

The Joy of Forgiveness

Call to Worship: Psalm 48

1st Scripture: Psalm 36

2nd Scripture: Psalm 32

Hymn #87- *Holy, Holy, Holy*

Hymn #705- *Marvelous Grace of our Loving Lord*

Hymn #175- *Man of Sorrows*

Introduction

While we can't say for sure, some would believe that David had written this Psalm as a means of expressing what had happened, following his adulterous sin with Bathsheba, and how God had led him to true repentance and forgiveness. Whether or not this is the case, the glory of this Psalm is that it exposes well, our natural tendency toward dealing with sin in the wrong way, while revealing the path of true forgiveness, that is found by those who deal properly with their sins before God.

To be sure, "mankind is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward," and so, even as Christians, we will battle with remaining sin until we are perfected in glory. And so, the question is not so much, "*If* we sin, what should we do?," but rather, "*When* we sin, what should we do?" Now, understand, I am not at all saying that we should be careless with sin, as if to trample on the blood of Christ. Ongoing, willful sin, will lead to severe chastisement for the Christian, if not certain judgment for the hypocrite. But, for those who find themselves struggling with sin, and grieving over remaining sin, this Psalm given by David, is a wonderful place to set your minds, and a sure path to peace and rest. I'm going to make an assumption here this evening, as we enter the New Year. As we enter the year 2019, whatever our path forward looks like, it will contain imperfection and sin. And so, it is important that we recognize this, again, not to take the matter lightly (we ought to be in a battle), but rather, so that, we can live realistically, and continually find the grace to press on and serve Christ, in spite of our continual shortcomings. Careless sin, can be deadly, but unrelenting guilt over sin can be crippling, ultimately seeking to compel us to give up. This Psalm gives us hope for overcoming unrelenting guilt.

I. The Joy of Forgiveness

David begins this Psalm, in the way in which he often begins his Psalms. He makes a bold statement, which then leads him to clarify and explain why he can make such a statement. It is not unlike how we would write an essay about any given topic, laying out our assertion in the introduction, before we prove the assertion, and then conclude with some form of a restatement of our introductory assertion.

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit” (vs. 1-2).

Now, when the Psalmist speaks of being “blessed” here, we must begin by understanding that he is speaking of the highest form of blessing there is, namely, blessing that originates with God and finds man as its object. This involves more than just being happy, although certainly it would warrant good reason for happiness. But, blessing can still be upon a person who doesn’t realize it, and therefore, is presently sad or filled with sorrow. The idea here is that the one who is blessed, whether he/she subjectively realizes it or not, is in the position of favor with God. And that is the true and ultimate blessing, which every human being ought to desire. “Am I okay with God? Is He happy with me? Are we in loving fellowship?...etc.”

Who then is the one who is blessed, according to David? Notice, not the one who never sins. David would be stating an impossibility, if he were to say such a thing. It would be like saying, “Blessed is the man who has wings.” In a fallen world, outside of Christ Himself, to be sinless is both unrealistic and impossible. Our nature is corrupt at conception. And so, David states not that the sinless man is blessed, but rather, the one whose transgression is forgiven is blessed. The one to whom God does not impute iniquity (or hold his sins to his account), as David further elaborates in verse 2.

And why is such an individual blessed, from David’s standpoint? Because that is the only possible means of any person standing in the presence of God, let alone having a loving relationship with God. If God does not forgive an individual’s sins, that individual is without hope and cursed. And sadly, that is the natural state of man. But here, David already offers hope to sinners, saying that one can obtain forgiveness with God. The fact that David speaks of such a blessed man, assumes that such individuals must exist.

Saying the same thing, but in different ways, David adds, "...Whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity..." Now, before we move on to consider how David affirms this assertion, it is interesting to note the concluding phrase of his introduction, which almost seems out of place, at first glance, but then makes perfect sense, especially when you read through the remainder of the Psalm. Notice David adds, "Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, *And in whose spirit there is no deceit.*"

Now, where in the world does "deceit" come into this picture of blessing? Is David saying that the man whom God does not impute sin, must also never lie, if he is to be blessed? Is lying the unpardonable sin? Of course not! If that were the case, no one would ever be blessed. Everyone has lied at sometime or another. Well, what then does David mean here? Well, he means something that is very critical to the whole of what he is trying to get across to us in this entire Psalm. When he speaks about deceit in this context, he is speaking about deceit, in connection to one's sin. In other words, the one who is blessed is the one who is willing to own, acknowledge and confess his sins, and not the one who attempts to deceptively hide them. In this small statement, David is already highlighting the critical importance of humbly laying our sins before God, if we are going to find forgiveness for them. And the assumption is that those who do not own, acknowledge and confess their sins (the beginning stage of true repentance), will not be forgiven, and therefore, are not blessed. Now, this is going to become more evident as we now move ahead. Notice, how David shows that when he covered his sins, as a man of God, it ate away at him. The Holy Spirit was convicting Him, even unto the detriment of his spiritual and physical health.

"When I kept silent, my bones grew old, Through my groaning all the day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah" (vs. 3-4).

You see, when David had refused to bring out and deal with his sin before God; when he hid it and shunned the ailing of his conscience, it ate away at his health. He was full of deep sorrow, which led to groaning, weariness, probably an inability to eat, and spiritual dryness. He lacked vitality and any sense of peace with God and joy in his salvation. His deception led to this. But, notice when things finally began to change, taking a turn for the better:

“I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,” And You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah” (vs. 5).

