



Revived: Repentance Brings Fresh Joy in the Lord **Behold Our God! – Read the Bible for Life Series #22**

Psalm 32

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When our family moved to this area about ten years ago, I repeatedly heard an expression that I found very confusing. Sometimes I heard it on voice mail messages that ended with, “Leave me a message and have a blessed day.” Have a blessed day? It sounded to me like they were saying, “Have a blast day.” I was taken back to my childhood in the 1970s when we’d say, “Hey come on guys, let do the slip and slide; it’s a blast. Let’s play Pong; it’s a blast.” I didn’t understand what they were saying.

My wife, who is a much better listener than I am, explained they were not saying “blast” but “bless-ed.” Oh, you say tuh-mey-toh—I say tuh-mah-toh. You say have a “blessed day”—I say “have a bless-ed day.” Now I get it. That makes sense and I’ve even used that as a salutation on my e-mails. It’s something we do—we wish one another a blessed day. We are aware of blessings in our lives as Christians. It’s a category we’re familiar with. We have songs we sing like “Ten thousands reasons for my heart to sing...” or “Count your many blessings, name them one by one...” We like to pile up those blessings.

My favorite holiday is Thanksgiving. At our house we go around the table and have everybody share one thing they’ve been blessed with and some years we go around several times. Often that’s our accounting method for blessings. We number them; we count them one by one. “If I have a long list of blessings, it’s better than having this shorter list of blessings.”

We’re going to be looking at Psalm 32 together. It was written by King David whose life we’ve been following for the last several weeks. He takes a completely different accounting system of blessing. Rather than talking about the accumulative effect of blessings—counting them one by one and piling them up—he looks at the magnitude of the blessing, the degree of the blessing. As he does that, he points to one blessing and says,

“This one far outweighs all the others. You can take all the other blessings in my life and pile them up but this blessing would outweigh them every single time.”

Let’s look at Psalm 32 and note the blessing that David says is greater than all the others. He writes:

- ¹ *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*
- ² *Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*
- ³ *For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*
- ⁴ *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*
- ⁵ *I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,”
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*
- ⁶ *Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.*
- ⁷ *You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. Selah*
- ⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*
- ⁹ *Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.*
- ¹⁰ *Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.*
- ¹¹ *Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*

Let’s pray. God, You are the God from Whom all blessings flow. Father, help us understand more fully this great blessing of forgiveness. What a joy to receive it. What a joy to live in it. What a joy to seek it. God, would You open the eyes of our hearts to see this in Your Word. Holy Spirit, would You do this work in us today as we look at Psalm 32. We pray this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

The great blessing that far outweighs all the others for David is the blessing of forgiveness. God’s forgiveness, he says, is the greatest joy. That’s the theme for this whole

psalm. Being forgiven by God is the greatest source of joy a person could ever have. We're going to walk through this text and see how David brings that out in five movements.

David begins in praise of forgiveness, and then he talks about his pursuit of forgiveness. Or maybe we find out that the pursuit was actually in the opposite direction as God pursues us. Then we hear of David's response to forgiveness in verses six and seven. Then God comes in with a promise from the Forgiver and he closes with coming full circle to David's praise of God as the Forgiver.

1. In Praise of Forgiveness – Psalm 32:1-2

What is David so deliriously happy about here? The first word of the text is "blessed" and we see it again in verse two. "Blessed is the one who has this...Blessed is the man who has this..." That one word literally means "how happy!" The New American Standard translates it, "How blessed..." or the New Living Translation states, "Oh what joy..."

There is great joy in this reality of being forgiven if it's true of you. To emphasize this state of forgiveness, David comes at it from three different angles. He says, "*Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*" Literally "whose sin is carried away." Think about the picture in the Old Testament of the scapegoat. The High Priest would confess the sins of the people, putting his hands on the scapegoat. Then it would be released into the wilderness, never to be seen again. David says, "Blessed is the person for whom their sin in relationship to God is gone, never to be heard of again."

"*Blessed is the one whose...sin is covered.*" Again we think of the Old Testament images of the blood of the lamb on the Day of Atonement that would cover everything. The idea is that God has wrath against human sin and there needs to be something between sinful human beings and a holy God. The blood of this sacrifice would cover you and absorb the wrath of God.

Then the third way he talks about it is, "*Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity...*" Or against whom the Lord imputes no iniquity. It's an accounting term. In other words, blessed are you if God looks at the account of your life and rather than being in the guilty column you're in the not-guilty column because your sin is forgiven.

