

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

In a previous church that I pastored the Lord brought a young lady across our path whose life had been broken by her sin. She had developed an alcohol and drug problem. She was cutting herself. She was in the midst of a lot of pain resulting from the sin of others and her own sin. It is many years ago now, but I remember some of our conversation like it was yesterday. We were seated at our kitchen table. Christine and I listened as she told us her story, describing her brokenness, expressing her pain. After she shared, we responded by explaining the hope of forgiveness and salvation provided for us through Jesus atoning sacrificial death. The Lord used those words to birth in her a faith that Jesus loved her enough to endure the cross for her so that she could be forgiven and set free. She responded by praying with us, confessing her sins and professing her faith in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. I looked up after we prayed and as she lifted her head, I noticed a puddle had formed on the table from her tears. I wasn't sure what to make of her crying so I asked how she felt and she said these words, "I just can't believe it, I just can't believe it. I can't believe that God would forgive me after all I have done!

Her tears were not her typical tears. These were not tears of sorrow. They were tears of joy; the joy that arises from a heart overwhelmed with gratitude for forgiveness.

Psalm 32

*Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!
Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are
lived in complete honesty!*

*When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long.
Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like
water in the summer heat.*

Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt.

*I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my
guilt is gone.*

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.

For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory.

The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you.

Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."

Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him!

Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

The title of my message today is: Draw Near to God... Don't be a Donkey!

Psalm 32 is a Psalm about how to experience a life of Joy. It begins with joy and ends with joy. This joy is the result of drawing near to God, first, to be forgiven by Him and second, to be instructed and guided by Him.

Psalm 32 is one of the Psalms of David. He wrote it reflecting on the mercy he received from God once he came clean, confessed and sought God's forgiveness for a series of horrific sinful acts. His series of severe moral failures began with a dereliction of duty, followed by an abuse of power, followed by adultery, followed by deception, culminating in a conspiracy to commit murder.

In order to fully appreciate this Psalm, we need to review David's story:

- The story begins with these words: At the time when Kings would go to battle, David stayed in Jerusalem and sent Joab, his commander.
- David rose from his bed in the evening, went up on his roof and saw a woman named Bathsheba, bathing on her rooftop.
- David sent men to find out who she was. He learned she was married, sent for her anyway, committed adultery with her and she conceived.

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

- David tried to cover up his sin by inviting Uriah, Bathsheba's husband and a soldier, to leave the battle and return home to be with his wife.
- Uriah refused to engage in such dereliction of duty and stayed at David's palace.
- David tried to further entice Uriah to go home and be with his wife by getting him drunk, but that did not work either. Uriah did not go.
- David, desperate to cover up his adultery, devised a plan with Joab, his commander, to send Uriah to the front line unprotected. From David's perspective his plan worked. Uriah was killed.
- David then took Bathsheba, now a widow, as his wife.
- About a year later, after no signs of remorse and repentance from David, God sent His prophet Nathan to confront David.
- Nathan's words brought deep conviction to David's heart and he cried to God for forgiveness.

Reflecting on the above David wrote, *"Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!"* When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, "I will confess my rebellion to the Lord." And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone. Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment.

The key word in the first couple of verses is "joy". David was elated because he received forgiveness. You can hear the exuberant relief in David's words. David had been plagued by the painful feelings of guilt. His pain is expressed in verses 3 & 4. His guilt feelings weighed on him emotionally and psychologically to the point of weakening him physically.

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

But David's problem was not primarily that he felt guilty. He was guilty. David was guilty of real, actual sin. There are times when people feel guilty for things they haven't done. That is not what David is addressing in this Psalm. He is addressing the guilt feelings that accompany one who is guilty. There are only two options when dealing with guilt feelings due to actual sin or wrongdoing. We can either receive forgiveness or we can try and rid ourselves of the guilt feelings by denying or justifying our sin. We convince ourselves that we did nothing wrong. We kill our conscience. The first option is the only healthy response, because only through confession and forgiveness are our guilt feelings and our actual guilty status resolved. David had apparently battled with his guilt. His words indicate that he tried to kill his conscience; possibly either denying, justifying, or minimizing the evil he committed. Finally, after Nathan confronted him, David was convicted of his sin, stopped hiding it, and confessed. The conviction enabled him to face his guilt in a positive way. And when he did, he experienced this wonderful relief from the weight of his guilt.

In verse 1 and verse 5 the words translated "forgiven" and "forgave" mean literally, "to take off, remove, or lift off". Forgiveness lifts the weight of guilt off of us. When someone feels the need to confess their guilt they often use the English idiom, "I have something I need to get it off my chest." This idiom accurately describes the emotional and psychological pressure guilt places us under. God doesn't want us to be weighed down by guilt. He calls us to draw near to him, confess our sin, and experience His forgiveness. David's joyful exclamation was, *"And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."* Because of this wonderful experience David said, *"Therefore, let all the godly pray to you while there is still time, that they may not drown in the floodwaters of judgment."* Draw near to God to receive forgiveness and freedom NOW while it is still available.

