

Sermon: Psalm 32: A “Forgiven First” Identity

Preached on July 30th, 2023

Image Church, Atlanta

(Welcome and Intro myself and FTG)

INTRO:

(Acknowledge First day of school starting Tuesday)

Who remembers when you were in elementary school and you had to learn American History? For me that was a long time ago. But I remember I had to learn the preamble to the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, etc.

And although I don't remember much, one of the paragraphs that I do remember from the Declaration of Independence was: **“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”**

I don't know about you but as a kid, I didn't really understand these things (at least not fully).

“The pursuit of happiness?” What is that for a kid anyway, right? You don't “pursue” anything as a kid, you just exist...

But as an adult, you best believe that my life's goal has been “the pursuit of happiness.”

I think if we're honest, all of us are pursuing happiness, right? The question is, how do we find it? Or better yet, IN WHAT do we find happiness/joy?

For some of us, happiness is found in relationships, in sports, in gaining financial freedom, Or...for some of us, happiness is found in a *“...cold beer on a Friday night, a pair of jeans that fit just right, and the radio u-up...”*

I did a Google Search for “Happiness is found...” to see how Google would complete the sentence and here are some of the answers I got:

Happiness is found...

- Within
- When you stop comparing
- In March
- In helping others
- In the darkest times

And here is the best one I found:

- Happiness is found in hurkle-durkling. -Hurkle-durkle: a 200 year-old Scottish term meaning **to lounge in bed long after it's time to get up**. Happiness is hurkle-durkling. (I might have to agree with this one!)

But whether you find happiness in hurkle-durkling or chilling at the beach it's all subjective, right?

Because "Happiness" (according to the world) is based on YOUR definition of "happiness."

Not only is it subjective but (whether we realize it or not), happiness is probably based on something circumstantial... Something... subject to change... something fleeting.

Well, the Bible (especially the Book of Psalms) gives us a different approach to what Happiness is, or rather, where we can find "Happiness."

In fact, the very first Psalm 1:1 starts off saying:

"(How happy) Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night"

The Psalms show us that Happiness is not found in **WHAT** we pursue, rather **WHO** we pursue. Or more accurately, **Who has pursued us...**

So this morning, I want to read Psalm 32 together and glean from David, who gives us some instructions about what it really looks like to "pursue happiness."

SCRIPTURE:

Psalm 32:1-11

Hear the Word of the Lord:

Of David. A Maskil.

1 How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! 2 How joyful is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!

*3 When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. **Selah***

*5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal 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 faithful pray to you immediately., When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him. 7 You are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. **Selah***

8 I will instruct you and show you the way to go; with my eye on you, I will give counsel. 9 Do not be like a horse or mule, without understanding, that must be controlled with bit and bridle or else it will not come near you.

10 Many pains come to the wicked, but the one who trusts in the Lord will have faithful love surrounding him. 11 Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

...This is God's Word

Background and context:

This Psalm, a "Maskil" (a Hebrew word for instruction, enlightened or "wise saying,") is one of the penitential Psalms of King David... Last summer we preached on a sister passage, Psalm 51, which is a Psalm that David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba was exposed.

In Psalm 51 there's a passage that says *"...I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you."*

Scholars believe that this Psalm, 32, was David fulfilling what he wrote in Psalm 51.

Psalm 32 is David *"teaching transgressors your way"*

It's a Psalm where we find David rejoicing at the fact that even though he had committed some of the most heinous acts against God and His people, God still forgave him.

Let's take a look at this passage:

"1 How joyful is the one whose transgression is forgiven whose sin is covered!"

The word "Joyful" here is the Hebrew word "Ashre/Esher" which is sometimes translated, "Happy" or "Blessed" in some Bible versions.

The word describes someone who is privileged or happy. The book of Psalms commonly uses this expression to indicate someone who is fortunate or privileged.

Another way to read this passage is:

"True happiness is found in the person who really, deeply understands that they have been forgiven."

He goes on to say: *"How joyful is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!"*

What David is saying is that TRUE happiness is found in, not in a thing, but an identity.

