

Repentance

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[0 : 0 0] So, let's turn in our Bibles now, or you can look on the screen also to Psalm 32. We've been thinking about how the Psalms can help us to grow in our relationship with God, how they can give us ways of speaking and relating to God. And this week, we're thinking about confession, we're thinking about repentance. So, Psalm 32, this is a Psalm of David. Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them, and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me, my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Therefore, let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found. Surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place. You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding, but must be controlled by bit and bridle, or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous.

Sing, all you who are upright in heart. Amen. This is God's word. Let's begin by recognizing one of the wonderful qualities of the Bible, its honesty and its transparency that we find in so many of the central figures in the Bible. I discovered this week that Psalm 32 was St. Augustine's favorite Psalm.

So back way in the fourth or is it the fifth century? I can't remember. He wrote the confessions, great exploration of his inner life. And fundamental to his understanding of himself and why he loved Psalm 32 so much is the reality. And he said it, you can only know yourself when you know God.

And by that, he meant to understand that before a holy God, we are sinners. As John Newton put it, I am a great sinner and God is a great savior. That's the reality that Augustine found in Psalm 32 that caused him, as he was dying, to have it inscribed in the wall beside his bed so he could reflect on it.

[3 : 2 4] But when you start to think about some of the major stories that you find, major characters in the Bible, you recognize there is a willingness to expose their great failings. I was thinking this morning about Peter, one of Jesus' disciples, who denied three times even knowing Jesus, and then wept bitterly as he realized what he had done. But Peter at the same time as realizing how deep his sin was, also discovered how great God's grace was because he was wonderfully restored by Jesus, was invited in and given an important task of being the foundation, his word, his message being the foundation for the church. We can think about Jonah in the Old Testament, the ultimate reluctant prophet who was so angry at God for having compassion and sparing the enemies of God's people.

How did the story of Jonah ever come to be known? Because Jonah recognized his faults and was willing to share that story as he came to understand God's grace is better than my anger.

Peter and Jonah and Paul and here King David are among many who have looked into their own hearts and souls and seen the depths of their sin, but they're happy to talk about it as a way to make much of the amazing grace of God's forgiveness. So their stories and here David's story in Psalm 32 stand as a testimony.

There are sins, there are many, but his mercy is more. Or as we have it here in Psalm 32 in verse 1, blessed is the one whose sins are covered.

Psalm 32 is a wonderful psalm, but it's a challenging one. At the same time as offering freedom, it's a truth that challenges us because it forces us to look in on ourselves. Because David is giving us the message that it's with honest confession and it's with sorrow over our own sin that we find true blessing and favor from God. That's where joy is found. And that's very different to the message of a lot of popular self-help psychology. I read an article this week asking the question, are you dealing with guilt?

[6 : 09] And this popular psychologist was saying that the key when you're dealing with guilt is to learn to forgive yourself. And that's fine for a certain kind of guilt where you're holding on to things in the past that we should leave behind because they've been dealt with. But what about when our sin is against God and our guilt is real? Then it's not a case of we can forgive ourselves and move on. We need God to forgive us.

So Psalm 32 forces us to go deeper, but because it does that, it gives much greater freedom and joy than learning simply to try and forgive ourselves. So as we read Psalm 32 and think about it together, think about it as the testimony of King David, a King David who is the spiritual leader of Israel.

And here he is using his own failure as part of public worship to teach the people of God that there is no greater joy than the joy of forgiveness. That that joy comes from confessing sin, not from trying to cover it up. And then he urges everyone to practice true repentance, to share in his joy. So let's see him lead us in that direction. Firstly, in the couple of verses, we have his testimony that there's no greater joy than forgiveness. The Psalm makes us ask the question, who is the happy person? Who is the truly blessed person?

Who is it that can say they enjoy God's favor? And as we explore Psalm 32, we need to recognize that Psalm 32 only makes sense, its conclusions only make sense when we have a biblical view of humanity. That we are made in the image of God and that we are made for relationship with God and to enjoy his glory. So that we would see the greatest loss we can ever know, it is to lose fellowship with God and by contrast, the greatest joy is to be reconciled to him.

