

Songs of Joy!
Rejoice In The Forgiveness Of Sin!
Psalm 32:1-11

Have you ever done wrong? Has your conscience ever been troubled by the wrong you've done? Have you ever borne a burden of guilt or shame? If so, then I have good news for you, today; for today I want to say a good word about forgiveness and the joy that it brings.

In Psalm 32, King David says, "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." (Ps. 32:1) What had David done and how did David come to know the joy of God's forgiveness?

Many people believe King David wrote Psalm 32 and Psalm 51 together in the wake of his sin with Bathsheba. Doubtless you will recall how David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, and then had Uriah murdered so he could cover his sin by taking Bathsheba as his wife. Although this sin was hidden from many, it was not hidden from God. So God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David with his sin. Nathan confronted David by telling David a story – the story of a rich man with many flocks and herds who, nonetheless, took the only little lamb belonging to his poor neighbor so he, the rich man, could serve that lamb to his dinner guests. When David heard this, the bible says his anger was greatly kindled, and he said, "...the man who has done this deserves to die!" And then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!" And David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan answered David's confession, saying, "Now the Lord has put away your sin." (2 Sam. 12:5, 7, 13)

It is against the backdrop of this incident that many people believe David wrote Psalm 51 and Psalm 32. In Psalm 51, David repents of his sin saying, "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin...Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit." (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12)

If Psalm 51 describes David's repentance then Psalm 32 describes what happened after he confessed his sin and repented of it. "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body 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. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide

my iniquity;
I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin...You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance...Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart." (Ps. 32:1-5, 7, 10-11)

Yes, my friends, there is joy in God's forgiveness. But you can only experience that joy if you know that you need to be forgiven. Now I admit, few, if any of us, have sinned as David did. But all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. (Rm. 3:23) We've sinned in various ways, too numerous to mention. We've sinned in thought, word, and deed – by what we have done and by what we have left undone. And if we take that fact seriously then we'll probably experience some discomfort, some disquietude, some inner dis-ease, just as David did. For as David said, "While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand (O Lord) was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

Has that ever happened to you? Have you ever done wrong and then had it eat away at you afterwards, troubling your conscience? I had this happen to me quite recently. It started in a Church Council meeting of all places. I was rude to Karen, our Office Administrator, and treated her unkindly in that meeting. Now there were reasons for it – I'd had a bad day and was tired – but none of that was Karen's fault. And as soon as I got home I confessed it to my wife. "I was rude to Karen," I said. And it troubled me until I went to her, apologized, and asked her forgiveness. "It was so unlike you," she said, and she graciously forgave me. I felt better afterwards and I hope she felt better too.

We need to do this more often than we do. We need to confess to those we've wronged and seek to set things right. But we need to do this with God as well. For after all, every sin is really a sin against God and not just against our neighbor. Maybe that's why, in the 51st Psalm, David prayed to God, saying, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment." (Ps. 51:3-4) Well of course, that wasn't exactly right. After all, he had sinned against Bathsheba, and Uriah, and against their friends and their families, too. But at least David recognized that his sin was bigger than that, as big and as bad as it was. It was a sin against God, too, for he had transgressed God's commandments, sinned against God's will, and was guilty of iniquity in God's sight.

Well fortunately, God is eager to forgive us – just as he was eager to forgive David. And he has shown us just how eager he is to forgive us by coming to us in Jesus Christ and dying for us on the Cross. For it was on the Cross that he did everything necessary to make possible and public our forgiveness. And it was on the Cross that the Son of God uttered these words: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do!" (Lk. 23:34) So when we come to him seeking forgiveness, we find that it has already been given!

Through confession and repentance, we just experience the forgiveness that was won for us at Calvary!

Perhaps you have heard the story of the Catholic woman who allegedly saw visions of Jesus. Skeptical of her claims, her bishop met with her and decided to put her to the test. "The next time you see some vision of Jesus, ask him what sin I confessed at my last confession," the bishop commanded her. Well about ten days later the woman called the bishop and informed him that she had indeed seen another vision of Jesus. Quickly the bishop rushed to meet her. "Did you really see Jesus?" the bishop asked. "Yes I did," the woman replied. "Well, did you do what I commanded you to do?" the bishop asked her. "Yes, your holiness," she replied. "I asked Jesus what sin you confessed at your last confession."

"And?" asked the bishop. The woman leaned forward and looked the bishop square in the eyes and said, "Bishop, when I asked Jesus what sin you had confessed at your last confession, he looked at me and he said, 'I really don't remember!'"

Is our Lord forgetful? Yes, intentionally so! He forgives and forgets the sins of those who come to him by faith, trusting in his merciful forgiveness! And in that forgiveness, we experience joy; so we can say, "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity..." So, with the prophet Micah, the forgiven can exclaim: "Who is a God like (our God), pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of (his people)? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot. (He) will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." (Micah 7:18-19 adapted)

Friends, this is the second in our series of sermons entitled *Songs of Joy!* This series is based on various psalms and other biblical songs that highlight the joy God gives to all who believe. Last week's song called us to rejoice in a shower of blessings! Today's song reminds us that there is joy in God's forgiveness.

My friend let me ask you a question. Do you know that your sins are forgiven? In a moment we'll gather at the communion table to remember how Jesus promised forgiveness to all who trust him. If your conscience is troubled by some sin or wrongdoing then I encourage you to confess that sin to God and to those you have wronged, and then trust that God, at least, has already forgiven you in answer to Jesus' prayer from the Cross where he prayed saying, "Father forgive them..." By doing this, you, too, can experience the happiness of those whose transgression is forgiven and whose sin is covered. Amen!