

“SUFFERING IN SILENCE”

Psalm 32:1-11

Dr. John Crocker, Crossroads Church, Albert Lea, MN. October 23-24, 2010

Each one of us has on many occasions tried to hide a wrong instead of confess it and make things right. If your heart was not hardened or your soul callused, then your conscience tormented you and robbed you of your joy.

The poet Wordsworth wrote, *‘From the body of one guilty deed, a thousand ghostly fears and haunting thoughts proceed.’*

How long did you suffer in silence because you tried to hide the wrong?

- King David of Israel did something utterly detestable, and he refused to confess it.

He became trapped in despair. He groaned “all day long.” (v.3) But still he didn’t confess his wrong. He suffered in silence.

Here’s what happened: (You can read about it in 2 Samuel 11 & 12 It’s riveting drama). *‘In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David 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.’* (2 Samuel 11:1)

While his army was at war David had an affair with the wife of one of the men who was on the battlefield. Her name was Bathsheba.

Bathsheba became pregnant with David’s child.

David tried to hide his paternity by summoning Uriah back home to spend time with his wife. He wanted to deceive Uriah so that later when Uriah learned about Bathsheba’s pregnancy he would assume he was the father.

But Uriah didn’t cooperate. He could not enjoy the comforts of his wife’s companionship while the rest of the men were in battle risking their lives.

So David sent Uriah back to the battle. David secretly ordered the commander to put Uriah where the fighting was fiercest and then have those around him withdraw, so that Uriah would be killed in battle.

That’s exactly what happened. It was tantamount to murder.

Then David took Bathsheba to be his wife.

David, composer of beloved Psalms actually did that!

He kept quiet about it for almost a year and endured the torment of holding onto his sin and trying to hide it.

- Then God sent the prophet Nathan to confront David.

Nathan told a parable about a rich man and a poor man. The rich man took the poor man’s pet ewe lamb, had it slaughtered and cooked to provide dinner for traveling guest. He had many sheep of his own, but he took the poor man’s pet. (2 Samuel 12)

The story made David angry. He said anyone who did such a dastardly deed deserved to die.

Nathan looked at him and said, *‘You are the man. . . Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites’* (2 Samuel 12:9)

At last David repented of his sin, and God forgave him. But the son born to David and Bathsheba would not live. Forgiveness doesn’t cancel the consequences of sin.

- Psalm 32 is about David’s torment and his repentance.

¹ *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

² *Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

³ *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

⁴ *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

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.*

⁶ *Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.*

⁷ *You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.*

⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.*

⁹ *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.*

¹⁰ *Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*

¹¹ *Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

- Do you know what it's like to live with unconfessed wrongs? It sours your relationships with your spouse, parents, children, friends. It's a wall of stone that shuts out fellowship with God. It's toxic to your emotional and spiritual well being.

If this sounds familiar to you, are you prepared now to deal with it so that it doesn't eat you alive?

All of us should learn the lessons from David's experience expressed so poignantly in Psalm 32.

I. PRETENSE CAUSES PAIN. Psalm 32:3-4

The saying, "What you see is what you get" does not describe most people. Pretending is part of who they are. William Hazlitt wrote, *'Man is a make-believe animal: he is never so truly himself as when he is acting a part.'* (Early 19th cent. British Essayist)

³ *When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

Keeping silent was David's way of trying to deal with his sin.

After all, he was the king. Pagan kings did worse things than he had done, so why should he feel guilty?

David pretended to himself that all was well.

Nothing sets you back like keeping up a front.

Refusing to confess a serious wrong builds up a hard crust on your soul. It makes you shrivel as a person.

It's like comedienne Phyllis Diller's oven. She said her oven was so dirty she could bake only one cupcake at a time.

- As King David hardened his heart, God increased the pressure on him.

⁴ *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. Selah*

David *groaned* under the weight of God's heavy hand.

David said *'my bones wasted away, 'my strength was sapped.'* He was practically paralyzed by pretense.

- Some Christians cite Romans 8:1 where the Apostle Paul insists, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus"—for Christians.

So if God doesn't condemn Christians, there's no problem. Ignore any guilt feelings.

But why are so many Christians today living spiritually shriveled lives, unhappy and tormented in spirit?

It's because Christians still sin, and they don't deal with it!

The righteousness we have in Jesus Christ is totally incompatible with the wicked things we may do.

That's why we confess to God. Pretending to be righteous is torture.

- God loved David too much to let him live the way the pagan kings lived.

For almost a year David had to wrestle with the unrelenting pounding of his conscience.

- If your conscience is tormenting you, thank God for putting pressure on you. That's evidence of his love and mercy to those who belong to him.

II. REPENTANCE BRINGS RELIEF. Psalm 32:1-2, 5-7

Pretense doesn't work.

David tells us how he dealt with the agony of his guilt.

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. Selah*

⁶ *Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him.*

⁷ *You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah*

The way to deal with sin is by prompt confession and repentance.

The apostle Paul wrote, *'Godly sorrow—that's genuine remorse for sin—brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret.'* (2 Corinthians 7:10)

Christians must beware of the paralyzing power of sin.

In the Book of Proverbs I read, *'He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.'* (Proverbs 28:13-14)

In the NT James wrote *'Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.'* (James 5:16)

- Why don't we do this?

Lots of Christians have the idea that other Christians don't struggle with sin the way they do. So they don't want some holier-than-thou blabbermouth to know their failures.

I assure you there isn't a Christian in this room that doesn't want something in his or her present or past kept private, and hidden.

- So repentance is a normal part of Christian life.

