

Text: Psalm 32 (Easy English Version)

Sunday 10th May 2020

Brightons Parish Church

Let us pray. May the words of my mouth, and the meditation of all our hearts, be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Boys and girls, do you like stories? I love a good story and during lockdown I've been reading books by my favourite author. Shout out for me your favourite story at the top of your voice! (PAUSE) Wow those sound like amazing stories and I'm sure you've read them lots of times!

But we don't only read about stories, we often tell stories to each other – hands up if you've been video calling friends and family? Me too – we've been calling people to tell them what we've been doing, and it's been lovely to tell our stories.

There might also be things around our homes which help us remember important stories in our lives. Let me show you some things which do that for me, in my home.

(PICTURES IN LIVINGROOM)

In all our lives there are moments which are important, which shape our lives, and there may be pictures or ornaments that help us remember those moments.

I wonder, boys and girls, what big things can you remember doing with your family? I'll give everyone thirty seconds to talk or think about that at home.

(PAUSE)

Our psalm today is another prayer by David, and it is thought that David may have written this prayer...

sometime after events in the Bible when David made some bad choices; it's the story of David, Bathsheba and Uriah. Because of David's selfishness he chose to commit adultery and then to lie and then to cover it all up. Psalm 51 was probably written at the time when David owned up to his mistakes, but Psalm 32, our reading today, was written later on, as he reflected on what had happened and how it had shaped his life.

So, it's really interesting that David chooses to write a prayer about this – it's like he chooses to hang up a picture about his past mistakes and invites people to remember his story! I suspect many of us would find that a little bit uncomfortable. So, why does David do it? I'll give you another thirty seconds to think about that or talk about it at home. (PAUSE)

Let me share with you what I think David's psalm teaches us about why he chose to share his story. Firstly, it seems like David has found happiness, joy, by coming to know God's forgiveness. In verses 1 to 2, he says:

'When God has forgiven someone's sins, they are truly happy!

They may have turned against God, but when God forgives them, they are happy.

They may have done something bad, but when the Lord says, 'Not guilty!', he has truly blessed them...' (v1-2)

And David is not alone in feeling that way; many people can speak of knowing greater peace, contentment, hope when they have asked God to forgive them. Sometimes people may feel this because they were worried...

about the future, or about what happens after we die, **but I think many more** people have experienced joy, peace and hope because when they received God's forgiveness they also came into a meaningful relationship with God. That was my experience, and I'll tell some more of my story on Tuesday evening.

Yet David speaks of this himself as well – did you notice how he structures the psalm? **First there's forgiveness** and flowing from that comes knowing God as his refuge (v6-7), then having God as a guide into the “right way” or the best way to live (v8), then in verse 10 comes knowing God's unfailing love and finally in verse 11, having a true and deep sense that you ‘belong to the Lord’. It's really no wonder that David says people are happy and blessed when they have their sins forgiven.

But I wonder if that all sounds too good to you? Or, I wonder to what degree it matches with your experience of being a Christian? And to each of those questions, I want to share something specific.

Firstly, on Tuesday evening, in place of a sermon, I'm hoping to have 5 or 6 of you share your story about the difference God's forgiveness has made to your life. I'd like to get all sorts of stories – from men, from women; from the young and the less young; stories of people who came to faith in a moment and stories of those who came to faith over time.

My hope is that hearing these stories may help us all. We may learn a different kind of story and so expect more of God. We may hear a story a little like ours and so...

feel affirmed. We may hear a story and yearn for God to do that in our lives as well. So, join us on Tuesday evening as we hear the stories of others.

But I'm still looking for 3 or 4 more stories, so please get in touch this afternoon if you are a Christian and can share how God's forgiveness makes a difference in your life. Please don't allow fear to stop you – because what if your story, like David's story, is the one people need to hear to help them find hope? Imagine if David had kept quiet about his experience – would we realise that God is ready and willing to forgive any, and all, of our sins? Without David's story, would we realise that it's only when we quit the pretence of being perfect, and own up to our mistakes, that it's only then do we come into a right and meaningful relationship with God?

I'm so grateful for this psalm because of what it teaches about God and the kind of relationship we can have with Him. So, friends, I look forward to hearing from you this afternoon, because it's important we tell our stories.

But what if this psalm doesn't match with your experience of being a Christian? Specifically, some of you may say you've never really known God as refuge, or guide, or any sense of having Him surround you with His unfailing love, or you belong to Him. If we were meeting together I might ask some questions and try to understand some of your story, even though I wouldn't necessarily have an "answer", but I'd be curious to know what your relationship with God is like. Because I've known a little of those feelings myself – before I came to know God's forgiveness, I believed in God, but...

He seemed pretty distant. I did not know Him as a refuge or guide, nor did I have any sense of belonging to Him.

I think that's because, until that point, I didn't truly understand forgiveness. You see, most of us grow up with an idea that God is so loving and nice that we can ask God for forgiveness, He'll just give us it, and then we can carry on as normal. But again, notice the progression in the psalm – David is forgiven by humbling himself, and stays humble by being open to God's teaching.

Boys and girls, can you remember our second song this morning? If I did the actions, would it help? (ACTIONS)

That's it – "I'm following the King"... "I'm ready to obey, to listen to His Word." In my own life,...

I must have asked for God's forgiveness many times in Sunday School and church, but it wasn't until around the age of 19 that I came to the point of bending the knee to Jesus, of truly accepting Him as my King, or as the Bible calls Him, my Lord. And that meant allowing Jesus to call the shots; allowing Him to teach me what values, principles, priorities to have.

You know, if you look around my home, you won't actually see any pictures of faith – there's no pictures of Jesus, there's no pictures of the cross. And it got me thinking – most of us don't have pictures of Jesus or faith around the house, and that's OK, because it should be in our lives that people see Jesus, it should be in our lives that the story of us bending the knee to Jesus should be seen.

So, if I looked at your life, if I look at my own life, what would I see? Would I see the values and priorities of Jesus? Would I see the ways you bend the knee to Him? Is your life somehow different because of the forgiveness you have received through Jesus?

It's my experience, that when we bend the knee, heed His teaching, and allow Him to be Lord and King over every area of our lives, that then our relationship with Jesus becomes meaningful and we come to know Him as refuge and guide, with a true sense of belonging to Him. But it begins first, most often, with forgiveness.

I wonder friends, do we know the forgiveness of Jesus, and with that have we welcomed Him as Lord and King? I pray that we might, and so come to know the same joy...

as David and have a story to tell of God's grace which speaks to others in our day and in the days to come.

May it be so. Amen.

We close with our final hymn, "I will sing the wondrous story".