[8 : 22] Because what we have is David celebrating God's amazing grace. David sings this song all about reconciliation. God has shown him favor again and again, despite his lawbreaking.

And there's no better news for him than that. And that then gives him the honesty, knowing that he has found that reconciliation, it gives him the honesty to really dig down into his sin.

Maybe you noticed as the Psalm was read the different language that's used for sin. So in verse 1, it speaks of transgressions. And that brings us to the idea of rebellion against God.

This is us raising our fist in protest against God's rule. Where just as Adam and Eve did in the garden, we want to set our own course, deciding for ourselves what is right and wrong and good and evil.

So there is transgression. There's also in verse 1, the language of sin, which has the sense of falling short, of a target, of a mark, of a high jumper trying to jump the bar, but knocking it over, failing to reach the intended goal.

[9 : 45] And then in verse 5, we also have the language of iniquity. The idea of something that had been straight, which has now become warped or crooked, is deviating from the course.

So David is giving a lesson from his own life to say, I am guilty of an uprising against God. Though I am the man after God's own heart, I am guilty of rebelling against God.

I have failed his test. I am crooked in my nature. And as David exposes his own heart, he's inviting us to reflect on our own, to see that in the same way as he fails, so do we.

And it's something we need to hear. Maybe you find yourself, as so many people do today, struggling with news fatigue. Wherever we look, online, social media, newspapers, it seems bad news everywhere.

And it can be so hard and it can be so exhausting, so we just want to switch off from all the evil that's out there. David is saying, do we understand how important it is to recognize the evil that's in here?

[11 : 04] Do we spend time reflecting on the offense that we cause against God day in and day out? Because what David discovered in verse two, it is blessed as the one whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

David is saying there's blessing when we're totally honest before God, when we're not trying to cover up or wear a mask, but we're facing the ugly reality of our sin and our shame, as we bring it

into God's light, then there can be joy and healing and restoration.

Now, I imagine we know this in our own experience, a necessary part of really being restored in a friendship or a relationship when there's been a breakdown.

We need more than the quick, sorry, you know, the quick, I'm sorry, but nobody's perfect. What we need is somebody to really own what they have done that's caused such an offense, what's caused the breach, or we need ourselves to do that if there is to be true restoration.

And the same, David is saying, is true of God. We need to really think deeply about the ways in which we offend God in order to enjoy the joy of his forgiveness and to know the joy of restoration.

[12 : 30] As the people of God, we make much of God's grace and we must always do that, but we must not take sin lightly. So we enjoy grace, but we take sin lightly.

Take sin seriously, rather. We also see David, just as he digs deep into his own sin, we also see he also draws deeply from God's atoning work on behalf of his people.

So when he talks about transgressions, he talks about the blessing of the one whose transgressions are forgiven and where the cost of reconciliation has been paid by God so that our sin can be lifted off us.

And as we know from the New Testament, it can be lifted off us because it's placed on Jesus and he dies for it. In verse one also, there's blessing for the one whose sins are covered when our sins are removed out of God's sight.

That was the imagery of the scapegoat. In the Day of Atonement, the annual festival where the nation sought the forgiveness of God, the scapegoat was sent out into the wilderness, as it were, carrying the sins of the people out of their sight and out of God's sight.

[13 : 54] There's blessing for the one whose sin the Lord does not count against them where our record of debt is cancelled, where it is wiped clean.

So David reflects on both of these and he understands that joy returns after sin when the separation is ended by God.

Crucial for us is to not have deceit, to be open and honest about our sin and our failure, but it's also crucial to recognize it's God who forgives.

It's God's grace that we lean on and cling to. Now, of course, when we're honest, this is a painful process and it's not necessarily a process that we'd like to involve ourselves in.

It's far easier to try and cover up or cover over our sin and our shortcoming. It's much easier to try and distract ourselves and keep ourselves so busy that we never think how things stand between us and God.