You've probably heard about the 95 theses that Martin Luther nailed to the Wittenberg church door. Do you know what the first thesis was? It read, *'When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he willed that the entire life of the believer be one of repentance.'* (Martin Luther)

Luther wrote to refute the practice of penance and ritualized confession in the church. He said real penance means genuine repentance before our Lord—not just going to the priest occasionally for absolution.

Without real, regular repentance, pretense takes control of your life.

- Jesus talked about "pretend Christians" who call him Lord. He said *'Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.'* (Matthew 7:21)

If you do something that you know is contrary to the will of our Father in heaven, repent immediately. If you don't, you will be miserable.

The muck of sin builds up in our lives, like the inside of Phyllis Diller's oven.

- I often have to turn to my Lord in penitence. I'm not proud of that, but it's the truth.

Only repentance can bring the relief we need.

- David learned that. That's why he says it right at the start of this Psalm.

¹ *Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

² *Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

Repentance brings relief from the torment.

III. HUMILITY PRODUCES HAPPINESS. Psalm 32:8-11

Now David tells how God spoke to him.

⁸ *I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.*

This tells us what God did with David, and what God does with us.

He teaches, He guides, He protects.

If someone teaches you, what is your responsibility? To learn.

If someone shows you the right way to go, what is your responsibility? To follow.

If someone counsels and protects you, what is your responsibility? To submit, and not resist.

Isn't this what parents do? They instruct, they guide, and they protect. Children must learn, follow and submit.

That's the hard part, isn't it?

Over 250 years ago (1758) Robert Robinson wrote the words of a hymn that has a renewed popularity in contemporary Christian worship. Robinson grew up in London. During his teen years he belonged to a notorious mob of hoodlums. At the age of 17 he attended a meeting where the evangelist George Whitfield was preaching. He went there to mock the preacher, but God's powerful word, preached by George Whitefield, got through to Robinson and he repented of his sins and put his trust in Jesus as his Savior. He felt God calling him to be a preacher of the gospel and went on to serve as the pastor of a significant church in Cambridge, England. At age 23 he wrote the hymn, *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing*.

One of the stanzas has these words, *'O to grace how great a debtor daily I'm constrained to be! Let thy goodness like a fetter bind my wand'ring heart to thee: Prone to wander—Lord, I feel it—prone to leave the God I love; here's my heart—O take and seal it; seal it for thy courts above'*

- David was prone to wander away from God; so was Robert Robinson; so am I, and so are you!

Many times I have not wanted to go God's way or listen to the counsel of God's word.

God warned David, and his warning applies to us.

⁹ *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.*

In David's time—3000 years ago—people knew more about horses and mules than most of us do.

But we all know that if you want a mule to obey you, you don't give it a briefing or a pep talk; you don't appeal to its sense of moral responsibility.

Mules have no morals and not much sense.

So how do you get a mule to obey you? You've got to get its attention first, and that involves some discomfort—the cut of the bit and the pull on the bridle—otherwise you can't do anything with the beast.

That's how God had to deal with David.

God was "heavy handed" in his dealing with David. (v.4)

Now God says to David, *'I shouldn't have to do it again. You're not an animal, so don't act like one.'*

The right response to God's heavy hand is humility. The Apostle Peter wrote, *'Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.'* (1 Peter 5:6)

- It's through his holy word that God instructs and guides us in the way we should live.

But if we ignore it, we become like animals in terms of the way God has to deal with us.

By means of God's holy word we learn the most important lessons from God; that's how we choose God's way for our lives, and that's how we yield to God's protection—his loving care.

God says, literally in v.8 *my eye will be on you*. That's a whole lot better than God's heavy hand being on you (4).

- Now see how David sums up this Psalm:

¹⁰ *Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.*

David had done a bad, bad thing. But he had repented, and he contrasted the woes of those who persist in wickedness with the embrace of God's mercy.

Unfailing love here in v.10 is that marvelous Hebrew word, *hesed*.

This word is so rich in meaning that we don't have a single English word as its equivalent. It's God's mercy, his kindness, his unfailing love to people who deserve his wrath.

I think there were tears of gratitude to God in David's eyes when he wrote that word.

Have you been there? As a Christian have you been more like an animal than a child of God? Have you stubbornly turned from God's way and ignored the counsel of his word? Have you squirmed under God's heavy hand on you? Do you need to repent and confess your sins and then experience the embrace of God's mercy?

If you have done that, you understand David here.

The torment was gone. In its place came the freedom to breathe, to laugh, to cry. So David concludes:

¹¹ *Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

David sang this with a happy heart. No longer was he suffering in silence.

Do you feel God's heavy hand on you? Have you been resisting God because there's something you need to confess and make right, but you maintain your silence and you're spiritually dry and bitter?

Has the joy gone out of your life? Do people who know you well say you're not the person you used to be?

God sent Nathan to confront David and get his attention. Has God's word today in the Psalm been like Nathan to you? What are you going to do about it?

I pray that we all will respond as David did to Nathan, so that we will know God's blessing upon us as a church and so that we will rejoice in the Lord and be glad, and worship him with righteous hearts.

Let us humble ourselves so that we will experience God's loving embrace instead of his heavy hand.

PRAYER: Please don't leave here still tormented by guilt.

I want to lead you in parts of the prayer David prayed after the prophet Nathan came to him. It's Psalm 51:

1. *Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.*

2. *Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin*

7. *Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

8. *Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice.*

9. *Hide your face from my sins and blot out my iniquity.*

10. *Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*

12. *Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.*

Our Father, you see those who have prayed this prayer. They have been where David was, and they want the joy of their salvation back.

May you grant them that assurance now because Jesus Christ died for their sins on the cross and arose victorious over sin and death, so that those who repent and believe in him can say with confidence, "It is well with my soul."