I want to draw our attention to this image of imputation because the Apostle Paul uses this terminology in his great treatise on the gospel—the book of Romans. Turn to Romans 4. This is where Paul actually quotes these two verses and draws on them to make

a point about how God looks at a person based on his or her faith. Paul makes the point that in the Old Testament, God looked at Abraham and saw his faith and trust in God and counted that as righteousness. Not as a work that Abraham had done but because of his faith, God credited righteousness to him.

Look at Romans 4:5-6: “*And to the one who does not work* [because he just said if you work, you’re given your wages; these aren’t wages but a gift] *but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted* [imputed] *as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works...*” So Paul has looked at these verses and he not only sees the “not counting against” but he also sees the “counting for.”

Then Paul quotes Psalm 32:1-2 in romans 4:7-8:

*“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”*

Paul emphasizes that God is not counting sin when faith is applied to our accounts. We know from the whole story of the Bible—especially the book of Romans—that what God is applying to the account of sinful people is the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the sinless One Who came and lived a perfect sinless life so that everyone who would look to Him in faith would not have their sins counted against them but would have Jesus’ perfect righteousness credited to their account as they trust in Him and His death on the cross as a provision for their sin.

We too can know the joy that David had. The one great blessing that any of us can know is to have our sins forgiven, to not have our sins counted against us but through faith in Jesus to have His perfect righteousness credited to our accounts and have a restored relationship with our Creator.

So my question is do you know that joy? Do you know that blessedness? Have you come to this God Who forgives, Whom we sang about being slow to anger, Whose way is kind, Who is compassionate, Who invites sinners to come to Him? Have you repented of your sin and have you trusted Him? Because whatever else you might have going for you, that would be the greatest blessing you could ever know.

2. In Pursuit of Forgiveness – Psalm 32:3-5

David has learned this and he recounts it here in Psalm 32. This principle that forgiveness is the greatest joy is something he's learned by experience and we see how he eventually pursued forgiveness in verses three through five. David did not seek forgiveness initially. Verses three and four are the "before"; verse five is the "after." Or we could say verses three and four is what not to do; verse five is the what to do. It's the agony of silence and the thrill of forgiveness.

Initially David wasn't seeking forgiveness. He was silent but look at his experience in verses three and four as he kept silent.

*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

David felt as if his bones were wasting away. There was groaning all day long—day and night. Why? Because God's hand was heavy on him. David had the burden of his sin affecting him physically. Sin is vividly pictured in the classic, *Pilgrim's Progress*, as we see Christian with a huge burden on his back from which he seeks relief. God uses that burden to turn us toward Him because we were not created to withstand the burden of our own sin. In God's grace, He wants to provide that relief. God is the One pursuing us—the One applying corrective grace and drawing us toward Himself.

David says his strength was dried up. He had had enough. That was the agony of silence. In Psalm 51 (which by the way can be seen as a companion to Psalm 32), David very clearly talks about the experience of his repentance after his sin with and against Bathsheba and Uriah and the whole nation. In some ways Psalm 32 is an answer to the prayer he made in Psalm 51:12 when he asked God to restore the joy of his salvation. In Psalm 32, we see that joy of his salvation restored but first he's recounting the agony that came before the joy. If Psalm 32 was written in connection with that whole saga, then there may have been a year between the sin and the repentance. That was really a lousy year for David. His strength was dried up; he groaned all day long. God's hand was heavy on him until he admitted his guilt in verse five. Look how he did that.

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;*

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*

David says, "I acknowledged my sin. I didn't try to cover it up any more." We learned in previous messages how he tried to cover it up but now he finally says, "I'm not going to try to cover it up any longer. I'm going to own up to my sin." Look at how he owns up to his sin. Notice three different words for sin—the same three that are used in the first two verses. They round out the full ugliness of our rebellion against God. "My sin...my iniquity...my transgressions..."

- The idea of **sin** is to miss the mark. But the picture is not missing the mark or target because I was really trying hard to hit it and I just got in the outer ring. It was because I was aiming in the wrong direction.
- The idea of **transgression** is crossing a line; willfully breaking one of God's commandments.
- **Iniquity** is the idea of twistedness or perversion.

David uses all three of these terms and no longer tries to cover up his sin and all its ugly details. He says, "God, it was me. I did it. I am the man. That was me." In his pride, he wanted to avoid the pain of owning up to his sin but he found that the pain of hiding it was even greater. When Nathan came to him and said, "You are the man," David owned up to his sin. Do we own up to our sin?

