

'Making Sense of the Psalms No.8'

Wednesday 7th October 2009

Psalm 32:1-11

"The Joy of Forgiveness"

Introduction

When I started this series on 'Making Sense of Selected Psalms' back in May, I outlined for you the ones we would look at together. We have so far looked at Psalms 1, 2, 8 and 19 as introductory Psalms. Then we looked at three Psalms all about Christ – 22, 23 and 24. Now we come to look at three Psalms all about Forgiveness. They are Psalms 32, 51 and 103. Tonight we are looking at the first of those: Psalm 32.

The script-writers of a TV Soap such as 'Coronation Street' or 'Eastenders' would have been proud of themselves if they had dreamt up the story-line behind Psalm 32. The story behind Psalm 32 is recorded for us in 2 Samuel chs.11 & 12 in our Bibles. You can read them sometime to get the detail, but let me give you the gist of it:

A king gets up from his bed one night, and as he wanders around his palace, he notices through a window a woman taking a bath. He doesn't turn away – he keeps looking, and he notices that she is a very beautiful woman indeed. Deep within his heart he knows he must have her. But then, after all, he is the King, so why couldn't he have her? There's nothing to stop him. So he sends one of his servants to invite this woman back to his palace. She does what she has been commanded, and she goes to bed with the King. In the morning she gets up, washes herself, and returns home.

But sometime later the King gets a message from this woman to say that she is pregnant! And what's more her husband wasn't around at the time – he was off fighting the King's battles for him at war! So what was the King to do? Well he sent for the woman's husband and had him brought home from the field. At first he told him to go and take a few days off, '*Go and spend sometime with your wife!*'

But when the king discovered that the man hadn't gone home to his wife at all, he tried another tactic. He invited him to a party and got him drunk, and then sent him home. But he still didn't go home! This man was a more honourable man than the King. He didn't think he should go home to his wife and enjoy the luxuries of home, whenever all his colleagues were still out in the heat of the battle.

So the King felt he was left with no choice. He wrote a letter, signed and sealed it, and sent it with the man back to his commander in the field. The letter told the commander to put this man on the frontline, in the very heat of the battle, and then give the command for everyone else to withdraw and leave him to it. And sure enough, that's exactly what happened, and this man (Uriah) was killed in action!

After a respectable time of mourning, the king took the widow home as his wife and some time later the child was born. But unfortunately the child died when only a week or two old.

It's the classic love triangle. It's behind most of the storylines of TV soaps to this day. So much so, that we begin to think there's nothing wrong with it anymore. '*Sure if everyone else is doing it, it must be OK!*' So you could be forgiven for thinking, '*Maybe I need to spice up my life a bit and have a fling!*' '*What's wrong with it anyway?*'

1. What's wrong with it, is something people don't like to talk about anymore: It's Sin!

The King was David; the woman was Bathsheba; and her husband's name was Uriah. It all happened 1000 years before Jesus died on the Cross for our sins, but it was still sin. This Psalm 32 was written by the *same* King David, sometime after these events.

Psalm 32 contains a number of different words for 'sin':

'**Transgression**' (v.1) – that means over-stepping the mark – it's like trespassing - crossing a line. Going beyond what is right and good and acceptable - to something that is wrong and bad and unacceptable.

It means we have broken the Law of God.

In the Ten Commandments, among other things, God said, '*You shall not commit adultery.*' But in the New Testament (Matt.5:27) Jesus said, '*If anyone looks at a woman to lust after her, he has already committed adultery with her in his heart!*' – That's what Jesus said!

He also said, about the command, '*You shall not kill*' that if we hate someone, it's just as bad as wanting them dead! Jesus was making the point that sin is not just an outward action; it begins with our thoughts as well. We can sin, transgress, or break God's Laws in thought, word and deed. We all do it every day! Even as believers we still do it. That's why we never get to a point where we don't still need the grace of God, every day, to forgive us and cleanse us from our sins.

Another word for wrongdoing in Psalm 32 is the word '**sin**' (hamartia) (v.1).