We're going to unpack this throughout the rest of our time this morning but the first point I want to make is that:

"TRUE" HAPPINESS CAN ONLY BE FOUND WHEN YOU "TRULY" UNDERSTAND FORGIVENESS.

Let's call this a "FORGIVEN FIRST" identity.

For David, he had been forgiven (again) for some pretty bad things. And He understood that he didn't deserve anything other than death, judgment, separation from God.

But instead he received forgiveness... And that changes everything for him!

He uses this word, "transgression."

A transgression breaking a command or law. Whether you are cheating, speeding or mistreating, you are committing a transgression.

We transgress daily. In fact some of us transgressed the speed limit on the way here this morning.

But think about this... Have you ever been pulled over for speeding?

How did you feel when you first saw those blue lights behind you? If you've never been pulled over, I can't explain the feeling but **IT IS terrifying**, your legs get all numb... heart races... you're shaking, etc."

I remember one time I was pulled over and I was petrified... I tried to explain my way out of the ticket and to my surprise the officer gave me a warning...

I can't tell you how AWESOME that felt... Can you relate? Has anything similar ever happened to you? How did that make you feel?

Relieved? Happy?

(BTW I wish I would've come up with, what I think is the greatest excuse of all time, where the person who was pulled over told the officer they were trying to reach 88 MPH so they can get back to the future!) 😊

That's what David is getting at. However you felt at THAT moment... When you realized that you got something you didn't deserve. If you could bottle up that emotion, that feeling... that is how

Christians, who KNOW their identity should feel every day. And he calls it Happiness, Joy, Blessed.

Why? Because David understands that the ONLY thing that ultimately matters is his relationship with God.

Now, before you go throwing things at me or telling me I'm being unrealistic, here's what I'm not saying. I'm not saying that you can't find happiness in other things.

My wife brings me happiness, (she's a good thing) my children bring me happiness, my grandchildren bring me happiness... Another Braves WS victory would bring me happiness. And so would... "a cold beer on a Friday night, a pair of jeans that fit just right... and the radio u-up..." 😊 (ok that was the last time, promise...)

But seriously, I'm not saying that we're not allowed to be sad, angry or suffer. Or that you can't find happiness in created things...

What I'm saying is that when things don't work out, when you haven't gotten that job or that promotion yet.

When you haven't accomplished that goal that you're shooting for... when your relationship isn't where you want it to be, you don't have to be devastated because, (if you're a Christian) there's a truth that you can turn to that should put all those things into perspective.

And that truth is that...

God, through Jesus Christ, has done everything necessary to give you right standing with Him and has secured eternal life for you!

Do you believe that today? Christian?

If you do, does your life reflect it? What is your reaction when things aren't going quite the way you expected?

Are you a joyful person, in the midst of trial?

If not, what you need today isn't a reminder to try harder to be happy/joyful, but rather a simple reminder of this wonderful truth.

Your transgressions are forgiven. Your sin is covered! The Lord does NOT charge you with iniquity.

As one Pastor puts it, ***"Cheer up, you're worse than you think you are, but Cheer up, you're more loved than you can ever think or imagine."***

Or... Maybe you're on a different side of this. Maybe the reminder we need today is that we've forgotten that we're ACTUALLY sinners.

There's a passage in the book of Luke where Jesus tells a parable... (Luke 7:41)

He says that a creditor had two debtors. They both owed money that neither could pay back. One owed more than the other but he graciously forgave them both. And Jesus asked Peter in that passage, "Which of them will love him more?" and Peter answered, "I suppose the one he forgave more."

And Jesus goes on to say that Peter is right... He says that the one who is forgiven much, loves much. The one who is forgiven little, loves little.

The point that Jesus is making is that in order to realize how great your forgiveness is, you have to remember how great your sin was.

So let me ask you... do you find yourself in a place where your forgiveness is NOT that amazing to you anymore?

Maybe the question for you is, do you realize the gravity of your sin?

It's easy to forget...

BUT... At the same time... When you remember your sinfulness, do you remember the beauty of your forgiveness? The new identity you've been given because of Jesus.

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL TWO STEP DANCE, RIGHT!?

You are both a sinner and a saint.

I think this is what was going through David's mind when he wrote this Psalm!

