

PSALM 32 OH, FOR JOY!

As we read through the Old Testament this year, we are reading in the Psalms on the weekends. So it is good to occasionally step into the Psalms as we journey through God's story in the Old Testament.

This morning, we enter Psalm 32.

Why Psalm 32? Because I want to preach on it! I want to preach on it, because it speaks to me in a way that few Psalms do.

Every week, I seek to preach to myself. I am not the preacher on high, telling you what to be and do. The Holy Spirit is the preacher, and I am like you - offering myself to the Lord, as I hear his truth.

This is always true, but this is especially true today. I promise not to do this often, but today, this sermon is about me.

The question for you is: Is it about you?

Do I want to be happy?

I think I do. Sometimes I am "happy" being miserable. Self-pity and self-flogging are back-alley doors to happiness, and sometimes I use them.

But deep down, I want to be happy. I long for joy. Not merely a brief burst of excitement, but a slow-burning, long-lasting, soul-lifting joy.

I am made for this. As the childrens' catechism says, God made me holy and happy.

So how do I do it? How can I be happy?

In my office, I have five big, fat, stuffed binders filled with material for preaching and teaching illustrations. Under the file I call "happiness," I see I have an article from six "experts" on happiness. They say I should do this:

* When something good happens, I must find a way to hold on to it longer. I can do this by buying souveneirs or taking pictures.

* I must live close to where I work. Traffic adds to stress.

* I must order my life, so I can see friends and family.

* I must buy memorable experiences. I must spend money for the big trip, the great concert, or the spectacular sporting event.

* I must limit my choices. Too many options will make me miserable.

So how am I doing?

* I have lots of filled photo albums.

* I live less than a mile from my work.

* I see my family and friends.

* I do not buy as many memorable experiences as some, but when I do, I remember them well.

* I limit my choices by living simply.

So how am I doing? Am I happy?

Psalm 32 is about happiness, gladness and joy. It may not seem that way at first. But listen to how it begins, and how it ends.

"Blessed is he..." Blessed. Happy. Glad. Joyful.

"Rejoice in the Lord and be glad..." Rejoice. Be glad.

But OH, I GROAN.

Why? Why do I groan? No matter how many pictures I take, no matter how little I drive, no matter how much I see my friends and family, no matter how many experiences I buy, and no matter how simply I live, I groan.

Why do I groan? No single Psalm gives the whole of the answer, but this Psalm gets to the heart of the answer.

I AM LYING.

I lie to myself. I see myself as I want to see myself, and I see myself as pretty good. I ponder my virtues, I remind myself of all the good things I do, and I lie to myself and tell myself that I am okay.

I lie to others. I present myself to you, as someone who has his life and heart together. I have a nice house and two decent cars. I have a charming wife, three "good" kids, two cute cats and a lovable dog.

I lie to God. Oh, I have my "standard" sins I confess, over and over and over. I should be kinder to my wife and children. I should care more for the members of the church. I should not take a second look at that woman. Why didn't I share the gospel with that fellow?

My "standard" sins are real, but they are not the real issue. I am just skimming along the surface, and not digging into the depths of my heart.

"Blessed is the man...in whose spirit is no deceit." I am lying, because I do not see my sin for what it is.

One word here for sin means "twisted" or "crooked." I can lie to myself and say I am okay, but as a

human being, I am twisted and crooked - inside and out.

Another word here for sin means “falling short of the mark.” I may look good by the standards of people, but I fall short of God’s standard, because he knows everything that grows in my heart.

Another word here for sin means “departure” or “rebellion”. I am a rebel who has departed from the ways of God - not just with wrong in my behavior, but with rot in my heart.

I am lying. And *I AM QUIET*.

I dare not speak these things to myself, or to others, or to God. I cannot admit that I am twisted, falling short, and rebellious.

I am like our oldest son when he was so young, and family would visit from far away, and he would think that if he did not say goodbye, the family would not leave. If I do not say it, maybe it will not be so!

If I do not say it, if I do not admit my distortion, and my falling short, and my departure from God, maybe it will not be so!

So I keep really quiet about it, and it stays there in the dark, and it grows and grows and grows.

I am lying. I am quiet. *I AM GROANING*.

Why am I groaning? Because of my lying and silence, but Psalm 32 also shows me more. I am groaning, because the Lord is oppressing me!

I say with the writer of Psalm 32, “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 sapped as in the heat of summer.”

I am groaning, because the hand of the Lord is heavy upon me.

