

Victory of the Lamb – How to Talk with God – Psalm 32 –

February 26, 2023 – Pastor Bob Johannes

“Do this—it’s good for you!” Do you ever get tired of experts telling you that? Sometimes it’s new research on something we’ve known forever, like: Exercise—it’s good for you! And whole grains, laughing, socializing, sunshine, carrots, broccoli, herbal tea, sleeping, breakfast. Yeh, old news, we all know that! And then the researchers also love to shock us. It’s good for you: crying, red wine, coffee, and dark chocolate, talking to yourself, onions, rock climbing, turkey bacon, and swearing!

In Ps 32 David tells us that confessing our sin is good for us, and more than good for us—it’s blessed and blessed, worth rejoicing and singing! Hopefully that’s not a shock to us that: **“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. Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!”**

David, the king of Israel in 1000 BC is writing to us from real life experience. He confessed and he didn’t confess, all clearly recorded for us in the Bible. And in Ps 32 he’s telling you and me personally that

Confession to God means everything!

“Without confession, I wasted away.

Without confession, you’ll be stupid and brutish.”

But what a difficult topic, talking about “sin.” Outside of church we almost never use the word sin to describe anything but an enjoyable naughtiness, a guilty pleasure. There are dozens of lingerie companies, chocolate companies called “sinful” something. There’s a nice California Zinfandel wine called, “7 Deadly Zins.” What’s your “guilty pleasure?” I love a cigar, a manhattan, or a Saturday watching really good college football. But David takes “sin” seriously, and says it’s not my opinion or yours when he speaks to our God about sin: **“ I acknowledged my sin to you...I will confess my transgressions to the Lord....Therefore let all the faithful pray to you....You are my hiding place.”**

As much as we hate to admit it, David speaks personally to me about the transgressions against God I need forgiven and sins against others that you need covered. “Transgression” is rebellious self-assertion. I proudly say, “No one tells me how to think or how to live my life!” Sometimes I do things just because everyone is doing the opposite, or because someone said don’t do it that way. Just think how bad that gets when you’re in a relationship--when your parents or your spouse or your friend tells you what they want or how to do something! Then stubborn transgression really heats up!

“Sin” means to go off the path, into the weeds, into danger, into self-destruction. One of David’s sins, that the Lord recorded for us, is such a classic example of going off the path, everyone of us can identify with the missteps David took. It’s all recorded with the painful details in 2 Samuel 11. I think I should just read it to you:

In the spring, at the time when kings [normally] go off to war [leading their troops], David [chose not to go and] sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem. (David had his greatest victories over Goliath, King Saul, the enemy nations, firmly established as the popular, God-appointed king for over 10 years.)

One evening David got up from his bed (he was married, but still looking around) and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite.” (She’s married to a notable soldier in David’s army who is correctly out in the field, in battle.) Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Misusing his position of authority. Rape! Think Harvey Weinstein) Then she went back home. The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”

So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.

David was told, “Uriah did not go home.” So he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just come from a military campaign? Why didn’t you go home?”

Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!” (David picked the wrong man and the wrong strategy for his coverup!)

Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day. At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. (The victim of his murder plot!) He wrote, “Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die.”

As a result: Some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. (To cover his sin he killed Uriah and more!)

Joab sent David a full account of the battle. The messenger told David everything Joab had sent him to say. The archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."

David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another.'" (Joab was an excellent general, but not a person of high moral character. David knew him, used him, manipulated him. Now he says, "No big deal. Don't let this bother you.")

When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.

Those were the crazy missteps of sin, one following the other, trying to make up for, cover up for the last mistake. David tried it. You and I have tried it with the same result: **"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."**

And we also have an example of David's transgression, that proud self-assertion that I am who I am, and "who are you to tell me otherwise?" Long before David was king of Israel, the Lord had given clear warnings to their kings: "The king must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself...He must not take many wives...He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold...and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left." But at the height of his kingship, after the Lord gave him a great victory over the enemy Philistines, David wanted to increase his stature, drafting more troops and levying new taxes. So King David demanded a census of his nation and his military might! It was so wrong that even General Joab, not the sharpest religious knife in the drawer, warned his king: "May the Lord multiply his troops a hundred times over. My lord the king, are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel?" The king's word, however, overruled Joab. And as a result the Lord sent punishment of David and Israel for David's proud self-assertion. So David warns: **"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."** I've been there, done that.

We get stupid and brutish in our denial. In his well-known book explaining his Christian faith, English novelist Francis Spufford defines sin as "the human propensity to screw things up," and it's stupid to try to deny that! Often we're forced to admit it at a time of great failure, when our marriage breaks up, our career crumbles, our child wanders away, our enjoyable habit becomes an addiction, but it's with us everyday. I can look at the lacks and flaws in me, my life and my plans. Why am I not everything I hoped I could be, everything I should be? Whether we use the words "sin" and "guilt" or not, we know that we've screwed it up. Or imagine that someone could see everything about you, someone who was always peeking even when you were all alone, when the

door was closed or the lights were off; who even knew your thoughts! How would you/feel? I need cover! You need cover! Even if I don't call it "sin," I know that I'm not enough, pretty, successful enough; popular, rich enough; smart, brave enough, kind enough, generous enough!

And the solution is confession to God! **"I acknowledged my sin to you [God] and did not cover up my iniquity. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord."** I need to come clean with God first and foremost, because he set the standard that I broke. And we all need his standards, because our natural propensity to screw things up can cloud our judgment. Your conscience can be so oversensitive that you're still beating yourself up about a sin from 20 years ago. Or if we judge it by public opinion, that can be so screwed up, too. Public opinion has justified everything from racism to date rape. Apparently public opinion in Russia is that Pres. Putin is a great hero, defending his country from Ukranian Nazis!

So just come clean with God. Ask yourself, "Am I accepting the responsibility, or still trying to blame someone else? Am I upset by the sinfulness of my sin or just the embarrassment, the consequences, the inconvenience of my sin? Am I beating myself up, trying to earn a clean conscience or a clean slate with God?" Confession means dropping all of that, and just coming clean with God, because he is the only one who truly forgives, covers, and cancels! Every solution I can try will just fall short. I'll waste away or be a stupid brute. **"But the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him."**

The Lord's love and forgiveness are so "unfailing" that 1000 years later the apostle Paul can quote the words of Psalm 32 in Romans 4 to assure us that the Lord's love and forgiveness are there for us, too, because **"[Jesus] was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Ro 4:25)."** And the apostle John echoes the same assurance: **"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9)."** Our God, your God, is so faithful in his forgiveness, that it would be unjust for him not to forgive.

So confession means everything. God designed confession for us as the greatest blessing, and the way to know him as the merciful and gracious God he truly is. **"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us (Ps 103:8-12)."** So make confession a priority in your prayer. Amen.