It's just 3 letters, but it covers so much. Sin is missing the mark, it's not measuring up, it's falling short of God's standard. In Romans 3:23 it says,

"All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God."

Every single one of us has failed to measure up to God's standard of perfection, that's why we are all sinners. In King David's case he was called to be faithful within his own marriage, and to respect the sanctity of Bathsheba's marriage, but he failed to measure up to that standard – he sinned. So have you and I – maybe not in physical adultery - but maybe in other ways

Another word for sin used in Psalm 32 is '**iniquity**' (v.2) – We don't use it very much now, but let me tell you what it means. – it means twisting or covering up the truth. That's exactly what David did. He tried all sorts of ways to get Uriah to go home to his wife, so that he would be 'off the hook' and everyone

would think that the child was Uriah's. He tried to cover his tracks. But it didn't work. All his schemes came to nothing.

I'm sure you've heard the saying:

"Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive."

Some people can spin those webs of deceit for so long that they hardly know what's true and what's false anymore. What's worse, no one knows when they're telling the truth and when they're not – that's what the Bible calls *iniquity* – twisting the truth.

There's a fourth word for sin in Psalm 32, it's '**deceit**' (v.2).

We can **deceive others**, like David did as far as Uriah was concerned; we can **deceive ourselves** just as David did when he thought he could cover up his sin, and thought that no-one would find out about it; but worst of all, we think we can **deceive God!** But we can't - it never works.

2. For a whole year David tried to cover his sin, but look what happened:

(vs.3-4) *"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."*

The only person his un-confessed sin was destroying, was himself. It was eating him up! His sin and guilt were eating away inside him. He was trying to get on with life, but it wasn't working. That's the problem with a conscience that is seared by guilt. We'll never be happy until we can get that sin forgiven by 3 people: - by the person we have wronged; by God Himself; and then we can begin to think about forgiving ourselves after that – and sometimes that's the hardest bit!

Look at how David begins Psalm 32: In vs.1-2 he says,

***"Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.***

***Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count
against him and in whose spirit is no deceit."***

Do you know what that word '*blessed*' means? It means,

***"Oh how happy – is the one whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered. Oh how happy is the man whose sin the
Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit."***

That's the person who is really happy, the person who is really full of joy – it's the person that God has forgiven for all their sins! And the opposite holds true:

***'Oh how miserable is the one whose transgressions have not been
forgiven, whose sins have not been covered.***

***Oh how miserable and unhappy is the man whose sin the Lord still
holds against him, and whose spirit is full of deceit.'***

Covering up your own sin, even as a Christian, is not the way to go. We can never get away from the all-seeing eye of God, or from the searchlight of God's Word. If we want to know God's forgiveness and the joy that comes from knowing our sin is dealt with, and forgiven, then we need to face our sin head-on and have it forgiven by God.

3. But how does that happen? How can we have our sins forgiven?

How can we know this joy, this happiness? Well David tells us in vs.5:

"Then I acknowledged my sin to you

And did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' –

And you forgave the guilt of my sin!"

There David calls sin, 'sin' – using the four words we have already looked at. There was one thing he had to do, and that was to **stop covering up his sin**. But as soon as he did that – God forgave him. He forgave his transgressions. If you like, He covered his sin properly. The Lord stopped counting his iniquities against him. He forgave him the guilt of his sin.

So the message from David in Psalm 32 to each one of us, even as believers tonight is: Stop covering up your sin; let God cover it properly!

We mustn't forget that, David was described as '*a man after God's own heart!*' (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22) This is not an unbeliever talking here. This is no someone coming to faith for the first time. This is a believer. This is the man who wrote most of these wonderful Psalms that we have been looking at over these past few months. This is the testimony of a man of God, who fell into sin - open, blatant, serious sin – that messed up the life of at least one person, and cost the life of another! But now he's teaching us as believers, how to deal with sin, and how to find our way back out of sin and guilt and the misery that it brings. He's teaching us about the grace of God. The grace of God is not just for the unsaved. You and I as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ need God's grace every day that we live, if we are to know the on-going joy of having our sins forgiven - for we still sin!

4. In the rest of the Psalm (vs.6-11) David is teaching us from his own experience what we should do if we find ourselves in a similar situation.

