

Confession & Celebration

Intro: Well good morning and welcome to church. We're so glad to have you with us today. If you're new here, my name is Seth and I'm one of the pastors here at The Well. I also want to thank both Gilbert and Philip for their love for the Scriptures as well as for you all. Philip continued our series last week and this week we conclude the series. This is our seventh week in our series Learning to Breathe looking at how Jesus has intentionally given us spiritual disciplines that teach us how to inhale and exhale throughout the Christian life.

We've looked at solitude & community, giving & receiving, prayer & action, resting & working, fasting & feasting, and serving & being served. And we close it out this week with confession and celebration.

When I graduated high school I had an aunt who gifted me a car. My parents had always told me that they weren't going to buy me a car and that I would have to figure out how to buy one on my own, but my aunt ended up gifting me a little, red, two-door Nissan 200SX. She kept asking me if I liked it and I kept assuring her that I did. Then after she left I guess there was a phone call between her and my parents because my parents came to me and said that I needed to do something to make sure my aunt knows how appreciative I was. I was confused because, I had said, "thank you" how else are you supposed to make someone know that you're appreciative?

I. Lament

- A. I've always been pretty bad at excitement and celebration. Do you realize how awkward it is to ask for a gift, receive that exact gift, and then realize you have no idea how to express that you're excited about it? Like, the best I've got is a forced fake smile. And I'm pretty sure all of us know that a forced fake smile means, "Oh... you got this... this isn't what I wanted." And then you have to go back and apologize to your mother-in-law because you have the social abilities of a snail. No? Just me?
- B. What I've begun to learn is that there's a rhythm between lament and celebration. That doesn't mean that the people who have suffered the most have the ability to celebrate the best. But it does mean that the people who have lamented their suffering the most have the ability to celebrate the best.
 1. To lament is to actually confess your sorrow, to actually feel it and carry it to God rather than pretending that it doesn't exist. When we think of confession we often think exclusively of confessing sin, but it's a more robust practice than that. About a third of the Psalms are dedicated to laments.
 2. To actually crying out to God with pain and sharing that suffering with him. So today we're actually going to camp out in a Psalm. Psalm 32 if you want to turn there in your Bibles, and if you don't own a Bible you can head to the Welcome Booth where we'd love to gift you one.
- C. Psalm 32 is a whopping 11 verses so let's just read the whole thing and then we'll come back and start to break it down.
- D. **Psalm 32** - Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was

sapped as in the heat of summer. 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. Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you. 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. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

1. So there's a clear flow here. There's an intro, then it moves from lament, to confession, to celebration. This is the rhythm of the Psalms. You can almost feel the inhalation and exhalation of this book as you read through it and feel the rollercoaster of emotions.
2. The Psalmist (King David) gives you the spoiler alert right out the of gates. Blessed is the one who's sins are forgiven. Happy is the one who's sins are taken away.
 - a) The Hebrew word for "blessed" literally communicates a happiness that exists within abundance. A contented happiness. So that's where we're going, but how do we get there?
 - b) That's where we start to get into the fun of this. Verse 3 says that as he kept silent his bones wasted away.
3. Now, there are two kinds of suffering. And I've thought before that those two kinds of suffering are either the suffering due to your own sin, or suffering due to the sin of another.
 - a) But honestly, sometimes suffering is neither of those. My cousin had a little four-year-old girl. Olivia. Vibrant and full of life until a rare form of brain cancer took her from this life. Who's sin was that? Nobody's. Sometimes life just sucks. So what are the two forms of suffering?
 - b) **Suffering from God's hand upon us, and suffering from God's hand withdrawn.**
 - (1) What do I mean? Psalm 32 seems really intentionally stuffed between the Psalms before and after it.
 - (2) Psalm 31 is all about the one who suffers because of no fault of his own, while Psalm 32 is the one suffering because of unconfessed sin. But what do both Psalms have in common? Lament.
4. I'm working on my Masters degree in theological studies right now and I recently took a class that required us to write a lament. My first thought was, "No thanks". But then I decided that it would be a silly reason to get a 0 in a class. So I just wrote something out for the sake of the grade and didn't think much of it. But then we broke into small groups and we were to read our laments out loud.
 - a) I realized in that moment that I thought I had written some trivial feelings on a piece of paper, but I actually admitted to some ungrieved tragedies. Something happened in me when I read that out loud, when I felt the feelings in a group of Jesus followers.

- b) David talks about his bones wasting away. All that time there had been this thing inside of me that was eating away at me. Slowly destroying my soul from the inside out.
5. Here's what I'm saying to all of you. Maybe you're like David here in Psalm 32 and your bones are wasting away. You feel absolutely crushed under the weight of your sin. Maybe some of you are like David in Psalm 31 and you've done no wrong, but it seems like the world is out to get you. You're taking loss, after loss, after loss.
- a) The thing that Christians have believed for ages is that the proper response is to lament. I would encourage you to write your own psalms of lament.
 - b) Experience the sorrow rather than running from it because it is in experiencing the sorrow that we're drawn towards action. Sorrow itself is so overwhelming that something has to be done about it and that's what David writes about next.

