

PSALM 32

JOY IS BEING FORGIVEN

FCF: As human beings we share a common need of forgiveness.

Proposition: The forgiveness of our sins brings to the life great spiritual joy.

Objective: To lead persons to know the joy of God's forgiveness.

Introduction:

A line in a contemporary song says it so simply, "I'm forgiven." This was the song that was in heart of David when he penned these words. He wants us to understand that it is the greatest thing that has ever happened in his life. In his estimation, it is even greater than the joy of being crowned the king of Israel. It has been the source of an unspeakable joy to him, and he wants others to know.

Twice in the opening of the Psalm he uses the word "Blessed." The word refers to someone who is spiritually fortunate, someone who has found great happiness; someone who has a heart full of joy. David is celebrating the joy because forgiveness has brought him out of the most miserable condition he has ever known.

You are probably familiar with David's experience. When he was at the height of success, he made a horrible decision. He chose to use his kingly power to destroy the family of a good, faithful soldier in his army. It

happened while Uriah was away from home at war. David saw the wife of the good soldier taking a bath, and wanted to have sex with her. He ignored the law of the Lord that forbid such an act. He ignored the loyalty of Uriah. He sent for her, and seduced her.

As often happens, this set in motion a series of events that he could not control. He soon received word from Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, that she was pregnant. David did his best to cover his sin. He brought home Uriah from the battlefield, encouraged him to go spend the night with his wife, but the loyal soldier was a better man. He refused the pleasure of his own wife while the army of the Lord was exposed to danger. David discovered that even when he was drunk, Uriah had higher standards than the king.

David was so desperate that he plotted the death of Uriah at the hand of the enemy. He intentionally and knowingly violated the basic principles of righteousness on which he had based his reign.

When it seemed appropriate David brought Bathsheba to the palace to be a wife to him. Had David avoided public disgrace through his plots and deeds? He may have thought that he had, but there was an inner voice of conscience that tried and condemned him every day. He knew that he had done a terribly wrong thing.

Then the Lord sent the pastor to make a visit! Nathan gently confronted the king with the seriousness of his sin, and then boldly declared to him, “You are the man.” The pastoral visit by the prophet set the king on the road to forgiveness. It led him to humbly seek the mercy of the Lord through prayer, as we read in Psalm 51. Then God assured him that he was forgiven. The assurance of the forgiveness gave birth to the Psalm that we have in front of us.

O the joy of being forgiven! Have you known this joy? Do you need this forgiveness? A careful look at the Psalm will point you to four things that makes forgiveness such a joyful, life-fulfilling experience.

I. BECAUSE FORGIVENESS REMOVES OUR GUILT.

This is the first blessing of forgiveness that David introduces. It was the first realization of his heart. It was what made him sing with joy, “I am forgiven!” The first lines of the Psalm provide us with a virtual theology of sin and forgiveness.

1. It lifts the burden of guilt.

“Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven.” A transgression is an intentional act of rebellion; it is doing something that you know is wrong.

The act puts you on the side of the enemies of God. It brings a burden to your life that makes life miserable. You live day by day with the painful awareness that you have offended God, and hurt someone else. “Forgiven” means to lift up a burden and remove it. When God forgives, He removes the life-breaking burden that our sin has brought upon our lives. David must have felt ten pounds lighter and ten years younger when this load was gone.

2. It covers the stain of guilt.

“Whose sin is covered.” Here we have another word for sin. This word means to miss the mark, to fail in a special purpose in life. Whatever life is all about, this means that you have missed it. “Cover” is a word from the sacrificial system. In this case it means that God has put our sins in a place where they can no longer be seen by Him. They will no longer be a consideration in His relationship to us. They are covered! What David tried to do with his sins, God has graciously accomplished.

3. It dismisses the charge of guilt.

“Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.” Iniquity is the third word for what we have done. It calls attention to the corrupt and perverted nature of what we have done. It brings out the ugliness and shame of our sin. It is the thing about sin that makes it such a humbling thing. It is

hard to admit that you are capable of doing something that is obviously so wrong.

“Not impute” is a word from the courtroom, or from the accountant’s office. It means that you will not be charged. It is what happens when the judge dismisses the charge. In this case it is the guilty against which the charge is dismissed. David’s guilt was never in question. God knew he was guilty. Bathsheba knew he was guilty. Joab knew he was guilty. The pastor knew he was guilty. And David knew himself to be guilty! But God lovingly decided not to press the charge, not to put it on the record against him. O the wonder of such mercy!

Now you can begin to know why David is so excited about forgiveness. But there is more!

II. BECAUSE FORGIVENESS ENDS GOD’S CHASTISEMENT.

David enjoyed a special relationship with God before his sin. In a sense God had adopted him as a son, and related to him as a Father. So when David sinned against God, it was a sin against this loving relationship that he enjoyed with God. How will God respond to David’s sin? It was obvious to God that David was attempting to hide his sin, and deny that he had transgressed, so God reacted like a loving Father. He began to chastise David. He chastises all of His children when they sin, if they don’t

immediately take steps to make it right. Only divine forgiveness can remove divine chastisement.