He understood the depths of his depravity and yet how deeper still were the mercies of God.

So what did that free David to do?

It freed him to be confessional...

When Nathan confronted David about his sin in 2 Samuel 11, he told David he had been caught and David's response to Nathan was, "I have sinned against the Lord." And then Nathan replied to David, "And the Lord has taken away your sin; you will not die.

He's remembering that moment...

But I also think he was remembering how heavy of a burden he was carrying while he was hiding his sin, before Nathan confronted him.

3 When I kept silent, my bones became brittle from my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was drained as in the summer's heat. Selah

He realized that holding his sin in had caused him to carry a huge weight. He says his strength was drained as in the summer's heat. I think all of us here in GA can relate to that analogy...

But... then he does his two step dance. Sinner, Saint, or better yet, Repentance and Faith...

*5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not conceal my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," (Acknowledging his **sin** -REPENTANCE) and you forgave the guilt of my sin. (Believing that he was forgiven -FAITH)*

SINNER/SAINT : REPENTANCE/FAITH

This is the "Gospel 2 step," as my friend Dr. Tom Wood calls it.

Do you believe the same is true for you? If so, what does knowing this truth mean for you? What does it do to you? How do you respond?

Well, if God has forgiven you and given you a new identity as forgiven, covered, free from guilt then it should lead to what we can call a "forgiven first" identity.

A "FORGIVEN FIRST" IDENTITY LEADS TO FREEDOM

You see "**forgive**" is something you do... something God does.

"ForgivEN" is something you ARE.

It's an identity.

And a forgiven person has freedom.

Freedom from what? From guilt, self loathing, self condemnation, from condemning others. Etc.

Listen, I don't know about you but I don't need another voice outside of the one already ringing in my head reminding me of my issues. I can do that all by myself...

What I need is someone reminding me of the identity that Christ has given me as SINNER/SAINT... My identity as "Forgiven"

So is this you today? Do you believe that you've been forgiven?

If so, the good news is that a "forgiven first" identity gives you freedom from condemnation,

Not only this...

A "forgiven first" identity also frees us to be open about our sin to one another.

Have you ever had something that you were hiding from someone? Maybe even today?

Married people in here, how's your marriage? Who are you sharing your struggles with?

Let me share a few stats with you... According to a study conducted in June 2023 this is a breakdown of the American divorce rate by religion.

- Catholic:19%
- Mormon:9%
- Jehovah's Witness:9%
- Orthodox Christian:9%
- Muslim:8%
- Jewish:9%
- Hinduism:5%
- Buddhism:10%
- **Protestant (Non Catholic Christian):51%**
- **Born Again (Evangelical) Christian:33%**

The struggle is real. And the Church, God's people, are not immune to the effects of sin in the world.

So who are you sharing your struggles with? Who are you confessing your sins to?

Here's another stat from the Institute for family studies:

"A majority (57 percent) of men ages 30–49 report having watched pornography in the past month, and 42 percent say they have watched it in the past week."

Again, you don't need an outside voice to shame you... The Bible says Satan is the accuser of the brethren.

I'm not sharing these with you to shame you at all. I share them so that we would all have an awareness that this stuff happens INSIDE the church.

I believe the reason why this is happening is because we are too ashamed to talk about our struggles with one another... to be a confessional people.

But... I believe it's because we don't WALK in our "FORGIVEN FIRST" identity.

Let me give you some good news, that might bring you some peace this morning, **you don't have to hide your sin.**

The greatest person you could have ever offended knows the worst version of you and doesn't **count it against you,**

That's what David says! *The Lord does not charge [you] with iniquity*

David says your sin is "COVERED"

It's already hidden in Christ so you don't have to hide the real you from anyone else?

This is good news! This is the gospel.

THE GOSPEL FREES US TO BE A CONFESSORIAL PEOPLE

James 5:16 says "...confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, so that you may be healed"

Family, let's not let our fear of man, fear of loss, fear of rejection, shame, or guilt keep your sin bottled up deep inside.

This is what David means when he says in verse 2, "*in whose spirit is no deceit!*"

(Share the story about when I confessed to Ana... or about the credit card)...

I can't explain the burden that had been lifted.