II. Confession

- A. **Psalm 32:5** - 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.
- B. When David says that he acknowledged his sin it gives the idea of uncovering something that was once hidden.
 - 1. You know, recently I was at the store and one of my boys ran up to me and started pushing on my stomach a bunch and then yells, "Dad your stomach is SO big!"
 - 2. And then within a day or so Norah woke up in the middle of the night so I got out of bed to put her back to bed. Because I had gotten up in the middle of the night I didn't have a shirt on and this little brat has the audacity to say to me, "Daddy, your belly keeps getting bigger, and bigger, and bigger!" As she keeps stretching her hands out as far as they can possibly go.
 - a) If there's one thing that I've learned about kids, it's that there's nothing that's hidden in those little minds of theirs. They will absolutely tell you everything they're thinking. Sure they'll steal your keys and other things that matter to you and they'll hide those, but not their thoughts. They'll tell you everything that you wish would stay hidden.
 - b) I think that there are so many things that God expects out of us to be more like children than like adults. This is one of those ways. God expects us to have this openness with him where all of our sorrows and grief are poured out to him as we're feeling them. He expects the darkest parts of us, the deepest sins, to be confessed to him and laid bare as they're happening.
 - 3. But **confession is designed to be the natural movement from lament to celebration.**
 - a) The church is designed to be a place of confession. There are a couple ways that we try to make sure that this can happen. One is the way that we do communion every week. We intentionally have a moment built into communion to approach God and confess your sins to him.

- b) Another moment is small groups. James, the brother of Jesus, teaches that we should not only be confessing to God, but we should be confessing our sins one to another.
 - (1) Now here's what I think happens, we see these moments as primarily being about sin so we don't use them either because we're too prideful to admit to being sinners or we don't see confession as an opportunity to say to God, "Life sucks right now and I don't understand why you're not doing anything about it."
 - (2) That's legitimately what so much of the Bible is. I don't know if you realize this, but there are probably ways of talking to God that you think are blasphemous except if you'd read the Bible you'd find out that's where they actually came from.
- C. Gerald Wilson (NIVAC) wrote, "Not only does the psalmist confess to God (32:5), but he makes that confession within the hearing of the worshiping congregation."
 - 1. So I want you to think of the sin that brings you the most shame and tell it to your neighbor. No I'm totally kidding, don't do that.
 - 2. But here's what I do want. We've been known as the church with the sign out front that says "Come As You Are". It's not there right now because it ripped, but we'll get it fixed. Anyway, being able to come as you are is something we've been known for.
 - a) We should be able to walk through these doors and openly confess to God and others exactly where we are. We should resist the urge to put on a fake mask and pretend that things are better than they are.
 - b) Church, if there's anything you should be certain not to fake it's your spirituality. Don't pretend like you're good with God when you're not. Don't pretend like you've got it figured out when you don't. We're in this together and we can admit that this stuff is hard.
 - (1) And then we have deeper communities like small groups where we can confess some of the sins that we're wrestling with. And then inside of those groups my prayer would be that you have one or two people who you can confess the deepest darkest parts of your heart to.
 - (2) When the Bible talks about confession it's talking about it in a way that encompasses all of this. Openness the way my kids are open about my physical appearance. Openness both to God and the body of believers.
 - 3. Because it's in confession that there is forgiveness of sins, that there is release from suffering.
 - a) See, most of my life when something good came to me or when I was given good gifts I left people confused because I seemed so unenthusiastic.
 - b) But what I've learned is that the people who have best learned the rhythms of lament and confession are the people who know how to celebrate the best.