1. It ends the pain from the chastisement.

From the historical record we are not able to fully discover the form that the chastisement took. We are limited to the references that we find in the Psalms of David. Here we learn that the chastisement of the Lord can bring much pain into the life. “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Your hand was upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.” This pain may have been psychological, or it may have been physical. Many have seen in this language indications of a burning fever that destroyed the vital functions of the body. There is no reason that it could not have been both. But the source of the pain was the heavy hand of God upon his life. There was no relief until the hand of the Lord was lifted. The doctor does not have pills that will relieve this pain, though he may try. But when the sin is gone through forgiveness, then the chastisement will be gone.

(The reference to the “bones” is interesting. The bone marrow is so vital to the operation of our immune system. Could it be that the stress brought on by his guilt affected the function of the bone marrow, which depleted his immune system, which then exposed him to some painful disease? I believe

this to be a distinct possibility. Nothing creates more stress on the human body than living with unresolved guilt.)

2. The chastisements of the Lord are redemptive.

Here we learn an important lesson about the chastisement of the Lord---it is always lovingly redemptive. David put his hand upon David in chastisement to bring him to repentance. The pain and misery brought on by the chastisement soon brought David to the place that he cried out to God in confession.

When he confessed his sin, the chastisement was over. So it will be in your life. No wonder David wrote the blessed hymn celebrating the forgiveness of the Lord. Anything that will lift God's heavy hand of chastisement will bring joy into the life.

III. BECAUSE FORGIVENESS PROTECTS FROM GOD'S JUDGMENT.

There is a difference between judgment and chastisement. Primarily judgment is something that God imposes upon the wicked; those who refuse to confess their sin and seek His forgiveness. Chastisement is the way God relates to those who have a faith relationship with Him. They are the ones who have bent their will to His will and are seeking to walk in His ways.

However when David thought about his sins, he knew that they deserved judgment. So a part of his joy is knowing that those God forgives He protects from judgment.

1. It protects from the temporal judgment for our sins.

The Bible speaks of judgment as something that is temporal—that is, it happens in this life, and that it is eternal—something that happens in the final day. David indicates that the forgiven have protection from both.

“Surely in a flood of great waters they will not come near him. You are my hiding place.” The flood of great waters can be an allusion to the judgment of the Lord that came upon the world in the day of Noah. It was temporal destruction. Everything that man had and man himself was destroyed by the water. Did David’s sin not deserve such a temporal judgment? Doubtlessly! But God protects him from the temporal judgment that his sins deserved. So He does with us.

2. It delivers from the eternal judgment for our sins.

“You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance.” The Old Testament does not divide the temporal from the eternal as clearly as the New Testament so these words could be applied to either. My understanding is that both are included. The plural “songs” of

deliverance suggests that there is more than one deliverance from judgment.

The forgiven experience one in this world, and one in the world to come.

When God forgives a person, He comes under divine protection from judgment. He is saved from the wrath to come.

Wow! Do you not feel like singing a new song to the Lord, a song of gladness and joy!

IV. BECAUSE FORGIVENESS RESTORES FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD.

This may be the best part of the whole thing. The deepest pain we know is the pain that comes from broken fellowship with God. In Psalm 51 David pleaded with God to not take the Holy Spirit away from him, and to restore the joy of His salvation. And He does.

1. It restores the blessed guidance of the Lord.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go: I will guide you with My eye.” A number of faithful scholars believe this to be a promise from David rather than from the Lord. I have always understood it to be a promise from the Lord to the forgiven. Once you are forgiven, the Lord allows you to walk so close to Him that He can communicate with His eye. All of us who are parents know about communicating with your eye. To a sensitive child who has the will to please the parent that is all it takes.

God no longer has to communicate through pain. He can now just look, just nudge us in our spirit, and we will know what He wants us to do. It is the evidence of restored communion with the Lord.

2. It restores the covenant blessings of the Lord.

“Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him.” To trust in the Lord in this case is to receive His forgiveness. It is to obey Him.

“Mercy” is a primary word in the covenant. It is the steadfast, loyal love of the Lord. It is His lovingkindness. These expressions of God’s faithfulness to His covenant literally surround the life of the forgiven. Every time they turn around, they are becoming aware of a fresh experience of God’s mercy.

When you put all four of these together, there is obvious reason to be glad.

In fact if you have experienced God’s forgiveness, you don’t have to try to be joyful and glad. The gladness and joy just naturally fill your heart.

How can I know His forgiveness? Follow the steps of David.

First, acknowledge your transgression.

“I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity have I not hidden.” This is the most difficult step.

Second, confess your transgression, agree with God about them.

“I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord.” This is where you agree with God about the seriousness of what you have done.

Third, receive God’s forgiveness through a prayer of faith.

You might want to make David’s prayer in Psalm 51 your personal prayer. I have many times. God gives forgiveness, but we must receive it.

Fourth, begin to live like a forgiven person—gratefully serve Him.

Do what David did! Begin to share with others how willing God is to forgive, and to bear witness to the joy of being forgiven. “For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when You may be found.”

I want you to invite you to confess your sin to God, and to ask Him for His forgiveness today. Right now!