleasure when you're cleansed; penalties when you conceal your sin; pardon when you confess. Three P.C. words. Easier to remember.

Verse 1, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. And blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." The first couple of verses, David speaks about his current position. By the time he wrote 24 he had discovered the mercy and the grace of God. David knew full well what it was like to lie to everyone, pretend all was well, try to hide in your heart the sin that was just tormenting you. And he also knew what it was like to get rid of it, to let God have it, and to let God restore your life. And it was more than the quieting of a noisy conscious. It was really that confidence that you could come into God's presence again and be welcomed there. It was a positional promise as well as a real experience.

And so David talked about blessing. And by the way, that word "blessed" in the first part of the first verse is plural. It is a blessing that overwhelms David's life in many ways. But notice what he writes about these things, "Blessed is the man who's forgiven, whose sin is covered, to whom God does not account his sinfulness, or impute them." I want to point out to you in the first couple of verses that David uses four different terms for sin, and they're very unique, they're very different, and they all apply. And David said it is a blessing when God doesn't lay any of this to your charge.

The word "transgression" is the Hebrew word "pesha." My Grandma used to say "pesha" to things. I don't know if that was typical to her or because she came from Holland. I don't know. But it was kind of like "huh." That's kind of what she meant by it. The word itself means to revolt or rebel against authority.

When it relates to you and God, it means you crossed the line. God has said don't come here, and you've gone here. It is the sin that makes a child tell his parents no -- clean your room, no. Come down from there, no. Be quiet, no -- when he's told to do something. It drives the heart of a child to test every boundary and see how far they can get away with things. It's the word "transgression." When David in Psalm 51 said to the Lord, "Against You and You only have I sinned," you want to say to him, no, you've also sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah and your family. But David's point is this: Until you rebel against God's authority, really that's where it starts. That's your greatest sin of all. You break God's law. You stand against God's ways. And so blessed is the man whose rebellious heart God has forgiven.

Second of all, sin, "whose sin is covered." This word "sin" in Hebrew is the -- almost the equivalent to the Greek word "hamartia," missing the mark. Right? It's a word that means even if you have good intentions and you shoot for God's will, you are going to come up short. Doesn't matter how hard you try, you don't have what it takes to live a way because of sin that would please the Lord. So whatever we do, our intentions, our efforts, they're all going to come up short. Look, we can all go down to Huntington Beach and run off the pier and say jump, and some of you will go 10 feet, and some of you will fall right off the edge, but none of us are going to land on Catalina. We are going to miss the mark. Well, if Catalina's the will of God, nobody gets there without some help, and that's exactly what this word means. It implies a habitual offense that cannot be overcome by itself. So we're incapable. We can't hit the mark. We're rebellious against the will of God.

Thirdly, the word "iniquity," "blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute his iniquity." The word "avath" means crooked or twisted or perverse, and it always is referred to the human nature that drives men to sin. In other words, you left to yourself are bent away from God. Your natural tendency is to turn away from God, not to turn towards Him. That's not natural. Natural is to turn away. Whatever God says, we're not true, we're not straight, we don't follow it. That's just the nature that we have. We're twisted. Blessed is the man that God doesn't hold accountable for his twisted ways.

And finally, he says, "In whose spirit there is no guile." The word guile is "remiah." It means to be duplicitous or insincere. David's point is, blessed is the man who isn't insincere before God, who's not guile-filled or phony in his

approach. David, if you apply it to his life, David in his sin with Bathsheba had defiantly acted against the will of God, which he knew. He had fallen short of the law of God. He had shown the crookedness of his heart in how he attempted to hide his sin. And in pretense, he married her and went back to the palace as if all is well, trying to hide his sin, and all of that stuff just drove him into the ground. But blessed is the man who takes all of that in forgiveness, every bit of it, by His grace.

The word "blessing," the Hebrew word "baruch," "baruch," literally the blessings of God for our benefit or the restoration of God in our predicament. So to those four sinful words he adds the words forgiven, covered, not imputed. The word "forgiven," at least in Hebrew, means to lift off one's shoulders, to carry the burden. You carry it yourself and then you go to the Lord and, the Bible tells to us cast our cares upon Him. Well, it follows then that this word would mean that God would lift the burden from your back. As far as the east is from the west, He removes our transgressions from us. I think Isaiah said the Lord, speaking in Isaiah 40 -- I'm going go with 43, the Lord said "I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My sake. I will not remember your sins."

Covered. Blessed is the man who God has covered his sin. The word "covered" is an Old Testament word that is used in terms of sacrifice, that the blood of the sacrifice covered our sin. Didn't remove them. Jesus could remove them. But this would cover you until that sacrifice that would come. It is most often used in the Bible to speak about Yom Kippur and the day that this animal, the lamb, was slain for the sins of the nation. And the high priest would take it and he would go into the Holy of Holies and he would pour out the blood on the mercy seat, the cover on the ark, and inside the ark was the broken commandments of God that Moses had thrown to the ground when he found man worshipping idols. But underneath there was the sin, but on top of it there was the blood that covered. The "kopher," that's what the word is. God covered our sin.

