

- The heaviness of sin
- The happiness of forgiveness



The other evening I was grilling behind our house when I heard someone singing “Jesus Loves Me This I Know”. Now, we don’t have lots of neighbors ☺ so when someone sings you look and the source of that song was unexpected. There in the parking lot was a gruff looking man, about my age, with a thick beard, rolled up sleeves, singing, “Jesus Loves Me This I know for the Bible tells me so.” And he was singing that song as he pushed an elderly, very frail woman through the parking lot.

Unexpected, yes. But surprising, no. Not for a Christian – because that’s what Christians do, they sing. They sing of Jesus’ love. They sing of comfort and hope; of joy and sadness; of forgiveness. They sing “Jesus loves me,” when they are little and they sing “Jesus loves me” to moms and grandmas who are in a wheel chair and about to go to heaven.

One of my favorite contemporary Christian authors observed, “If you want to know how God feels about you, read the prophets (the Old Testament prophets), but if you want God to know how you feel, SING THE PSALMS.”¹

Because Christians sing, because we need God to hear the song in our hearts, Vicar and I are going to share with you a summer sermon series based on some of our favorite psalms. We’ll do it under the theme: Sing My Soul and today we want God’s Word to teach our souls to sing of forgiveness.

Psalm 32 is on page 49²

Of David. A "maskil."

- 1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
- 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.
- 3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.
- 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. "Selah"
- 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. "Selah"
- 6 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.
- 7 You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. "Selah"
- 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.
- 9 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.
- 10 Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.
- 11 Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

1. The heaviness of sin

Did you catch how we skipped over the first verse of the Psalm – at least the Hebrew first verse? Most of the Psalms have a heading and this one says it is a *maskil*. Sometimes those strange words describe the tune or the instruments to which the Psalm is to be sung but this one simply means it is a teaching Psalm or a Psalm of meditation.

1 Philip Yancey, “The Bible Jesus Read.”

2" NIV1984

And the one who wants to teach us is David. David wrote this Psalm at the height of his reign as king. He would never be more powerful, control more land and possess more wealth. This should have been a happy time during his reign but we know from our Old Testament lesson this morning that this was saddest time of David's life. This wasn't about some whistle blower reporting on corrupt tax collectors in David's kingdom. David wasn't called out for sending his secret service to eavesdrop outside of people's windows. David slept with another man's wife. He murdered her husband to keep their affair from going public. David sinned and was guilty and for a whole year he kept it all under wraps. For that whole year, David wrote no Psalms – because his heart was heavy. He avoided God – because his heart was heavy. He was distraught and depressed during that year. Did you hear the evidence of that when he was confronted with his sin (cf. Old Testament lesson from 2 Samuel 11-12:1-3)? After Nathan told him the story of a rich man taking a poor man's pet lamb and serving it for dinner, David called for the man's head. Wrong, yes, but isn't the punishment severe. I think David shows he was short tempered and moody and dealing with the heaviness of his sin and guilt.

Here's how he describes in the Psalm: "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."

Psychologists once referred to guilt and sin as the "hidden wound." Guilt kept hidden, held deep down inside, is a wound that causes physical and emotional strain on a person. It causes hate, envy, resentment towards others, towards God and towards oneself. It's a hidden wound that leads to insomnia and headaches and ulcers and destroys relationships.

Karl Menniger, the famed psychologist stated that he thought 75% of the patients in his mental hospital would be able to go home the next day if only he could help them understand forgiveness.³

Guilt and sin destroy and they damn – David and us.

So what do we do?

We pray. We confess. We list our sins on a sheet of paper and then throw it away. "We acknowledge our sin and do not cover up our iniquity." Lutherans get that – not self-imposing misery on ourselves – but confessing our sins, repenting of our sins, is the path to happiness. David did too: "I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD' - and you forgave the guilt of my sin."

This Psalm is the AFTER picture for David. We like Before and After pictures. After the diet, after the supplements, after the program, you will look and feel better, have more energy and increase your sex drive and be happier.

Here is a *true* AFTER picture – after the heaviness of sin, David speaks of the happiness of forgiveness.

2. The happiness of forgiveness

Reread verses 1-3.

Here is a good example of Hebrew music or poetry. David uses three different terms for sin – one means rebellion. One means to miss the mark, to not live the way God wants us to live. The other refers to the sinfulness that is a part of each and every one of us. Three terms to show us just how complete and corrupting sin is in our lives.

But notice he also uses three terms for forgiveness to show us that it is complete. "Forgiven" means the sins are taken away – as far as the east is from the west – so far has God removed our transgressions from us. Jesus death on the cross takes away the sin of the world – David's, yours and mine. "Covered" is the next picture for forgiveness. Our sins are covered in Christ. His perfect life surrounds us, clothes us, covers us so not a spot of sin or ounce of guilt remains. And did you catch the imagery in the Psalm? When David covered his sin and hid it deep inside he felt miserable. But when he confessed it, laid it open, presented it to God, God took it and covered it. And just in case you think there is some sin in your life that cannot be forgiven. Just in case you think that there is something in your past that will always stick to you, David gives us this third word picture: "not counted."

³ Source unknown.

One man told a friend of his, “Every time my wife and I get into an argument, she gets HISTORICAL.” The friend responded, “You mean, ‘HYSTERICAL.’” “No,” he replied, “I mean, historical. She remembers every wrong thing I have ever done and she lets me know about it.” God’s forgiveness is not like that. He keeps no record of wrongs. He doesn’t keep tally marks. He doesn’t count them – not one of them, because he counted them all against his Son at the cross. It’s the same picture Paul uses in the New Testament when he says that we are justified in Christ Jesus – that God does not count our sins or our guilt against us.

No wonder David writes this Psalm. He wants to teach us not to make the same mistake he did. He instructs us to not be like a mule that needs to be dragged against his will back to God. He teaches us, he sings for us, the joy of forgiveness. Forgiveness that is sweet and precious and leads us to run to God’s awaiting arms.

So when do you use this Psalm?

- > St. Augustine, a church father from centuries ago, had this Psalm painted on the wall above his bed. He wanted to see it every morning when he woke up and every evening when he went to bed because he said, “True knowledge begins when knowing you are a sinner and true wisdom ends with knowing God’s forgiveness.⁴
- > When might you use this Psalm? It’s the perfect Psalm if you are the kind of person who lives with guilt. Maybe you think, “I’m not good enough.” “I don’t provide for my wife the way I should.” “I don’t spend enough time with my kids.” “I wish I were better at my job.” “Pastor, I wish I could give more time at church.” This Psalm lifts the heaviness of that guilt and replaces it with the joy of forgiveness.
- > Or maybe you do have some legitimate guilt from some past sin – some sin that seems so great, that bothers you so much, that nags at you and keeps you up at night – well this Psalm, a Psalm that sings of God’s forgiveness, is for you.
- > Me personally? I like to use it after communion, after God’s forgiveness has once again touched my lips and set my soul apart to sing.
- > Or maybe the Gospel lesson of the woman anointing Jesus’ feet with her tears and perfume provides us with an application. If you are loving little and serving little and know and want to love more, let Jesus speak to you: She loves much for she has been forgiven much. You love little for you have been forgiven little.

Sing my soul – for we have been forgiven much. May God lead us to sing and love much. Amen.

VVV

4 “The Psalms” by Zorn