This Psalm is designed to draw us toward God. I was reminded of the verse in Jonah 2:8: "*Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs*" (NIV). When we cling to the idol of our own pride and of our own self-justification, then we forfeit the grace that God desires to freely give us.

When David owned his own sin that released God's grace to him. At the end of verse five he says, "*I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.*" That was David's pursuit of forgiveness; all the while God was pursuing him.

3. In Response to Forgiveness – Psalm 32:6-7

In response to that forgiveness, David actually made a promise. Look at Psalm 51:13. After he asks God to restore the joy of his salvation (which we see in Psalm 32), he says, "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you."

Well guess what? David **is** teaching transgressors God's way—he's teaching you and me. He's written this psalm to help us understand that we can come to God and that God does forgive. This is the answer to that promise—the fulfillment of that vow—in Psalm 51.

Notice that verse six is addressed to God's people: "*Therefore* [because God is this way] *let everyone who is godly...*" Now aren't you glad he doesn't say everyone who is sinless? It doesn't say everyone who is sinless because we know that even as God's people, even those who have been redeemed in Christ, we still stumble and sin willfully in many ways. But being godly means that we're following hard after God. That we're religious in the best sense of the word. That we're desiring a relationship with God. That we're serious about our relationship with Him. So this is addressed to everyone who is "godly."

In verse six, David says, "*Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.*" Offer a specific kind of prayer—a prayer of confession. A prayer of confessing our sins to God at a time when He may be found. This is very reminiscent of Psalm 95 which the writer to the Hebrews quotes in both chapters three and four. "Today if you hear God's voice—today is the day of salvation—don't harden your heart. Offer a prayer of confession in a day when God may be found."

If you do this, you can know two things. First, the assurance of God's pardon which has two aspects in this verse. In Psalm 32:6, "*surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.*" This reminds us of the flood in Genesis—God's judgment on the ungodly. Surely there won't be judgment for those who confess their sin.

Then in verse seven, he says, "*You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.*" When we repent, we will know God as our hiding place. We will be preserved from trouble by Him. We will be surrounded with shouts of deliverance. Do you and I repent like this?

Martin Luther said in the first of his 95 Theses that "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ...willed that the whole life of believers should be repentance." Repentance brings us into relationship with God but repentance ought to characterize our relationship with God in an on-going basis.

What does repentance look like? I think there are four steps in the process of repentance in this passage. We've seen them already but let's identify them.

The first step in repentance is a deep sorrow for sin. In 2 Corinthians 7, Paul talks about the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow. Worldly sorrow doesn't go anywhere; it's selfish. Godly sorrow produces repentance.

Don Whitney has written a book entitled *Ten Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual Health*. In the “Do You Grieve Over Sin?” chapter, he discusses worldly types of sorrow—ways you and I might be sorry after we sin that is not the kind of godly sorrow that leads to repentance.

- We might be sorrowful in a **self-pitying** way. Maybe we lost something; we forfeited something because of the sin. Because of our actions now, we don’t get to do this or we feel bad about that.
- Another worldly type of sorrow is **self-disappointment**: “I messed up again. I didn’t meet my own standard. I didn’t meet the standard of my family. I didn’t meet the standard of my church or school or job.” It’s a sorrow based on self-disappointment.
- Or a sorrow based on a **self-preserving** fear of God and His wrath. Now fearing God’s wrath is not necessarily a bad thing; we’re told to flee the wrath to come. But if it’s only a self-preservation, a sort of eternal insurance type of situation that doesn’t include a relationship with the God I’ve offended, then it’s not a godly kind of sorrow.

We need to have a deep sorrow for our sin.

Then the second part of repentance is confession. I would encourage us that when we confess our sin that it ought to be specific and we ought to use biblical terms. I appreciated David Sunday’s prayer of intercession for us as God’s people. He used very specific, biblical categories. He confessed our sin of sloth for instance—sin as a wasting of time.

4. A Promise From the Forgiver – Psalm 32:8-10

This step in this process of repentance is receiving God’s forgiveness. Sometimes we have this natural tendency to think, “Well, I have to do something. I’ve asked God for forgiveness. He can’t just let me off the hook. I’ve got to make it up to Him.” One of the big themes running through this passage is that of the assurance of pardon that we have from God when we turn to Him. He will forgive us—freely. We come to Him just as we are. We don’t have to clean ourselves up before we come to Him and ask forgiveness. That takes faith. God has to grow our faith in Him as a forgiving, compassionate God.