Finally, God will not impute your sin to you. The word "impute" by itself means to sew on a patch. It means to -- that in this case, count our wickedness against us. Or if you will, God removes the debt of sin that you have to reckon to God because He came and paid for it instead. Somebody pays your mortgage payment, you don't owe it anymore. It's been paid. You've just been taken care of. And that's how this word finds its way in. As long as verse 2 at the end, the sinner comes clean before God

-- no deceit. You're sincere. You're not just mouthing words, but have no intention of following up on your repentance. That's one thing. But if you're sincere, God will come and help.

So the pleasure we feel when sin is cleansed, the blessing that comes now. That's David's present tense experience. But now he looks back to the penalties he was facing when he was concealing his sin. "When I kept silent," verse three, "my bones grew old through my groaning all of the day long. And day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; as my vitality was turned into the drought of summer." For that time that led up to this really wicked action on David's part, David made some awful choices. And you can read about them on your own. But David would say to you that sin once committed and not confessed is awfully difficult to hide. It shows up in your rest, in your peace, in your way of life. I suspect that there were many nights that David was visited in the night with nightmares and that he couldn't sleep. There is that letter that he sent to Joab to say, hey, could you just put Uriah at the front of the fighting army so that he'll be sure to die first? I don't know where that letter went, but if I was Joab, and he wasn't a very nice man, that might have been great leverage in the days to come. I need a raise, I got a letter. There was evidence out there of David's wickedness, if you will. Hidden sins will always leave their mark. But notice what David said in verse 3, "When I was silent." He pretended all was fine. Now, his symptoms, the things he went through, might be the exception. Maybe you don't find those, but his stubbornness is common.

You know, it takes a lot to get men to confess their sin, because it seems to --they seem to get away with it, and for some time I guess David did as well. But the penalty for seeking to hide your sin kind of becomes more pronounced as you go. Remember this started out with David at the zenith of his career. There was no one like David. A year later he is sick and dying and depressed and locked up and people haven't seen him for months. His son has come and worked the palace gates and said to people, if I was the king, I wouldn't treat you like that. I would be available every day. It would eventually lead to his son trying to, Absalom, overthrow his father's kingdom. All because David decided to hide his sin. There was a spiritual toll, there was an emotional toll, there was a physical toll. And he describes it in these poetic terms. These are the poetry books. "My bones grew old." I just lost my strength. My vitality dried up like the drought of summer. Unable to function, not able to rest, unconfessed sin that

haunted him day and night and left him without peace.

Now, this was a guy whose life was truly blessed by God, and this is how he turned out. The fires in his -- in his conscious had become an inferno. He just couldn't get out from under it. And this popular, once very friendly and approachable king had withdrawn himself from public view, and he was just trying to survive from one day to the next. Quite a contrast.

It was Spurgeon who wrote of this Psalm, "I like when God's hands are upon me to lift me up, but I would rather be like Atlas and have the weight of the world on my shoulders than to live like David with the hand of God pressing down upon me." God will get you where He wants you to be one way or the other. That's His promise. "Your hand was heavy upon me," that's what we read. Because God won't allow you as His child to rest while secret sins are stored in your heart. And David said, there was great pleasure when I was forgiven, when I was cleansed, but there was tremendous penalties paid when I tried to conceal my sin. And he looking back now knows that better than ever. The -- whatever he got from this relationship with this woman, the price he paid was far greater than he would have valued it to be I'm sure. The sin that -- sin, or I should say the toll that sin places upon you -- and notice the word "selah" at the end of verse 13, think about that. Think about the exchange. You get whatever sin promises, and then you get the fruit of it. Really not what you're looking for.

In verse 5 David spoke about the pardon that though comes to him when you confess your sin. It's really easy, to be forgiven. God has made it pretty easy. And as long as there, in verse 2, no deceit, you're really serious. Verse 5 says, "So I acknowledge my sin to you, and my iniquity I haven't hidden. And I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the Lord,' and You have forgiven the iniquity of my sin."

When David met with Nathan, the prophet, and he realized that Nathan -- not only Nathan knew what had gone on, but God was aware of it and the prophet was saying so, David was terrified. According to the law, both adultery and murder have death penalties attached to them. David was cooked twice. He was guilty in two cases, two capital punishment cases. And when David said there in II Samuel, I think, chapter 12 to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord," the first words out of Nathan's mouth were these, "The Lord has put away your sin. You shall not die." The sin that should have killed you, God would suffer for. He would put them away. He would come to save. And David

must have been so relieved to hear those words. Look at the action words in verse 5, and they're required: I acknowledge my sin, I didn't hide my iniquity, I confessed my transgression, and then You forgave them. And for the second time in two verses you read the word "selah." Hide your sin and your sin will seek to destroy you. Confess your sin and God will in repentance bring you back to life. Forgiveness is available, but repentance is the road you got to go down. And David finally came to that recognition.