[15 : 07] It's much easier to minimize our wrongdoing, to pass the blame on someone else or our circumstances. But David's story as a Christian, as a believer in God, is to say that the only road to joy comes when we truly feel the weight of our sin and we repent.

So that's where his testimony begins and that sort of then naturally leads to the next section where he recognizes that the path to joy comes from confession and not cover up.

So he looks at the two ways that he tried to deal with his sin. So let's read verse 3 and 4 again.

David writes this, When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy on me. My strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

So again, this is David's testimony and he's saying he has learned from his painful mistake.

Here is David as a believer but he is trying desperately to ignore his sin. Rather than being open with God, he's being silent before God and what's it brought him? It's brought him distress and misery.

[16 : 27] And he recognizes why that is. He says, It's because God's hand was heavy on me. As the Bible says, God disciplines those he loves. God doesn't want his people to be comfortable in their sin.

Rather, he wants to draw us back to fellowship with him. And sometimes that's a hard road where God will confront our rebellion.

So here is David looking back and thinking about that time where he didn't confess sin and he's thinking of the mental and the emotional and the physical cost to him.

That sense of exhaustion and being worn out. In a sense, he's saying to us, this road of denial is a dead end.

If you're looking for joy, don't go down this way. Don't go living with your sin. Rather, you need to confess it. John Calvin, the reformer, said that until people are persuaded God is reconciled to

them, they are in misery.

[17 : 30] Nothing can be more terrible than to have God for our enemy. That's David's experience. And he's sharing that with us so that we would learn.

But then in verse 5, we see David's U-turn. We see David's repentance. We see his coming to his senses. And here's what he says, Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the guilt of my sin. No longer silence.

Now he's open before God. Now there's repentance. Now there's confession. And his discovery, his wonderful discovery, is that as he decides to turn to God, God turns to him.

God is like the father in the prodigal son story. If you remember that story of the younger son that demanded half of the family inheritance and went away and wasted it and while living and then found himself living in a pigsty.

[18 : 34] He realizes how miserable his life is and how he'd be far better off at home and he determines that he's going to go home and he's going to confess, I have sinned against heaven and against you.

And as he comes in his filth with nothing before his father, his father comes running. His father embraces him. His father throws a feast for this son of his and that's the character of God.

God delights to show mercy and grace when we confess our sin. And so this is what David discovered. When David covered up his sin, his life was miserable.

But when God covered his sin, there was joy and there was peace. And that's the hope at the heart of the Christian faith. That as we recognize ourselves to be rebel sinners before God and against God and as we repent of sin, as we turn to God, we discover that God in Jesus has made a way for us to be reconciled.

That God has sent his own son Jesus to pay the debt for our sin, to cover our sin, to bear the punishment for our sin so that we can be adopted into the family of God.

[19 : 50] And David understood that's where joy is. Not in covering up but in confessing. And this is why believing the gospel matters so much for us as Christians and as a church.

It reminds us that we need to be honest about the bad news of our sin. If we just cover over sin and act like it's no big deal, then the good news of what Jesus has come to do will make no sense to people.

Unless we see the horror and the ugliness of sin, unless we see the misery that we're in and the prospect of eternal judgment, then the good news of what Jesus offers won't connect with people at all.

To receive the message of Jesus as good news, we need to see the bad news of sin. It's also important to recognize that we are justified by the righteousness of Christ.

It's not my record that saves me, it's Jesus' perfect record. That's where salvation is. And that means that as Christians, we don't need to try and cover up. We don't need to act better than we are.

[20 : 55] We should be humble and not proud. We should be free to confess our sin, understanding that it's not on me to save myself, rather it's on Jesus, his perfect record, his finished work.

So there's hope when we understand how we are reckoned to be righteous before God. It's also important to see the heart of God, to recognize in the gospel that we are presented with a good and a loving God.

The one who knows the very worst about us, but still in Christ, loves to forgive and to save. That even before he'd created the world, God, Father, Son, and Spirit had established a plan of salvation to bring to himself all who would confess their sin.