Ahh, here is the moment of relief and refreshment. Being under the heavy and painful conviction of the Holy Spirit, David finally confessed his sin. He finally, after holding it in for so long, broke down, and brought it out before the Lord. And when he did so, he found God, graciously willing to forgive him. Reconciliation was brought about, a cleared conscience was obtained, fellowship was restored, the path to God was open, vitality was returned and spiritual joy was once again experienced. David found the blessing of forgiveness. Selah (a second rest).

And now, David, who again, is writing this song to share his own experience with the rest of us (because such a reality of finding joy in forgiveness, belongs to all of God’s people), pulls back, and invites us in, to relate to the general principle. In other words, this is not David providing a biography for us, so much, as it is David teaching us.

“For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You, In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters, They shall not come near him. You are my hiding place; You shall preserve me from trouble; You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah” (vs. 6-7).

In spite of his sin, as David has confessed to his God, he has found God to continually remain faithful to him, protecting him and preserving him from trouble. And such is the case for all of God’s people. As we repent, God forgives, and He welcomes us into His presence, and He proves His continual love for, and commitment to us, by providing us with grace and deliverance. His love has not changed. His covenant remains intact. He can still look us in the eyes, as it were, and not hold our sins against us. He genuinely pardons us and remains committed to loving and blessing us! Indeed, those whom God forgives are truly blessed!

And so, David wants to exhort us to willingly confess our sins before God; to come to Him, not attempting to hide our sins, but to lay them before God in their full weight and gravity. This can be very difficult, but it is the way of finding forgiveness, restoration and blessing.

“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, Which have no understanding, Which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, Else they will not come near you” (vs. 8-9).

You see, David is here saying, “Don’t be stubborn like the mule, who needs to be forced into submission.” “Don’t run, don’t hide, don’t let your pride have its way, but rather, embrace the path of peace and blessing by coming before God, unbearing the reality of what is in your heart. Indeed, He already knows what is there. Hiding from reality only harms us, the longer we keep it in. Rather, make it your regular practice to be open and honest with God, who knows that we still fall short. Come broken, honest and contrite, and you will find grace. Matthew taps into this reality when he records Jesus’s beatitudes, the first of which states, “Blessed are the poor in spirit...” Blessed are those who recognize their own natural depravity and weakness. For the kingdom of God belongs to them. And John taps into this reality when he states, in his first Epistle, “If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us for them all, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

And so, having affirmed his opening assertion about the blessedness of those who are forgiven for their sins, by use of his own personal experience, David then concludes this Psalm with a comparative statement, concerning the wicked and the just, relating to what he has expressed throughout the context of this song.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked; But he who trusts in the LORD, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous; And shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (vs. 10-11).

The wicked will be entrenched in many sorrows. Why? Because they will never humble themselves before God. They will never rightly deal with their sins. They will harden themselves in their own deception, and thereby, never obtain the grace and favor of God. In this context, being a sinner is not the primary focus of the misery of the wicked. Everyone born of Adam is a sinner. It’s the fact that the wicked never have proper, humble dealings with God, concerning their sins, which brings them misery. And because of this, they are hardened more and more, leading them further down the path of unrighteousness, heaping up a greater, eternal weight of judgment in the end. [Note: the Pharisees who were blind...etc]

But those who trust in the Lord; again, in this context, those who hope in God’s mercy and grace, will find themselves surrounded by God’s mercy and grace. They will be continually washed in the fountain of God’s cleansing mercy, through Christ. And they have every reason to

rejoice greatly, as those who are righteous in God's sight, through God's continual forgiving grace. [Note: Clearly, David acknowledges his own sin here, and yet, he refers to himself (and the people of God) as righteous. Here, we find that critical assumption that is made throughout all of the OT, when God's people are spoken of, as being "righteous." It is not that they are without sin, or even grievous sin for that matter. It is that they are blessed, because God does not count their sins against them. They are washed in the blood of Christ! He is their righteousness! This cleansing alone, is what leads them to experience personal, ongoing sanctification, such that they can be called, "upright in heart!"

II. Conclusion

Brethren, as we move into the year 2019, take this Davidic prescription with you. Let us never take sin lightly, but let us also recognize that we are still going to deal with remaining sin. And if we don't deal with it properly, we will be overwhelmed with a load of guilt, that will cripple us and make us ineffective in the work of Christ's kingdom.

Recognize here, that the conviction of the Holy Spirit, for the Christian, is never meant to bring about condemnation. God brings about the conviction of sin because He loves us, and He wants us to enjoy the freeing and glorious blessing of finding continual reconciliation to Him, when we sin. He wants to improve us. And so, He exposes our sins, never for the purpose of condemnation, but always for the purpose of reconciliation and growth in grace. God's love for us, compels Him to never leave us in our sin, but rather, to drive us back to Him for forgiveness and grace, and the power to overcome it.

With that said, let us see the necessity of continuing to come to God, daily, confessing our sins unto these ends. If you find yourself confessing your sins to God, and pursuing repentance, know that that is one of the surest signs of you being blessed! The natural man could care less, or at the least, makes excuses and seeks to keep his sins permanently hidden.

The gospel for the unsaved (in this same context)!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25