If you want to know the real joy of sins forgiven that David is talking about, then this is what you need to do as well:

- Stop trying to cover up your sin; let God cover it properly! (vs.3-4)
- Acknowledge and confess your sin to the Lord, and He will forgive the guilt of your sin (v.5).
- If you are godly, keep open lines of communication with God (v.6)
- When tempted, turn to God as your hiding place, your protection from trouble, and He will surround you with songs of deliverance (v.7)
- Learn some self-control (vs.8-9). We basically fall into sin, when we give our old selves free rein in our lives. When we allow our own selfish attitudes to lead us astray. According to vs.8-9 God wants to

instruct us and teach us in the way that we should go. He wants to counsel us and to watch over us. But more often than not we are the ones behaving like stubborn mules, who still want to go our own way. And that's why we get ourselves into such bother. *'Do not be like the horse or the mule which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.'* (v.9)

- So often in the New Testament 'self-control' is talked about. It's one of the fruit of the Spirit. We cannot control ourselves all of the time. We need the help of the Holy Spirit daily. The question is: Are we depending upon Him?
- (v.10) *'Many are the woes of the wicked...'* – is that what we want? A life full of woes? There are consequences to sin - that sometimes cannot be reversed. That was David's experience. *'A man reaps what he sows!'*(Gal 6:7). The TV soaps don't often tell us that bit. They just make sin look glamorous and attractive. But it's not. If we give into it, we will experience all kinds of trouble!
- But by contrast (v.10b): *'The Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.'* And that's the bottom-line. Day by day the Christian life is a life of trusting in God, not in ourselves - but trusting in God for the strength to live within his grace, in a way that pleases Him.
- If we do that, then we will be able to live out v.11. We will be able to...
***'Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous;
Sing, all you who are upright in heart!'***

How is all this possible? Because 1000 years after David wrote these words in Psalm 32, God sent His only Son Jesus, whom he loved with an everlasting love, and had him die on a cross outside Jerusalem for your sins and for mine. Jesus is the only man who has ever lived a perfect life - He never sinned in thought, word, or deed. He alone was able to be the perfect sacrifice for our sins. So *'God laid on him the iniquity of us all'* (Isaiah 53) *'and by his stripes we are healed.'*

This is **why** Jesus died - it was because of your sins and mine. Even for the sins that we commit now that we are Christians! We might not like talking about our sins as Christians, but the fact of the matter is we still sin in thought, word and deed every day, even though we are under grace. But the price Jesus paid on that cross didn't just pay for our sins before we got saved, it dealt with our sins after conversion as well – past, present and future! That's why Jesus had to die such a cruel death on the cross. It was your sins and mine, laid upon Him, that separated Jesus from His Father and made him cry out,

"My God, My God why have you forsaken me?"

It was because of **our** sins, not just those who crucified Him, that Jesus said from the cross:

"Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing!"

Conclusion

So let's stop covering up our sin, let's admit it freely and confess it freely to God today, and have it forgiven in an instant. And be truly blessed / truly happy – as we continue to put our trust in Christ.

It was David's son Solomon who really put Psalm 32 in a nutshell. In Proverbs 28:13 he said this:

***"He who conceals his sins does not prosper,
But whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy."***

And when we come into the New Testament to 1 John 1:7-10 we read this:

***"The blood of Jesus, God's Son, purifies us from all sin.
If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves
and the truth is not in us.
If we (even as Christians) confess our sins,
He is faithful and just and will
(go on) forgiving our sins
and purifying us from all unrighteousness.
If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar
And His Word has no place in our lives."***

So we need to stop denying that we are sinners, even as Christians, and admit that we have sinned, and continue to sin in thought, word and deed. Then we will not be going around with a *holier than thou* attitude, we will be going around with an attitude of *humility*, because we have been touched by God's grace. And all of us still need God's grace, every day that we live, and until we see Jesus face to face – because only then will we be sinless/perfect.

Until then...

We need to confess our sins to God regularly, and
He will be faithful and just to go on cleansing us and forgiving us.
All we have to do is ask!

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