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Psalm 32

The Blessed Joy of Repentance and Forgiveness

I was in middle school - in my 6th grade P.E. class. We were all sprawled across the gym floor, sitting on the ground, spread apart from each other, to take a P.E. test. It was my first ever P.E. test, and I didn't study for it at all. I was a straight A student up to that point, and, come on... it's P.E., right? Why study? But there I was, sitting on that grimy floor in a old, dimly-lit gym, staring at this test paper, and I realized: I didn't know a single answer to any of the questions! I panicked. But then, I remembered - for some reason, the study guide that I had neglected to actually study was still sitting in my jacket pocket. So I looked around and slyly snuck that study guide out of my pocket and gleefully copied all of the answers on to my test paper. When I was done, I snuck it back into my pocket, and then looked up - only to find the gym teacher - my large, imposing football coach - looming over me. He asked, "What was that in your hand just now?" Immediately, I panicked. Fear gripped my heart. I was guilty, I was in trouble, I knew it - and worst of all, I was caught. And to make matters worse, instead of coming clean with my sin, I added to my transgressions by *lying about it*. I could tell my coach didn't buy it, but he just, "Ok..." with a voice filled with disappointment, and walked away.

But I didn't feel relief. My heart felt like lead, weighed down with guilt and shame. I was wrong, and I knew it; I had blown it. I was a cheater and a liar. I felt overwhelmed guilt, overwhelmed with shame and embarrassment. I was terrified to tell my coach, terrified to tell my parents, even my friends. I was terrified that this would ruin my permanent record, end with me getting suspended or worse. But I knew that there was no escaping it - I knew that God already knew about my sin, whether I lied about it or not. I sat there, my heart pounding, and the guilt just ate me up; I knew I couldn't just keep silent or try and get away with it. So, eventually, I got up and went and confessed the truth to my coach - and, of course, he already knew exactly what I had done. But he also knew that I claimed to be a Christian, and he was a Christian, too, so he wanted to give me a chance to come clean on my own. And amazingly, he forgave me! Yes, I got a zero on the test, as I should have (which was a very valuable; I never cheated again) - but he didn't write me up, didn't send me to the principal's office, didn't have it put on my permanent record, no suspension or alternative school, which I deserved. Needless to say, I was relieved!

But perhaps the most relieving part was that my coach looked at me and *forgave me*. He didn't hold it against me, either in class, on the football field, or in our relationship. He didn't give me what I deserved - he showed me grace. Immediately, I felt relief - no longer sick to my stomach with hiding what I had done and lying about it; no longer gripped with fear; and relieved to have been forgiven!

There is nothing like the joy and relief of confessing our sin and truly being forgiven. We experience this when we're forgiven by other people, who are also sinners like us - but it is an even greater relief, and even greater joy and blessing to be forgiven by the righteous, holy God! That's what **Psalm 32** is all about: the blessed joy of *forgiveness from God*.

Whatever your situation is, whatever baggage you might have brought in here today with you, it's true for every single one of us that *we are sinners*. We all know what it means to do wrong, to purposefully do the wrong thing, to sin against God and other people, even those whom we love. We all know what it feels to have our conscience blaring inside of our hearts like a alarm bell or police siren, screaming out accusations against ourselves. And we all *yearn* to feel the relief of true forgiveness, grace, and reconciliation, don't we?

So what do we do? We turn to the Lord, who alone can deal with our sin and guilt; we *repent*. And **Psalm 32** gives us a *beautiful picture* of true, godly repentance and the incredible blessing of experiencing forgiveness from God! David starts off this Psalm by joyfully proclaiming the joy and blessing of the one who is truly forgiven of all sin and declared righteous by the Lord! But this blessing only comes to the one who truly repents and turns to God. The rest of the Psalm makes that clear. David shares his own experience of being crushed by guilt for his secret, unrepentant sin; then, he tells us how he finally turned to the Lord, confessed His sin, and experienced the incredible blessing of *complete forgiveness* for his sins! And then he turns to exhorting us to follow his lead, confessing, repenting, and then obeying the Lord, willingly and eagerly. And finally, he concludes by once again proclaiming the incredible blessing and joy of forgiveness and righteousness that everyone who turns to the Lord and trusts in Him will experience.

In other words, this Psalm gives us a bit of a roadmap for what repentance looks like and the incredible blessing of forgiveness that it leads us to. So that's exactly what I want us to see today: a biblical model for *why we need to repent, how to repent, and the wonderful blessing and joy that repentance leads us to*.

So first, we see that...