Now, look, let me say this to you: David's repentance did not earn him God's forgiveness, but it was the method in which God gave it to him. He didn't deserve it, but it is the only way God hands it out. As we confess, fellowship is restored. I want you to notice something else, and it's only unique to the Lord: When you confess your sin, God forgives immediately. There's no probation period. The Lord doesn't, say yeah, I've heard that before. Or, I think you're kind of a jerk, but we'll try it, you know. None of that kind of hesitancy or, the timidity of God. No, He doesn't have that. It says this: I confess, You forgive. They're both present tense. Well, one is passive. But it has an immediate present tense result. You want God to forgive you, you confess your sin, have no deceit in your heart, be mindful of the fact that this is the transaction that God has provided, and receive it. Just like that.

He mentions in verse 6 and 7 the power of God available to us so that we don't need to sin or that we can overcome sin. He says this: "For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You in a time when You may be found; and surely in a flood of great waters they won't come near You. Because You are my hiding place, and You'll preserve me from trouble; and You'll surround me with songs of deliverance." If you know that God's mercy and His forgiveness is available immediately to one who really turns to Him, it ought to be the greatest motivating factor that is in your life to have you run to Him to clear the air. Why would you hold on to sin any longer? Why would you try to get by without this forgiveness? You can be cleansed and washed and restored. You don't have to harbor things that destroy you. Keep your relationship with the Lord current. When 1 John -- or in 1 John, John at 90 years old wrote, "If we confess our sins, He's faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." So you can go to bed every night and just say, "Lord, as I look over my life today, I found places that I didn't really honor You very much, and I want You to forgive me." And you can get up in the morning with a clean slate. It should be out of habit, you know. It will just bless

your life to know that God is constantly watching. There's this big eraser in heaven, dipped into the blood of the Lamb. Everything can be removed, stains in every way.

David found out in the worst of times, when he had done the most horrible things. Blessed is the man. Blessed is that man. And so David gives us an admonishment here that we should come to the Lord and confess so that we might avoid the difficulty that comes when we try to hide our sin. Here's what I do, I hide in the Lord. He's my hiding place, He's my shelter, He's my place of rest. It's where repentant sinners find God's presence. And I want you to notice something: The same man that was oppressed by God in verse 4 is now His refuge in verse 7. The same God who leaned on him hard when he wasn't doing so well opens up His door for him in verse 7 when he's seeking Him. God isn't going to let you just flounder. He's a good Father. And for good measure, here's one more "selah," think about that. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. I think that's exactly written there, in the original language.

Well, in response, and don't miss this, verse 8 and 9 has the Lord responding in the first person to David's prayer. This is what the Lord said to him directly and personally. And notice the change of pronouns, from "they" and "you" and "us" to "I." "I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go; I will guide you with My eye. So don't be like a mule or a horse, having no understanding, that has to be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they won't come near you." I'll teach you, I'll instruct you, I'll guide you, I'll lead you.

Of course, notice that the Lord says, "I will guide you with My eye," and the only way that works is if you're looking at Him. It's all about where your eyes are; right? Fellowship with God is sure when your sins are forgiven and you've been washed. If you watch for Me, if you look to Me, then I can just lead you painlessly.

My dad had a look. If we were at dinner at somebody else's house and I was screwing around -- can you say that from the pulpit, screwing around? Yeah, it should be all right. We can edit otherwise. It gets to the Bible belt, I'll be in trouble. But one look from him and I just knew it was like, you're going to die. Say goodbye to your mother. You're never going to see her again. He'd just give you one and you'd just sit right up. It would freeze me. Did you have a dad like this or was it just me?

A bit and a bridle worked because they'd produce a certain amount of pain. It is an effective control method for stubborn animals who will do what they want and not listen to direction. But it is a driving or a controlling that comes through pain. God would want an easier path for you. Why drag you around in pain when He can just do one of these (indicating). You know, a nod, a wink; a look that you know and understand. The choice is yours. You should know that one way or another, God's going to put you where He wants you. He's not given up on you. He that began a good work in you is going to finish it. It's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It's not always so easy to serve a God who's not going to let you just flop in the wind. But you got a choice. You either get one of these, "ah," or one of these (indicating), and you can follow.

The outcome, verse 10, "Many sorrows shall be for the wicked; but he that trusts in the Lord will find His mercy surrounding him. So you be glad in the Lord, you righteous; you can shout for joy, you that are upright in heart." Forgiveness realized turns into joy practiced. The wicked, eh, you got all kinds of problems. The godly man just sings a new song.

So I don't know, maybe you have some sin in your life, hiding it. You're pretending all is well, and we all are fooled by you. You're putting on a good show. We all think you're the most spiritual person we've ever met. But God knows better and so do you. And if this shoe fits, put it on and repent, and then go home with joy. Your countenance will change. Your life will change. Your mouth won't hurt so much from the bit and the bridle that's been in it.