

Psalm 32 – The Pursuit of Salvation

Friends, if you will permit me to continue with the comparison of reading the Psalms with looking at someone's Facebook page, I would tell you this morning that reading Psalm 32 is a lot like reading certain kinds of inspirational memes that people post on their pages.

Maybe you've seen some of these memes? They are comprised of a nice photo along with an inspirational quote from some successful business person or motivational guru... do you know what I'm talking about?

I call them "positive wisdom" memes; let me show you a few so you know what I'm referring to. Take a look at this one...

"Incredible change happens in your life, when you decide to take control of what you do have power over, instead of craving control over what you don't" – Steve Maraboli.

And this next one... *"Positive anything is better than negative nothing!"* by Elbert Hubbard.

And just look at the lady in this photo - doesn't she just look wonderful! She's so happy she's positively glowing! Very attractive – who wouldn't want to be like her!?

Of course when you read this next meme it's obvious that this lady must have followed this advice; *"Beautiful things happen in your life when you distance yourself from the negative things"*

But I find this next one to be particularly interesting, it says *"Do you want to always be happy? Then stop fighting for the negative and learn the beautiful art of self-encouragement!"*

And I think that questions reveals why these sorts of memes are so popular on Facebook...

Because through liking them, posting them, reading them, reflecting on them and following their "positive wisdom" we

engage in that “beautiful art of self-encouragement” by which we can pursue happiness.

These memes make us wise for happiness, because who doesn’t want to be happy right? Happiness is very important to us.

In fact happiness is so important the pursuit of it was written into the United States Declaration of Independence!

It says “*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.*”

Now we may live in Canada, but it’s impossible to deny the impact that American culture and values – based on their Declaration of Independence and the pursuit of happiness – has had on shaping what life is like in our country - or in the rest of the world for that matter.

We are all busy pursuing and doing that which makes us happy – are we not?

When someone is considering an important life decision – what is it that we often say to them if they ask our advice on the decision? “Well, if it makes you happy you should go for it – right?

Even as Christians we say this...

But another reason why happiness is very important to us is that there are many things in this world which can make us unhappy.

No one can deny that everything in this world is affected by mistakes, tragedy, sickness, disaster, brokenness, evil, and death... and that the result is pain, and suffering and sadness, and this makes us unhappy.

And somehow we know this is not how things are supposed to be, at the very least experience tells us that happiness is

better than unhappiness – so we pursue it rather than let life dictate that we must be unhappy.

Certainly as we read David's description of his unhappiness in Psalm 32:3-4, with dramatic statements about how his bones were wasting away, that he was groaning all day long, and that his strength was sapped, we know that David does not want to continually feel like this – and neither would we...

So we take action and do things that help us avoid feeling unhappy – this is why “positive wisdom” is helpful to us.

There is a peace that will come from learning to work on the things you actually have some control over, instead of constantly being frustrated by trying to control the things you can't.

And avoiding the “negative things and people” in life and not allowing them to influence your perspective will dramatically improve your overall mood – even your health...

However friends, while positive wisdom is able to help us pursue happiness – it is insufficient to make us wise for salvation.

And the reality is that many of the things which make us unhappy are actually indicators that something is wrong at a much deeper level of reality – and we need to be saved from it.

And if we constantly rely on “positive wisdom” to help avoid whatever is negative and focus only on the positive; we risk putting ourselves in greater peril by allowing this pursuit of happiness to deter us from the wisdom that is needed for salvation.

Because salvation wisdom only comes from admitting and confronting the negativity in this world and in our own lives - do you understand what I'm saying? Let me put it this way friends – salvation is better than happiness. Do you believe that? Do you see the wisdom in that?

David certainly did – and that is why he wrote Psalm 32, so that people who heard it and read it would be instructed and made wise by it – specifically that they would be made wise for salvation – and be blessed in that.

If we pursue salvation instead of happiness; in the end we will be blessed with happiness as well – but it will be a deeper more profound happiness than what we may have been pursuing before.

So – how about making vs. 1-2 into a meme to put on Facebook to remind ourselves of this.

“Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose iniquity the Lord does not count against them.”

Now the salvation wisdom in Psalm 32 instructs us that we must know our transgressions, our sins, and our iniquity so we can confess them – and thus be in a Blessed state.

And David uses three different words to describe our wrong doing in this Psalm, not only because he’s writing Hebrew poetry – but because it is a poetic way to say we need to know all about our wrong doing.

We need to be made aware of every aspect of that which is negative in us; transgressions, sin and iniquity – the whole package.

And I know that can be difficult to hear friends – because we are so accustomed to pursuing happiness by avoiding negative things - we don’t really want to focus on the negativity of our transgressions, our ‘PESHA’ - the ways in which we deliberately and knowingly rebel against God...

We’d rather move past our iniquity, our ‘AVON’ – the ways in which we distort and twist and warp what God intended for good into something else...

And we can’t see what good will come from admitting that in every aspect of what it means to be human, we are sinful,

‘חַטָּא-אֵן’ – which is our overall tendency to turn away from being faithful covenant partners with God.

We’d rather not deal with any of this because it is negative, and positive wisdom tells us that when it comes to our happiness nothing good comes from focusing on negative things!

But friends, David tells us from his personal experience that when it comes to our salvation nothing good comes from avoiding all this – this is what made him feel like his bones were wasting away and his strength was sapped and caused him to groan all day long...

Instead we need to move towards what is negative in us and identify it, own it, so that we can confess it.