This fourth step in the process includes being open to God’s wisdom through His Word—the promise from the Forgiver. God has much wisdom for us in His Word. In fact in

verse eight, someone is now speaking in the first person. It's God and He's saying to His children:

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

Listen to how tender this is—with His eye upon us. But as wonderful as the gift of forgiveness is, God would rather that we had never offended Him in the first place. God interjects a warning here with a promise to lead His people if we will listen to Him and to His Word. God says, “*Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.*”

In other words, “Listen to my Word. I have instruction for you. I have teaching for you. I have good counsel for you. If you follow this, you won't have to be in this situation where your bones are wasting away because of unconfessed sin. So listen to me and don't be like an animal that has no reason; that can't understand what's going on so I have to guide and direct it. Don't make it so I have to use difficult circumstances in your life to direct you back to the right path. Listen to Me.”

David says in verse ten: “*Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.*” Avoid those sorrows.

As we're thinking about people we might invite to Exploring Christianity, I find this verse—“*many are the sorrows of the wicked* [or of the world]”—helpful because I think sometimes we can fall into the trap that Asaph fell into in Psalm 73 when he thought the world had it easy and that life was carefree. Maybe you're thinking of someone you might invite to Exploring Christianity but you think, “Their life is pretty good; I'm not sure they would see the need.” I think this verse reminds us that folks who don't have a relationship with the living God have many sorrows, whether we can see them or not. And we, because of the gospel, have the antidote to their sorrows. We have the balm to their hurt. We have the refreshment they need. “*Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.*”

5. In Praise of the Forgiver – Psalm 32:11

David ends in some ways where he began—he's come full circle. He began praising the gift of forgiveness. What a wonderful thing. How blessed—how happy I am. He walks

us through this gift and now praises the Giver of the gift—he worships the God Who provides his forgiveness. He says, “*Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!*” Notice that he’s gone from wasting away in his silent groaning to shouts of joy. Songs of joy. It’s the same word that was used earlier in the text in verse seven—these shouts were songs of deliverance. Literally a “ringing cry.” Pastor Huff and I were wondering how it would inform our worship, knowing that the songs in the songbook of the Bible are categorized as shouts of joy and ringing cries of joy. This is the experience of the one who knows the blessing that is beyond all other blessings; to know that your sins are forgiven by a just and holy God.

As we wrap this up, I want us to think about two categories. We probably fall into both of these from time to time but you may be in one or the other of these right now. The first is this: Those who don’t take sin seriously. The questions we need to ask are, “Do I take sin seriously? Do I struggle with sin when there is unconfessed sin in my life like David did here? Or can I easily rationalize my sin? Can I easily calm my conscience and sort of get away with it without confessing it to God? Do I take sin seriously because God does?”

You may be in that camp this morning or you may be in the camp that struggles with the fact that God would actually forgive you for what you’ve done. If that’s you, you need the assurance of God’s pardon that Psalm 32 offers. There’s no greater blessing than to be forgiven. Be assured that God does forgive those who come to Him in repentance and faith. He wants to calm your fears and anxieties. The heavy hand that you feel on you is God leading you to repentance.

Do you feel blessed? If you answered yes, then why?

- Do you feel blessed because you can pay your bills? That’s a blessing.
- Do you feel blessed because you have a strong marriage? That’s a blessing.
- Do you feel blessed because your kids are turning out pretty good? That’s a blessing.

But these don’t compare to the blessing of knowing your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ.

Or did you answer, “No, I don’t feel all that blessed.” Is it because you can’t pay all your bills? Is it because your marriage isn’t what you had hoped it would be? Or maybe you’re single and wish you were married. Maybe your kids aren’t turning out like you wanted them to. Even so, there is no greater joy—there is no greater blessing—that any

person could know in the universe than to know that the God Who created you has received you through Jesus Christ; that your sins are forgiven through faith in Him. There is no greater blessing—there is no greater joy—than knowing that your sins are forgiven.

Let's pray. God, I pray that You would strengthen our faith this morning. In the largeness of Your compassion and grace, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. Teach us that we can come to You in our time of need and find mercy and grace. Thank You for that reality.

I pray for anyone in this room who does not know Your forgiveness; someone who may not know what it means to first repent and to trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. Help them see Jesus as the great provision for their sins and their need to turn to Him, admitting their guilt, admitting their rebellion. Help them look to Jesus as their perfect righteousness, the provision for their sin.

And God I would pray that You would keep us from sin; that we would not have to be like an animal whom You would have to curb and redirect but that we would seek to live righteously; that we would listen to Your instruction; that we would hear Your teaching and that we would obey. I pray that You would be glorified in us. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' Name. Amen.

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