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

Look again at verse 2: There is joy for those, "*whose lives are lived in complete honesty!*" Knowing and trusting in the forgiveness available to us in Christ motivates us to live honestly about our sin. We don't need to deny it, justify it, minimize it, or hide it, because we know we can draw near to God with it and receive forgiveness from it rather than punishment for it. We hide our sin and draw away from those from whom we have no hope of mercy, but the hope of God's mercy fosters the ability to be honest with God and ourselves about our sin and to draw near to Him for forgiveness. There is a huge difference between being under conviction or condemnation. The devil wants to condemn you for your sin. Condemnation says, "You have sinned and there is no hope of forgiveness and redemption for you." "Your sin has left you unworthy and unwelcome." The Holy Spirit brings conviction, not condemnation. Conviction says, "You have sinned. You are guilty. You deserve punishment. BUT, there is hope because even in your guilty state, God loves you and is willing to forgive you and free you." Condemnation leads people to draw away from God, as it fosters both a fear of God and hatred for God, seeing Him as only a source of harm to us. The conviction of the Spirit draws us to God, seeing Him as our source of help, not harm.

There is great joy for those who draw near to God in prayer for forgiveness. There is also great joy for those who draw near to God in prayer to receive His guidance. Look at verses 7-11:

For you are my hiding place; you protect me from trouble. You surround me with songs of victory. The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control." Many sorrows come to the wicked, but unfailing love surrounds those who trust the Lord. So rejoice in the Lord and be glad, all you who obey him! Shout for joy, all you whose hearts are pure!

I came across an insightful observation by Laurence Turner. He noted that the verb "to send" is used no fewer than twelve times in the story recounting

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

David's adultery and his wicked attempts to cover it up. He pointed out that the emphasis on David "sending" depicts David's attempts to control his circumstances. David came to believe the lie that because he was King, he was in control and he could do as he pleased. The irony is that while David's "sending" others expressed his apparent control of the circumstances that led to his adultery with Bathsheba, then end result was that Bathsheba 'sent' word to David saying, "I am pregnant." The message "sent" by Bathsheba hit David right between the eyes with the reality that he wasn't as "in control" as he thought. David' response to this message from Bathsheba was to engage in more "sending". He continues to act as if he can control the situation, manipulating people and circumstances as he sees fit. The irony again is that it ends with God doing some "sending" of His own to show David who is really in control. He sent the prophet Nathan to confront David and reveal to David that when you break God's commandments, you really break yourself. David wrote that he "confessed his rebellion". Defining sin as rebellion is helpful in that it reminds us that the core problem with sin is that it is an attempt by us to seize control of our lives, usurping God's right to be Lord of our lives.

David was awakened from his senselessness, realizing that he needed to be forgiven AND he needed to follow. David realized he needed to stop acting like a mule. Barnes writes the following about this statement.

"The mule is distinguished for its obstinacy, and this is evidently the ground of comparison here. The meaning is, be tractable, gentle, yielding; submit to the guidance and direction of God and his truth." (See [Barnes Notes](#) on Psalm 32)

We have two choices. We can draw near to God willingly. That is the sensible thing to do. Or we can be drawn to God against our will. In the later case those who come to God against their will are those coming to him for judgement, not for forgiveness. Every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus is Lord, but for some their bowing will be under compulsion before God as judge. You can humble yourself now and bow down receiving His mercy

Drawing Near to God: Draw Near to God...Don't be a Donkey

8/6/17- Pastor Randy

and grace or you can bow down before Him later, humbled under His condemnation. When my boys were young they didn't always come when they were called away from playing or watching TV. Sometimes I would say, "You better come now. Don't make me come and get you!" When God calls us out of our sin to follow Him, let's not be dumb donkeys and make him come and put a bit in our mouths and drag us where we ought to go.

Don't be a donkey! Stop trying to run your life your own way. Draw near to God! Listen to His voice! Follow His path. Those who trust God, following His path for them have a reason to be excited because they are surrounded by his love. Those who obey the lord have a reason to be excited because He is watching over us!

Don't be like a donkey. Don't be stubborn and unreasonable, denying and trying to hide your sin. Acknowledge your sin. Draw near to God. On our side of the cross we understand even more than David did about God's provision of forgiveness. We understand the sacrifice and freedom are available through the cross. We understand the depths of God's love for us demonstrated by the sacrifice of Christ. If David had a reason to be grateful and joyful, how much more do we, knowing what we know!