III. Celebration

- A. **Psalm 32:6-7** - Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.
- B. David commands us to pray, to confess to God, then he directs his attention to God. He says that God is his hiding place, that God will protect him. Then he says that God will surround him with what? Iron shields? Castle walls? Nope. Songs. Songs of deliverance.
1. In the midst of this chaotic world, God offers songs of deliverance and celebration.
 2. Here's what I found when I had to write my lament for my class. I noticed that the psalms almost always end with some sort of praise to God. These guys are literally out here writing poetry that's like, "Roses are red, violets are blue, God you're a jerk, but I'll forever worship you." Yeah see, the things we think are blasphemous are literally in the Psalms.
 - a) But I learned that the reason we put that praise at the end is because these psalms are liturgies for us. The breathing rhythms. And they're teaching me that once I've exhaled all my displeasure and fury with God that I now need to inhale his goodness and praise him.
 - b) I think of like when a baby gets mad and makes that initial cry and you're just waiting for that inhale because you know that the MASSIVE inhale is coming after that first cry. We want to exhale all our frustration, but we MUST inhale God's goodness after.
 3. In the moment, as we feel the pain, God doesn't just allow us to aim all our frustration at him, he actually invites it! He welcomes us placing the blame on him because he can handle it. And then he surrounds us in these songs of deliverance!
 - a) Because there are times that you're going to be stuck on the part where you feel like God's a jerk. You've lost loved ones, you've got unanswered questions, your depression or anxiety hasn't been healed and you can't understand why a good God seems to be so mean to you.
 - b) But then God surrounds you with songs of deliverance. The songs of the people who have been where you are, who have been even lower than you thought possible, but that have now been lifted up by God's goodness.
 - (1) God invites the venom of our prayers and then invites us into the songs of the delivered that we might shift our lament to praise, our confession to celebration.
 - (2) Just like confession happened in the midst of the people of God, so too does celebration happen in community. And the more we learn these rhythms the better and better the celebrations get. Not because the evil of this world has vanished, but because God has taught you to see the good in the midst of the chaos and you've suddenly become more focused on God's goodness than the chaos. And realizing that, David leaves us with one final command:

- C. **Psalm 32:11** - Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!
- D. Look what Gerald Wilson (NIVAC) says about this, "This final verse, with its invocation to praise Yahweh, provides the occasion for the voicing of praise [...] Joy, ecstatic shrieking, and singing are all appropriate responses for those who experience the faithful love of God poured out on them. This word picture gives us a brief window onto the celebratory worship of ancient Israel. No solemn, staid occasion this! The milling throngs, overcome with the wonder of God's love, parade about leaping and dancing, shrieking and singing in a marvelous cacophony of uninhibited and infectious praise."
1. Wow. I looked at this and thought to myself, "I need to meet more Pentecostals" because I've apparently got a lot to learn.
 2. But seriously, I was recently at a prayer meeting with a bunch of different pastors here in Modesto and most of them were definitely more charismatic than I am.
 - a) We're talking about what it is that we're going to pray about and I'm thinking that I'm about to have a conversation with God so I need to settle my heart. Take a little moment of silence to center myself. Maybe do a little body scan to release some stress as I step into the moment.
 - b) And as I start to take this posture we're told that God has already started doing some incredible work in Modesto and let me tell you, I found the charismatics. I about jumped out of my skin when they started shouting and clapping.
 3. And you know what I thought to myself? I thought to myself that I am so glad that the church is bigger than I could imagine, that it's so beautifully diverse and that God has given us brothers and sisters to help us through the rhythms that we find most difficult. Their excitement was infectious. It was impossible to be in that room and not celebrate the goodness of God.
- E. And that's the way it's supposed to be. That's the story of the Gospel. The Gospel message is that through our confession Jesus has taken our lament upon himself and we are now invited to celebrate with the Father as he celebrates the return of his sons and daughters. We'll close by briefly going back to verse 1.
- F. **Psalm 32:1** - Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.
1. That word "forgiven" is almost never translated as forgiven. It's most often translated as lifted or carried. In other words: happy is the one who's sins and difficulties have been lifted off of them.
 2. God has picked them up and placed them upon himself so that we might find a lightness in which we can celebrate alongside all our brothers and sisters in the faith.
 - a) Church, this whole seven-week series on spiritual symmetry is all leading up to the moment of celebration. We do this to become more like Jesus. We do this because we believe the Kingdom of God is real. We do this because we believe

that the story ends with New Creation where we celebrate our union with Christ forever.

- b) And I, for one, think it's a good idea to start practicing now for the party that will be thrown in New Creation.
- 3. Your invitation today is to have the weights that hold you down lifted away. We all have suffering, we all have reason to lament. But what will you do with it. Jesus came that you might have your sins, your failures, and the weight of this world lifted off you. It was placed on him while he suffered on the cross. And when he rose from the grave three days later he declared that all the suffering of this life is defeated in him. Accepting Jesus doesn't mean that your life will suddenly be perfect, but it does mean that there is joy in the darkest moments because we know that their days are cut short. Jesus has won.
- 4. The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead then you will be saved. And that's your invitation today.

Takeaways:

- 1. **Write a lament.** Set aside 15 minutes this week to write your own psalm — let yourself feel the sorrow you've been running from. Don't rush to the praise at the end. Just exhale.
- 2. **Practice the inhale.** After you've exhaled your frustration to God, intentionally follow it with praise — even if it feels forced at first. Write down three specific things God has done that you can thank him for after your lament.
- 3. **Use communion as confession.** When we take communion, don't just go through the motions — use that moment to actually lay something specific before God. Let the rhythm of the table become the rhythm of lament and release.