Listen, I'm not saying you need to post it on social media.

John Piper says "*tell everyone THAT you struggle but find a few trusted friends that can speak the gospel into your life and tell them WHAT you struggle with.*"

This is why you'll hear us putting so much emphasis on being in Discipleship groups, which are gender based groups of 3 or 4 men/men, women/women who meet regularly to confess sin to one another, encourage one another, pray for one another and speak the gospel to one another...

And listen, being in a discipleship group isn't to make you feel better about yourself, although you should come out encouraged, it's ultimately to glorify Jesus and put what he's done on display.

It also isn't all about just being confessional for the sake of confession.

There's a very practical way this plays out.

If we have a "forgiven first" mentality, we will be better at accepting criticism and feedback.

We'll be able to walk in our present state of "sinner/saint" a little easier.

When our spouses, friends, parents, family point out our issues we won't have to make excuses or hide... We can put away the little attorney of our hearts. (objection)

Do you understand what David is saying now?

*How **joyful** is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!*

*How **joyful** is a person whom the Lord does not charge with iniquity and in whose spirit is no deceit!*

Joy, happiness, blessedness... come from a place of **being**, not a place **doing**.

In other words (and we say this all the time) your belief drives your behavior. -You do what you believe.

You want to understand the "pursuit of happiness?" Believe... that the gospel is actually good news for you still today! It's a GIFT.

BTW side note here. If we look carefully, the implication of this verse is that NOT everyone is forgiven.

You see, if everyone were forgiven, then David wouldn't say, happy is **"THE ONE who receives forgiveness."**

I think it's a reminder that...

FORGIVENESS IS AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE BUT ONLY "EXPERIENCED" BY THOSE WHO REALIZE THEIR NEED FOR IT

For those here who might not be Christian. I would call you to see your need for a new identity. One that the world does not offer.

The world says "do." Jesus says "done."

The world says "work." Jesus says "it is finished."

The pursuit of happiness according to the world is always circumstantial.

(Social status, corporate success, financial freedom, appearance, possessions)

All those things might bring temporary happiness, but TRUE happiness is found in a person, Jesus Christ...

Who did everything necessary to give you the best identity you can ever have. "FORGIVEN"

And David tells you not to wait until it's too late to call out...

6 Therefore let everyone who is faithful pray to you immediately....., When great floodwaters come, they will not reach him.

One day all this will be gone... and as the saying goes, "you'll never see a u-haul behind a hearse."

Meaning, you can't take your stuff with you.

So recognize your need for forgiveness, don't fall into the world's definition of Happiness.

Don't be as David says in verse 8, stubborn *"...like a horse or mule, without understanding, that must be controlled with bit and bridle or else it will not come near you."*

Heed to the warning that David gives in verse 10... *"Many pains come to the wicked," but the one who trusts in the Lord will have faithful love surrounding him.*

David doesn't say God will give us "stuff," He reminds us that we will have God's Love, His forgiveness,

And as NT people we know that Love and Forgiveness have been given to us in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

So what? What do we do with this?

APPLICATION:

1. Remind yourself DAILY of your identity as "Forgiven."
 - a. The prophet Jeremiah says "His mercies are new every morning."
 - b. Let everything you do flow from your identity as "Forgiven First" (SINNER/SAINT)
 - c. Be quick to recognize the things that get in the way of you walking in your forgiven first identity?
2. Acknowledge and confess your sins to God and to one another, every day.
 - a. Find someone that you can share your struggles with, pray with.
Don't do it alone.

- b. Maybe start/join a DNA group?
Talk to me about how to get this going.
3. Meditate on the word
 - a. Psalm 1:2 "Meditate on His word" day and night
NOTE: Meditating isn't "emptying your mind" it's filling it, with God's word
 - b. Don't just read it... Meditate on it.

You can meditate on verse 7 of our Psalm this morning... where David says...

- *You are my hiding place*
- *You protect me from trouble.*
- *You surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance.*
- **Selah**

Amen?

So let me close our time this morning the way David closes this Psalm... by speaking a benediction over you...

I pray that you would... *"Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, you righteous ones; shout for joy, all you upright in heart."*

Let's pray...