PSALM 32: The Joy of Forgiveness

Last week we looked at Psalm 51, David’s confession of his sins to God. We looked at David’s sin and how he responded when confronted about it by Nathan the prophet. What was David’s response? He was convicted in his heart that he had sinned. He confessed it and repented of it. We noted as we looked at David’s prayer that in his confession he had a right view of sin, of his sins; a right view of God, of God’s holiness, His love and His justice; and that he had a right view of himself (prone to sin, in need of God’s help and protection). David took full responsibility for his actions. He knew he was guilty and deserved God’s judgment. In fact there was a consequence for David’s sin which Nathan informed David of. David didn’t try to justify what he had done or make excuses or blame others. He confessed his sin to God, he took ownership of it and he appealed to God for mercy. He didn’t appeal to God’s justice because he knew he deserved death for what he had done. But he appealed to God’s mercy and asked to be forgiven, cleansed, and restored. He asked God to change his heart. His greatest fear was that God would abandon him and he didn’t want that. He had seen what had happened to King Saul and David didn’t want to go down that path. He longed for that sweet fellowship he had once enjoyed with God. Despite his personal failure, David desired spiritual restoration and he wanted to be useful to God. So last week as we looked at Psalm 51, the emphasis was on David’s confession of his sins.

Psalm 32, which we will be looking at this morning is a companion psalm to Psalm 51. They go hand in hand. Psalm 32 was most likely written about the same time or shortly after Psalm 51. First John 1:9 says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So last week we saw where David confessed his sins and this week we’re going to focus on the follow up to that where God was indeed faithful and forgave David of his sins. We’re going to hear in David’s own words what he went through leading up to and then following his confession. I see Psalm 32 as the epilogue to Psalm 51.

Before we get into the text let me make an important point here. When we came to Christ, when we first believed by faith, trusted Christ, asked God to save us, we were forgiven of our sins, right? In fact we know that when Jesus died on the cross He paid for all of our sins, past, present and future. “Once for all, the just for the unjust” (1 Peter 1:18); “God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8); “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom 8:1); First John 2:12 says, “I am writing to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for His name’s sake.” In that sense we have already been forgiven of our sins, right? That was taken care of at the cross so that we are no longer under the penalty of our sin. So we don’t need to confess our sins in order to somehow maintain our salvation. Our salvation is secure in Christ and we have been sealed by the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13). Nonetheless, we are instructed to confess our sins (1 John 1:9, James 5:16). As believers we confess our sins – but why? So that our fellowship with God, which has been broken as a result of our sin, can be restored and all the benefits that go with that. Unconfessed sin in our lives as believers hinders our prayer life, renders our service for God to be ineffective or less effective, robs us of our joy, stunts our spiritual growth, hurts our witness, etc. So, we won’t lose our salvation, not if we’re truly saved, but we will miss out on many blessings that God intends for us to enjoy here and now.

READ Title to Psalm 32

A maskil is simply a poem intended to instruct or guide (13 of these are identified specifically in the Psalms). The idea then is to reflect on what truths you have been told. So David is instructing us. If you will recall in Psalm 51 and verse 13 David desired to be forgiven, cleansed and restored so that he could be used by God and specifically he wanted to “teach sinners (“transgressors”) God’s ways so that they would turn back to God. And that is exactly what he is doing in this psalm, teaching us from his own experience so that we can confess, repent and be restored.

READ Psalm 32:1-4

A person who is forgiven by God, David says is blessed. That word “blessed” is the Hebrew word *Esher* and connotes the state of prosperity or happiness which results when God bestows His favor on us.

Three words for sin, sin in general: (1) “transgression” which is rebellion against what God has said to do or not to do; (2) “sin” which is failure, missing the mark (Rom 3:23); “iniquity” which is being crooked or perverted.

Three words in these verses describe what God does by His mercy and grace for sinners, which Paul quotes in Romans 4: (1) “forgiven” means that your sin, your transgressions have been taken away, removed. Psalm 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far does He remove our transgressions from us”; (2) “covered” is another word here. The idea here is to be concealed or blotted out (Ps 51:9 “blot out my iniquities”; (3) “counts no iniquity” our sins are not counted against us, God doesn’t hold us accountable, it’s already been dealt with by Jesus’ death on the cross.

Take a look at that last phrase in v 2 “in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Remember last week the definition of confession – we agree with God about our sin. We see our sin for what it truly is, the way God sees it. No deceit, just honesty with God. Did you know that Satan is the master of deception? Second Corinthians 11 tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. He fools people into believing they’re going to receive some positive benefit from their sin; or that their sin is not a big deal; or that it doesn’t hurt anybody; or somehow we owe this to ourselves, we deserve to have this.