He is like the wood-splitter we used a while back in our yard. That arm would press against one end of the wood, and it would force the wood into the blade at the other end of the splitter, and it would press so hard against the wood that the wood would eventually crack and split.

I am groaning in the heart. I carry a sense of guilt. Sometimes I see it, and sometimes I stuff it, but at the very least, I walk through life with a dull sense that I am not well, and all is not well.

I am groaning in the mind. I recall again and again, as much as my mind will admit, who I am and what I have done, and try as I might, I cannot be free of those memories.

I am groaning in the body. I am weary. Maybe I do not sleep well, for my spirit is not at rest. Maybe I do not function well, for I am both sleepy from last night, and worn out from the burdens I carry when I am awake.

Maybe even I groan because of sickness. I cannot say, “This sickness is because of this sin.” But it may be right to say, “If I lie to myself and stay silent about who I am and what I have done, could not God use even illness to press against me?”

Oh, I groan. I may groan for many reasons, but Psalm 32 takes this slice of my heart and my life, and it speaks to me. I am lying. I am silent. And I am groaning.

This sermon is about me. Is it about you?

OH, FOR JOY.

Oh, for happiness. Oh, for delight. Oh, for peace. Oh, for all of this, for more than a moment of adrenaline or chemically-induced rush. Oh, for a joy that is lasting.

I know enough to know that I will not have this perfectly in this life. I know that the whole creation groans, and its groaning will make me groan.

But still, oh, for joy! Oh, to be able to say: Blessed is me. Oh, to be able to “Rejoice in the Lord, and be glad.”

How? How can this be? How could it be for David, who lied, then kept silent, and groaned, but eventually found joy?

Remember the splitting of wood. The press of the arm forces the wood to crack and split. That may be “painful”, but it is useful. Now that the wood is cracked and split, it is ready to be used for the purpose of burning.

Even though I groan, the Lord is taking me on a path to joy, for his perfect purposes.

It starts with this: *I CONFESS*.

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.”

I take no responsibility for what others have done. But I take complete responsibility for what I have done.

I do not minimize this with words like, “I am only this way, because she is that way.”

I do not muddle this with words like, “I guess I should not be this way, but I am not as bad as him.”

I will do this before God. I will confess what he already knows. I will confess it all to him. Every bit.

I will do this before others, if I must. If my sin has hurt them, then I will go to them and confess it to them.

Every bit.

No, this is not a matter of making a list and checking it twice. I cannot remember every sin. Maybe I will simply say, “Lord, I am so twisted, fallen away and rebellious that I do not always know when I have sinned. But I do remember this. I do remember that.

“I confess it all. I hold none of it back. Known and unknown. Recalled and forgotten. Big and small. What others can see, and what only you can see. It’s all there. It’s all sin. It’s all my fault. Here it is.”

Maybe I will whisper it alone. Maybe I will shout it aloud. Maybe I will weep through it all.

I will rip it out of the darkness, and I will bring it fully into the light. I will expose it for what it is - an ugly, smelly, dirty, rotten reality.

This sermon is about me. Is it about you?

I confess. *GOD FORGIVES.*

I read these words, and they so richly describe what God does with my sin, when I confess it.

He forgives. He lifts it off my back. I have been carrying this weight around on my shoulders. It is so heavy. It is so burdensome. But now, by God’s mercy, it is gone.

He covers. I tend to cover up my sin, but when I uncover it before God, he then covers it up again. The image here is of the mercy seat, where the blood of the sacrificed animal would be sprinkled on the atonement cover.

He does not count. If I count my sin, the calculator will explode. But God, the great accountant, chooses not to add it up and hold it against me. The debt is paid. The ledger is clear. It’s gone.

This is the gospel! This is what God does, through the Son that David looked forward to seeing, named Jesus.

I expose my sin to the light, and even as I do it, I wonder if God will condemn me for it. I wonder if he will say, “That’s it! That’s enough! No more! I am finished forgiving. To hell with you!”

No! What have I learned? There is no sin so small that I must not confess it, and there is no sin so great that God cannot forgive it.

He forgives, because of Jesus. He covers, because of Jesus. He does not count, because of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus has secured this, for he has taken upon himself, every bit of my guilt.

I say it, but do I believe it? If this truth has truly seeped into the cracks of my heart and soul, why would I continue to hold that sin within? Why would I not be willing and even anxious to expose it, in all its ugliness, that I may place it at the foot of the cross, and find forgiveness?

This sermon is about me. Is it about you?

I confess. He forgives. And *HE BLESSES.*

Oh, for the joy of this blessing! And oh, what joy David reveals to me here, as he describes the blessings for the one whose sin the Lord forgives.