I. Repentance is Prompted by the Anguish of Conviction over our Sin (vv. 3-4)

David begins the Psalm by proclaiming the blessed joy of being forgiven, in verses 102. But at the end of verse two, we read, “..and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” In other words, the one who is “blessed” to receive forgiveness is the one who does not hide, cover up, or justify his own sin, but rather turns to the Lord and confesses it in repentance. David then encourages us to turn to the Lord by sharing his own personal experience with us.

And his account begins with his experience of the *anguish* of conviction he felt for his hidden, unrepentant sin. We read, in verses 3-4: “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.” He’s describing here the inner turmoil of guilt and shame for his sin. He doesn’t deal with this sin - he “kept silent.” He just hides his sin away, trying to keep it hidden and private in his heart. But that only makes the conviction he feels worse; his guilt and shame doesn’t go away, it just festers and ferments inside his heart, making him feel worse, so that he can say, “my bones wasted away through my groaning.” He knows he’s guilty; his conscience is screaming at him on the inside. His inner turmoil doesn’t just get worse, but it persists “all day long” and “day and night” - it won’t go away. It crushes him, zapping away his strength, energy, and motivation, for his “strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” I’m from Alabama, and trust, if you’re outside all day, baking in the humid, 95 degree summer sun, it takes all of your strength away, leaving you feeling like you can’t move a muscle. That’s how David’s unconfessed, unrepentant sin left him feeling. What we see here is the absolutely crushing, debilitating anguish we feel inside our hearts when we *are living in sin and refuse to turn from it*. Repentance simply means to *turn* - to turn *away* from our sin, to acknowledge our wickedness and guilt, and to let go of it by confessing our sin to the Lord, turning to the Lord with our sin.

I know I’m not the only one here today that has embarrassing stories of sin, failure, and mistakes from my past. In fact, I know with certainty that I’m not the only one here today who knows what it feels like to be wracked with guilt, overwhelmed with shame, and just be eaten up with, even to *beat yourself up* because of your sin. Maybe you still wrestle with shameful memories and feelings of guilt for sins you committed long, long ago. Maybe you’re wracked

guilt for sins you've committed this week. Maybe you're being eaten alive inside because of guilt and conviction over secret sin that you're hiding, keeping it in the dark because of your shame and fear. But the question is: *what do you do with all that guilt and shame?* When you're convicted of your sin and know that you're in the wrong - what do you do about it? How do you deal with it? That's a question that each and every one of us has to answer. In fact, each of us *does* answer that question, one way or another, every single day. And the way we answer this question reveals what we're putting our trust in; it reveals what we truly believe about the gospel of Christ.

When conviction for sin comes, what do we do? Well, we might try and cover it up. YOU could hide it, try and pretend like it didn't happen, try to fool yourself and others. But that won't work; God knows, He will not be fooled. We might try to justify ourself, to excuse and explain away our sin, to try and make it out to not be so bad, or maybe not bad at all. BUt no, this won't work either. All this will do is make us self-righteous hypocrites, who pretend like we have it all together on the outside, all the while we're hiding our sins and failures away and consumed with fear, guilt, and shame.

These are the responses of unbelief, not repentance. If we continue in sin, without acknowledging or repenting from it, even hiding it, excusing, or justifying it, then *our hearts are being hardened by unbelief*. We see this in *1 John 1:vv.6, 8, and 10*: "If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.... If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us... If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us." If you regularly live in the darkness, holding on to unrepentant sin, either hiding it away, refusing to confess and turn from it, or even trying to justify and excuse your sin, saying your without sin - watch out, because this might mean that you don't know the Lord. And the most dangerous place to be is when you finally *stop* feeling the anguish of conviction David tells us about here; when we no longer feel conviction for our unrepentant sin, it means our hearts are being hardened, our consciences seared. Therefore, we must heed the warning of *Heb. 3:12*, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God."

But if we are God's children, through faith in Christ, then *He will not let you go*. There are times when even true believers stray away from God, backsliding into a lifestyle of unrepentant sin. But God loves His children so much that He chases after us - He even loves us

enough to send discipline into our lives, in order to lead us to repentance. That's exactly why David says here that this turmoil and affliction He felt was from God; He says in verse 4, "For day and night *your hand was heavy upon me.*" He brings such discipline upon us, allows us to feel such anguish and inner turmoil over our sin, guilt, and shame, in order that we might fall under *godly conviction*, leading us back to Him, in repentance.

That's the only right response to the anguish of conviction - we must *repent*.

