

# Rejoice In Grace!

Dr. Lal Hmingliani Browne

 Psalm 32

## Psalm 32:1-10

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord', and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding-place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you. The torments of the wicked are many, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous Ones, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."*

This is the word of the lord.

Thanks be to God.

**Let us pray:** May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.



As Pastor Steve mentioned last Sunday, we are taking a "summer with the Psalms." The psalms reveal the depth, passion, breadth and wisdom found in loving relationship between God and God's people. Seven of those psalms have been labeled "penitential psalms". Psalm 32 is one of those seven psalms.

Our human relationships give abundant opportunity for falling short, and hurting God and others.

Therefore, attention to repentance and forgiveness is quite appropriate. Moreover, there is a wisdom in the psalms that carries us beyond where we could ever imagine going.

Personally, I love the psalms because my father loved the psalms. The psalms were almost always a part of our daily family devotions. To this day I read a psalm almost every day.

Sometime early in my parent's marriage, my mother learned that bangs on the forehead were all the rage. Influenced and led by her friend, she went and got her hair done – with bangs. She waited eagerly for my father to come home. He came home from work. He changed his clothes. They had tea. They prepared dinner and ate dinner. We had our family devotions and they put us children to bed.

All this time there was no reaction to my mother's bangs from my father. Finally mother

## “What God wants is a relationship of love and joy and happiness.”

could not wait any longer and asked, “What do you think of my new bangs?” (What husband thinks there is a safe answer to that question? But my father was brave, so he simply told the truth as he saw it.) He said, “You look like a horse.” For the rest of his life she never wore bangs again.

Several years later, my mother was pregnant with my twin brothers. One day while she sat in the doctor's waiting room, a man admired the gold necklace my father had given her. He offered her a piece of a gold bar in exchange for the necklace. She made the exchange only to discover later that the 'gold bar' was only painted metal and she had been robbed.

She dreaded to go home and tell my father, but they had the kind of relationship where they did tell each other everything.

She explained what had happened and apologized to him. My father gently said to my mother, “Oh, the regret is mine. I didn't buy a beautiful and valuable enough necklace. Tomorrow we will go together and I will buy you a big and beautiful enough gold necklace that you will never again be tempted to trade it away.” He bought her the better necklace and she kept the fake gold bar as a reminder of the grace of his love and kindness to her.

While my Father would never mistake himself for God, I think his action here

models the grace and love of God. My father made no demand for mother's guilt and penitence. His forgiveness was for the sake of their relationship. My father's concern was for her to be his loving wife and him to be her loving husband. The relationship mattered.

As the Prophet Isaiah said,

*“But now, says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, and he who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine!” (Isa 43:1)*

As God says in Exodus,

*“I am the Lord, and I will free you ... and deliver you ... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.” (Exodus 6:6-7)*

I noted that Psalm 32 is called a “penitential psalm”. However, the psalmist here has an interest in something that is far more important than penitence.

Penitence provides the opportunity for forgiveness. And forgiveness gets rid of the negative problem of sin. The passion of the psalmist, however, is for the positive. The psalmist wants to move past sin and to experience God's joy in us. God's love is for us and our love and joy in God.

One of the phrases I most appreciate in our Committal Service Liturgy is the prayer where

the deceased is lifted up to God by name and, though a sinner, he or she is redeemed by God's own doing.

The person is already God's own. So we address God in prayer, saying - "Tom Smith, a sheep of your own fold, a sinner of your own redeeming!" I love being a redeemed sinner sheep!

Being forgiven is not the goal. Living a life of joy as redeemed children of God is the goal!

Our repetitive sin, and need for God's grace, may cause us to miss what God wants with us. What God wants is a relationship of love and joy and happiness.

Therefore, verses 1 & 2 invite us to think of ourselves as those happy ones 'whose transgressions are forgiven'. We are forgiven by God and are without iniquity.

We tremble to say such a thing – to suggest that we, at any time, are without transgression, sin, iniquity and deceit. We say we have turned to God in sincere repentance. We affirm that we believe God forgives when we repent. Surely then, we are truly forgiven and made anew, by God.

In verses 3 & 4 the psalmist includes us in the 'we' of those connected with the love and mercy of God. Being forgiven is a great release of anxiety and guilt. But it is not enough.

Verse 5 contains three repetitions of our confession and reminds us that we need to keep confessing our sins. But, for the psalmist, there is need for only one declaration of God's forgiveness. We stumble in our efforts, but God's act of forgiveness is powerful, graceful and lasting. How marvelous is that!

In verses 6-8, we are included in those who have stories to tell about living in the context of God's forgiveness. It is a part of our call to witness to living as God's changed people.

If we are always aware of our sinfulness and never aware of our blessing as God-forgiven people, we end up being arrogantly proud of our humility.

Indeed we are forgiven sinners, redeemed by God. If we continue obsessing with our guilt, we end up blinded to what God has done for us.

The obsession with guilt also numbs us to what God does for us - to keep us living in a grace. The 'ancient path' is not about getting forgiven. It is about living with joy as redeemed sinners.

Joyful living as people redeemed in God's love, is the best protection/antidote from falling back into sin. As the old Browne family favorite hymn puts it,

*"But I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day."*

Verses 10b - 11 are the heart of this Psalm. Here are the words of light, grace and hope that are God's vision for us.

*"Steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous Ones, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart."*

This is the center of the message. We are imperfect people made acceptable by grace and called back to the love of God's relationship with us. We must trust in God and count on God's declaration that he has made us upright in heart. Because of that, we get to live forever in God's steadfast love and joy.

As Lamentations says:

*"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning..." (Lamentations 3:22-23a)*

In response, we get to love God and love neighbor.

Friends, we are called, to rejoice with great celebration. We are to live our lives as God's grateful children!

In the generosity of God's grace, we gather to be the part of the Body of Christ called Church of the Palms. All of us are 'sheep of God's fold' and 'sinners of God's own redeeming'.

Surely, the gift of salvation we receive, as sinners redeemed in Christ, is so valuable we will never want to trade it away.

Let us live our daily lives rejoicing in God's grace.

Thanks be to God. Amen.



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Church of the Palms

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