I am protected.

“Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.

“You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.”

I am protected in my soul. If I live among others, I will be accused by others, either for the past, or in the present.

What can I say? How do I respond? If it is true, or if it has been true, I can say, “Yes! I have sinned. I have lived in darkness. But my Savior has helped me to expose it. I am forgiven by him, so you will not condemn me.”

I am protected in my body. Maybe I will face real waters of adversity. Someday they will take life from my body. But now nothing stands between God and me, so I know that nothing will take away my eternal life and joy.

I am secure, in the Savior who has purchased eternal security for me on the cross. I am protected.

I can grow.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

Let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed

Be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.

I am starting to get the guilt part. Jesus cleanses me from the guilt of my sin.

But what about the power part? Why won’t I just keep being what I have been, and doing what I have done?

I walk now in mystery. It is a mystery I have shared with some of you. I do not fully understand this, but I believe this. As I expose my sin to the Lord, as I confess it fully, and as he forgives, it loses power over me, and I begin to gain power over it.

I speak these words of confession, and even as the words leave from me, I feel the power of that sin, begin to lessen, and I begin to sense the power of Christ, filling me.

Darkness hides. But when darkness is exposed to light, it can no longer hide, and it loses its power.

I am not just free from the guilt of my sin. I am being freed from the power of sin.

I can grow. I can grow as the Lord says to me, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should

go. I will counsel you and watch over you.”

In the words of David, I am not like the horse and mule. They need to be controlled with outside “persuasion” like the bit and bridle, or they will go astray, again and again.

But I can think. I can learn. I can see how God would have me change the ways of my heart and my life, and by the same Holy Spirit who inspired these words that instruct and counsel me, I can grow.

What a blessing! I once heard Pastor Alistar Begg say, “You want your life to stink? Then disobey the Word of God. I guarantee it.”

My life does not have to stink! I will never be “stink-free” in this life, but I do not need to make my life stink as I have! I will still sin, but as I confess, Jesus reminds me that he has freed me from guilt, and he is still freeing me from the power of that sin.

I will not be perfect, but I will not be the same. What a relief. What a blessing. What a joy.

I am protected. I can grow. I can worship.

In my groaning, I cannot worship. If I am lying and silent, I will either flee worship, or I will fake worship.

But now, I can “rejoice in the Lord and be glad”! I can delight in him with others in gathered worship, and I can delight in him as I go into the world.

I am his. He is mine. I am righteous in God’s sight. I am upright in heart, as the Lord changes my heart.

I am surrounded by his unfailing love. I have trusted his word, which declares that if I confess my sins to him, freely and fully, I will not face condemnation, but I will be welcomed with the mercy of this One who sent Jesus for me.

I was in a place of groaning. But now I am in a place of joy, for I am immersed in the glorious mercies of the Lord.

What blessing: protection, guidance, and worship. What happiness. What gladness. What joy.

Oh, for joy!

This sermon is about me. Have you ever had to go through one of those medical exams, where they poke, prod, and plunge into your body to see just about every square inch of you?

That is what God has been doing to me - not for my body, but in my soul. He is reaching inside me, and he is exposing a heart and life that is so lacking in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control. It is ugly, stinky, revolting, and damnable.

At times I have felt that I have been on that wood splitter, and that he is cracking and splitting me, and I have wondered if I will simply shatter.

What do I do?

I can only hold on to words like Psalm 32. When I stop lying, when I stop being silent, when I expose the darkness to light, in a whisper or a shout, and I confess my every sin to him, he forgives and he blesses, through Jesus.

So along this road of Psalm 32, a road I am still walking and sometimes losing, I find joy.

This sermon is about me. Is it about you?

Do you sit here this morning, lying? Are you lying to God? Or to others? Or to yourself? Are you silent about your sin?

How is God oppressing you? Not to break you, but to make you?

In unconfessed sin, there is bondage and oppression. But in confessed sin, there is freedom and joy.

Maybe you must go to a quiet place and weep. Maybe you must go to an open field and shout. Maybe you must go to one of your pastors, your elders, your spouse, or another friend, and admit the truth.

Do it! By God’s grace, and because of God’s grace, do it! I plead with you to expose darkness to light, to take it to the cross, and to know, maybe for the first time, this forgiveness and blessing and joy.

Souvenirs or pictures? Less traffic? Friends and family? Memorable experiences? Simplicity?

Here is happiness. Here is gladness. Here is joy.

“Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”