II. Repentance Brings the Blessing of Forgiveness for our Sin (vv. 1-2, 5-7)

David continues the story of his own experience in verse 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." David's anguish of guilt was finally relieved when he finally turned to the Lord and *confessed his sin!*

That's the first step of true repentance: turning away from our sin and acknowledging our sin, guilt, and shame to God. We must come before the Lord and confess ourselves as sinners - and we must confess our specific sins. When we're convicted of particular, specific sins in our life, we can't shove it down, we can't hide it, we can't cover it up, justify or excuse it - we must bring it to the Lord, confess our specific transgressions, and acknowledge them as wicked and sinful. We acknowledge our iniquity, that we deserve God's punishment and wrath, and that there is nothing we can do to justify, cover up, or atone for our own sins. We repent by recognizing our need for God's mercy and grace.

And when we confess our sins to the Lord and ask Him for forgiveness, here's the amazing part - we can actually receive forgiveness! David covered up his sin for a while, so that the Lord disciplined him and his guilt ate him up inside; but as soon as he turned back to God and confessed his sin, he says, "you forgave the iniquity of my sin." And this wasn't just true for David; the same is true for anyone who repents, confesses, and trusts God. David exhorts us to follow his example, saying, "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 will not reach Him" (v.6). Now, this doesn't mean that there's a time when we seek God and won't find him, or that we have to wait for the right time of the day. Rather, I think the end of verse 6, and verse 7, make it clear that the "great weather" and "trouble" that we need protection from are the waters of God's wrath and judgment. We know that day is coming for everyone, when we die, or when Christ

returns. Therefore, we must seek God and repent *before it's too late, while we still can*, that we might experience the same forgiveness and salvation that David did. And whoever turns to God, confessing our sin and trusting in Him for salvation, will surely be saved! As God promises this in *1 John 1:9*: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

This is no light, trivial thing. Look back at verses 1-2, where David proclaims just how *blessed* someone is when God forgives them: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven” (v.1a). This means the righteous, holy, just God is looking on our wicked sins, which we committed against Him, and He *removes our sin and guilt from us!* “Blessed is the one... whose sin is covered” (v.1b). The word here for “covered” is the same word for “atonement.” True forgiveness means that our sins have been atoned for, our sin debt paid, so that we are no longer considered sinners but are declared innocent and righteous before God, even being reconciled to Him! David continues: “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity” (v. 2a). True forgiveness means God doesn't “count our iniquities” against us anymore; he throws away the record of our sin, no longer accuses us, condemns us, or holds us accountable for any of the wrongs we've ever done. When we confess our sin and acknowledge just how guilty we are, we can receive the blessing of being *completely forgiven*, having our guilt and condemnation taken away and being *justified* by the Holy God, the ultimate Judge!

And this is possible for us because of what Jesus Christ has done. Paul quotes these verses in Rom. 4:5-8 and tells us that here, in Psalm 32, David “speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works,” for “to the one who does not work but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.”

True confession of our sin acknowledges that we deserve God's wrath, and that *there is nothing we can do to cover up or justify our sin; no amount of good works we can do to save ourselves or clear our sin debt against God!* But repentance doesn't stop there: we confess our sins and turn to Christ, believing that Jesus lived a perfect life in our place, died on the cross as a sacrifice to atone for our sins, paying the penalty for them, and rose again, showing that God accepted the sacrifice! Whoever believes in Christ will be forgiven and declared righteous, simply by trusting in the grace of God in Christ!

So what do you do when it comes to the end of the day, and it suddenly hits you that you've been a terrible parent today, or a terrible spouse, and you're convicted for yelling in anger

and being selfish toward you kids, or your wife, your husband? What do you do when you wake up in the morning, and you sit down to read your Bible and pray, and you're hit with a fresh wave of guilt as you remember that you got drunk last night; or that you were looking at that thing on the computer that you know weren't supposed to; that you gave yourself over to gluttony, gossip, lust, or selfishness once again, even though you promised God you wouldn't do it again; what do you do?

Don't try to atone for your sin; don't try to beat yourself up enough or do enough good works before you think God will let you come back into His presence, or until you feel comfortable coming back to church. Confess your sins *to the Lord*; turn to Him! But don't repent by saying, "God, I'm sorry, I promise to do better next time." That's skips the most crucial step of repentance: we must *turn away from sin and turn to Christ*.

Turn to Christ in faith and believe the gospel. Ask the Lord to forgive you *because of what Christ has done*. "Lord, I have sinned against you. I know that I deserve your wrath. But I believe the gospel; please forgive me because of Christ's life, death, and resurrection was a sufficient sacrifice in my place!"