So in v 1-2 David speaks from his own experience that to confess your sins honestly before God and to be forgiven, cleansed and restored brings with it God’s blessing. The burden is lifted, the joy is restored. But in v 3-4 David remembers that terrible time prior to his confession. David vividly relates for us what he experienced after committing his sins and before he finally confessed them to God. Most scholars believe that this was a period of about one year. Notice David’s description…“My bones wasted away” is a reference to David becoming physically ill. “My groanings all day long” refer to his emotional state. He felt mental anguish. In v 4 David could feel God’s hand of judgment upon him – “Your hand was heavy upon me.” David was out of fellowship with God and the result was that God was working on David, chastening him thru the Holy Spirit in order to draw David back to Him. But for a while David was in denial and hid his sins. For a year or so he did not deal with his sins. As a result he felt a deep sense of guilt. He was miserable. He says, “My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” He was in a spiritual wasteland, a drought.

What I want you to see from v 3-4 is that David’s unconfessed sins adversely impacted the quality of his life – in all areas. It didn’t matter that he was the king. His life was a mess. He struggled. He wasn’t happy or fulfilled. For a full year God allowed David to go thru all that until God knew that David was ready to deal with his sin. And then God sent Nathan.

READ Psalm 32:5

This is basically Psalm 51 in a nutshell. Again David uses those same three words for sin he used in v 1-2 but this time he attaches them to himself personally: “my sin,” “my iniquity,” “my transgressions.” There is this sense of release of the heavy burden of sin that he has been carrying around for too long. “I confessed my sin to You and You forgave my sin.”

And now David begins to teach us what he learned from this experience…

READ Psalm 32:6-7

Verse 6 sounds like a warning. David seems to imply that we need to deal with our unconfessed sin as soon as possible. When David says, “let everyone who is godly offer prayer,” in context, means to offer a prayer of confession. And he says we need to do this “when You may be found.” The NET Bible says, “while there is a window of opportunity.” So what’s wrong with saying, “I’m just going to sew my wild oats for a while and then when I’m ready, somewhere down the road, I’ll confess my sin and get right with God”? If that’s how you view your sin then Satan has you deceived. That is not a godly attitude toward sin or to the holiness of God. God’s people ought not to act presumptuously when it comes to the matter of forgiveness. If you have sin in your life and you haven’t dealt with it, the warning here is you better get on with it. You can’t assume that you’ll do it later because there may not be a later. You can’t assume things will always be the same as they are right now because in a heartbeat everything can change. Confess your sin to God, repent of it, seek forgiveness “while He may be found.” It is a very dangerous thing for a believer to continue to resist the Holy Spirit. The last phrase of v 6 tells us why – “surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him.” If I may use an engineering analogy – there was a time when the dam could be fixed. You could see stress cracks and maybe some small leaks. The signs of trouble were there. But if you wait too long and the dam breaks, it’s too late. Don’t wait. Don’t assume you will always have the time or even the desire to confess your sin and get right. The time to do that, to do business with God in the area of that besetting sin in your life is right now. I believe this is at the heart of what David is saying. And David teaches us how to deal with our sin whenever we go before God…

“Lord, I confess my sin, I acknowledge my weakness, I realize that I cannot battle this on my own. I need Your help, God.” READ Psalm 32:7 again. “I can’t do it alone. I need You. You are my protector and deliverer.” It takes more than just my personal resolve to do better. I need Your intervention in my life.

David, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit speaks the words of God Himself to us…READ Psalm 32:8-11

God says I will guide you and show you the way to go. Don’t be like a stubborn mule or horse that has to be physically forced in order to obey. No! Be teachable, moldable, obedient. Even if you ARE a believer, if you’re living a life of sin, your wickedness will bring you sorrow. One who has confessed, been forgiven and trusts in the Lord and lives a righteous life will have a heart filled with joy.

Final application, let’s be honest, we all sin. Everyone in here sins. We must know how to deal with our sin and where to go, whether we sin intentionally or unintentionally. We know where to find forgiveness, don’t we? Seek the Lord while He may be found, do it right now. And when we go before the Lord, honestly, repentant, humble, and we confess our sin and ask His forgiveness… Then what? God forgives us. And we need to be able to forgive ourselves as well. Now there may be physical consequences for your sin and if there are you will need to deal with those. Your sin may have hurt someone else and if so you will need to go to them and ask them to forgive you. But if we confess our sin to God, we can be assured that He will forgive us. Our fellowship with Him will be restored and with it the joy of our salvation.

That should make you want to sing. So let’s do that now.