So the gospel brings joy and David understood that. And so we are invited to learn from David's personal story that those who know the sorrow of repentance at one and the same time know the deep joy of God's forgiveness as we turn to him.

And so then that leads David towards this testimony where he really begins to share his lesson with the rest of the worshiping community. Where he says, follow this path to share this joy.

[22 : 21] Imagine if right now as part of our worship we were to catalogue our own sin and failure.

Imagine how horrific that would feel for us. But recognize that here is David introducing into public worship at one of those times where he is acknowledging before all the people that he sinned against God, that he was silent before God, he was slow to repent.

Here he honestly is confessing his deep sin so that glory would come to God and so that people would learn a lesson from him. He's giving instruction.

He's teaching lessons that he has learned through his pain. Two lessons for us. First, David says, repent quickly.

Verse 6 and 7. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found. Surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

[23 : 41] You are my hiding place. You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Repent, turn to God in prayer while God may be found.

Recognizing today is the day of opportunity. Today is a day of grace. And so David very simply is saying to the people of God, don't put off putting things right with your God.

Confess, repent quickly. And he gives a couple of pictures to help. In verse 6 he talks about the floodwaters rising. Most probably a picture of judgment, maybe even final judgment.

We need to be right with God to find favor with God that we might be spared from God's judgment. Think Noah. Noah found favor with God and he was in the ark. We need to find favor with God to be spared.

And then in verse 7 we repent quickly to discover again God as our hiding place, God as our place of protection, God the safe haven in the storms of life, God the one who will bring us through the storm of judgment and bring us to himself.

[24 : 58] We need to be restored to know that safety of being with our God. So we repent quickly. And the next lesson he gives to the worshiping people of God is to repent willingly.

Verse 9 Do not be like the horse or the mule which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

We have that saying in English don't be stubborn as a mule. And when it comes to repentance absolutely don't be stubborn as the mule.

What does he mean by that? Well in verse 9 he says don't lack understanding. Donkeys horses they don't have understanding don't be like that understand God is a judge repentance is vital God is a loving father therefore we should turn to him quickly and gladly.

He says don't be like the horse and mule that need to be dragged in the direction they should go. Don't live in the misery of unconfessed sin. Don't live with the guilt.

[26 : 13] Don't live with that sense of shame. Don't live with the exhausting effort of trying to cover up and live in denial rather than being honest and open with our God. Go quickly and don't be dragged to the place of repentance.

David learned the misery and wants to spare them and us from that. Don't be like the horse. Don't be like the donkey. Don't resist drawing near.

Don't always be pulling away. Learn from the story of the prodigal son. You know he couldn't wait to get away from his father. Couldn't wait to get away from the security and love of home and find himself in the misery of the pigsty.

And he came to his senses and he returned to his father and he enjoyed welcome and he enjoyed love. In verse 10, those who return discover the Lord's unfailing love instead of meeting with woe. Repent quickly, repent willingly and the result he begins where he finishes with joy. The greatest joy, the joy of the friendship of the Lord, the joy of fellowship with God is ours as we repent.

[27 : 38] So we've heard David's testimony. He's written this song for public worship so that the people of God that we might know where true joy lies.

It lies in being forgiven and reconciled to God. That we would see the path to that being open before God and confessing our sin. And we've heard his invitation to follow that path, to share his joy.

God and so all of us have to make that decision. It's a lifestyle. This isn't a one-off thing. We're always guilty of sin.

Therefore, our whole lives need to be one of repenting and trusting in God's grace. So if you're not a Christian here today, if you're listening in, you need to, for the first time, repent from sin and believe in Jesus, to have him as Lord and Saviour.

And for those of us who are Christians, we still need every day to enjoy close fellowship with God. And that means dealing with the things that go wrong in our hearts, dealing with the sin in our lives, so that we can, with David, know the blessing and the joy of those whose sins are covered and forgiven.

[28 : 59] Let's pray together.