And then: believe that *God really has forgiven you!* In that moment, at the end of the day, or in the morning before the Lord, and you feel crushed by guilt, simply confess your sin to the Lord, ask Him to forgive you, and believe that you really are forgiven of every transgression, that all your sin is covered over and atoned for, and that the Lord doesn't count any iniquity or sin against you any more - all because of what Christ has done! Trust in the grace of Christ, and believe that no matter how much guilt and shame you feel like you deserve, Christ has taken it all away and declared you *righteous!* Simply rejoice in the blessing of forgiveness!

Which leads us to our final point...

III. Repentance Leads to Willful Obedience and Joyful Praise (vv. 8-11)

Verses 8-11 shows us the final step that godly repentance leads us to: *joyful, willful obedience to God*.

Now, verse 8 could either be David still speaking, or God speaking to David - and therefore, us. The text doesn't specify, but I *think* it's best to see this as God speaking - and giving a promise to those who turn and trust in Him. He promises us, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye on you." promising us to

personally instruct, teach, and counsel us to obey His will. And then, He gives us an exhortation to *willfully* come near and obey God's commandments, in v.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." A horse or mule doesn't naturally obey; it has to be trained. A horse "without understanding" doesn't go where you want it to unless you put a bit in its mouth and force its head from side to side, showing it where to go. But the Lord tells us here to *willingly follow and obey Him*; and He even promises that He will teach, instruct, and show us the way to go, helping us to obey Him. That's the final step of repentance: we turn from sin, turn to the cross in faith, and then turn to *sin no more and positively obey God!*

And the final two verses make clear that this isn't obedience out of begrudging compliance or even of fearful dread: it's obedience motivated by *eager joy!* Those who disobey God and live in unrepentant sin experience "many.... Sorrows" and eventually face God's judgment. But those who "trust in the LORD" are "surrounded by steadfast love" and declared "righteous!" The blessing of forgiveness we receive in Christ leads us to "be glad," "rejoice," and "shout for joy!" We have been saved purely by grace through faith in Christ! We have been forgiven of all our sins! We who are guilty sinners have been declared righteous and reconciled to God! We who deserve Hell are headed to Heaven! What greater relief, blessing, and joy is there than that? When we repent and trust in the Lord, we receive such gracious forgiveness that it naturally leads us to *worship God!* The final step of repentance leads us to trust God and follow Him in willful, joyful obedience!

The experience of forgiveness by grace doesn't give us license to sin or make us care less about it. "Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!" (Rom. 6:1). On the contrary, *grace is our greatest motivation for obedience!* We do not obey God in order to *be saved* or to *be forgiven*; we don't obey to try and get on God's good side, so that He will finally like us and we'll earn His favor. No, Christ has already done that for us! If you're trusting in Christ, you're already on God's good side, you have His steadfast love and favor surrounding you, He is with you with His loving eye upon you, and He has already forgiven you completely and declared you righteous, purely by grace! We obey *because we have been saved! Because we've been shown such glorious grace, and are now free to obey, because God promises to help us do so!* When we experience forgiveness by grace through faith in Christ, it fills us with such incredible joy and worship that it motivates us to obey God, whom we trust!

So when we truly repent, the final step is asking, “What do I need to do to make sure I don’t fall back into that sin I just confessed to the Lord? What do I need to do differently in my life to better obey my gracious Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?” That’s where repentant faith leads: to a life of willful obedience and joyful praise and worship of our Lord!

Conclusion

So let’s review the model of repentance we see here:

We’re convicted of our sin, so we *repent*. But we don’t repent by turning from sin and turning to obedience - at least, not yet; as we saw, we first confess our sins and turn to *the cross*, trusting Christ’s grace to forgive us! We believe God’s promise that the grace of Christ *really is sufficient to cover up, take away, and forgive all of our sins!* And *then* we turn to joyful, willful obedience to God!

Brothers and Sisters, let us be quick to confess our sins to the Lord and receive the blessing and joy of forgiveness by grace through faith in Christ! Let us repent and turn to the Lord daily, for every sin that He convicts us of! Let us turn to the cross in faith, and let us respond with joyful, willing obedience in all things!

And if you’re not a believer, then this same repentance is the way you *become* a Christian. It’s as simple as it sounds: don’t try to cover up, ignore, justify, or fix your own sin. Just bring it to the Lord. Confess your sins to God; ask Him to forgive you. Turn to the cross of Christ, and believe that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection are sufficient to forgive and save you! Then, follow Christ in obedience - not in order to be saved, but because we’re saved! And the first step of obedience for you is to make your faith public in baptism, then to join a gospel preaching church. If you have any questions about this, or about baptism or church membership, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.