And while the Ten Commandments and the list of Seven Deadly Sins are certainly helpful in identifying our sin so that we may confess it and be forgiven of it – I want to look at the three Hebrew words for our wrongdoing that David uses in

this Psalm and how they describe the breakdown of our relationship with the God as Creator, Redeemer and Transformer.

Because this will help us come to a deeper understanding of how sin affects the totality of our human nature and our relationship with God instead of just understanding it legalistically in terms of external do’s and don’ts.

So חַטָּא-אֵן is a general turning away from God and His intentions and it describes the breakdown of the covenant relationship between God as Creator and those created in His image.

God intentions were for man and woman to reflect His rule and care and creativity to the creation together in obedience to the His command to *“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground”* (Gen 1:28)

But the covenant consequences of Adam & Eve's failure of the test with the tree of knowledge of good and evil means that each one of us is born with, and will live out of, an orientation of **CHATA-AN** where we will turn away from worshiping and glorifying God through our created purpose and seek our own survival, our own glory, in opposition or ignorance of God the Creator.

So – the questions we need to be asking to uncover this kind of sin in ourselves are; “Do I go to school, to work, do look for a marriage partner, start a family, raise a family etc... in order to give glory and honor to God?”

“Am I a faithful partner with the Creator in working with His creation? Do I reflect who God is in how I take care of, and steward, and develop, and use His creation? Do I honor and respect and obey God's created order or do I know better than God?”

In fact many of the things which rob us of our happiness are part of the Covenant consequences of **CHATA-AN**, so if you really

want to discover how deep the rabbit hole goes – move towards the sickness, the relationship breakdown, the natural disasters, the injustice, not away from them...

And don't be afraid of the answers you uncover friends because this is how we become wise for salvation. We need to discover how deep sin goes so our salvation can go deeper.

But we're not done there... once Adam and Eve have broken the Covenant of Creation, God reveals Himself as a saving God who intends to redeem and restore the Creation, but in response to this work of redemption we discover our **AYON**, our iniquity...

Every time God graciously brings in a new covenant administration to further his redemptive plans – human beings take advantage of the grace in that administration and twist it and distort it into something to be used for their own gain.

And there is no better example of this ~~AVON~~ than how God's people twisted the Law of Moses into a legalistic burden that determined who was good enough to be considered one of God's people and who was not.

And when Jesus Christ brought God's plan of redemption to fulfilment in the Covenant of Consummation – much of his ministry among God's people was untwisting their understanding of the Law of Moses, this was part of how He fulfilled it.

So the questions that we need to be asking ourselves to discover our iniquity are; "Do I turn Jesus' forgiveness into something exclusive – that is only for certain people?"

"Do I believe that Jesus forgives me because of my efforts or because I'm really not that bad of a person?"

"Do I twist Jesus' grace into a license to sin? – as Paul describes in Romans 6:1 'let us keep on sinning so that grace may increase!'"

But again – as we ask and answer these questions in self-examination we don't need to be afraid of what will be revealed to us, because this is about us becoming wise for salvation – not determining if we are good enough Christians.

So while it might reveal to us the ugly and shameful parts of who we are – remember our Lord's words: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."* (Luke 5:31-32)

And *"Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven— as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."* (Luke 7:47)

Friends part of how we are blessed as we confess is that we grow in our love for Jesus because we experience just how much He is able to forgive us when we confess our sin to him! Amen?

And finally friends as God works to redeem the Covenant of Creation along the way He outlines very clear and specific

covenant terms and responses – and in addition to our iniquity of twisting the grace and mercy that comes to us in those covenants - there are times when we just flat out disobey the specifics that God has outlined and rebel against him.

That is our **PESHA**, our transgressions, our deliberate instances of disobedience where God says “do this” and we say – “no way - we’re doing that instead.”

And since we now live in the time where God has redeemed the Covenant of Creation in Jesus Christ through the Covenant of Consummation – the specific terms of the New Covenant are in the person of Jesus Christ, and we have had the Holy Spirit poured out upon us to include us in Him and transform us into faithful covenant partners – to become like our Lord Jesus.

So the questions we need to ask ourselves to discover our transgressions are; “Am I refusing to listen to and co-operate with the Holy Spirit’s transformation work in my life?” “Am I saying no to something the Holy Spirit is asking me to do or

respond to?” “Am I discouraging the Holy Spirit’s work or gifts in someone else?”

And again friends – remember we are asking these questions so that we are made wise for salvation, so that we can confess our disobedience to God and let the Holy Spirit give us a desire to obey instead.

So that we will experience God dealing with us as David describes in vs 8 *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.”* This can’t happen if we avoid dealing with our transgressions friends.

Because when it comes to salvation – David’s experience is that nothing good comes from avoiding these negative things in our lives...

In fact David arranges the structure of Psalm 32 to indicate that his negative experience in vs. 3-4 parallels a far greater

negative experience of final judgement, which he refers to in vs. 6-7, speaking about the rising of the mighty waters.

But the good news friends, is that David proclaims and encourages everyone to God, while he may be found, and confess and you will avoid this negative judgment.

Those who are wise to do this will find that the waters of judgment will not reach them, God will be their hiding place, and He will surround them with songs of deliverance. (vs. 6-7)

So in terms of salvation wisdom friends, it is better to face our transgressions, our iniquity, and our sin and confess it – and we’ve not said too much about how we go about doing that, because that isn’t really the focus of this Psalm..

next week when we look at Psalm 51 David will show us what’s involved in confessing our sin when we realize what we have done wrong.

In Psalm 32 he is setting the stage – trying to convince us that it is not wise to avoid our sin... and face judgment. If we should avoid anything – its judgment, but avoid that we must face our sin... and confess it.

So friends, we’ve just taken a really thorough look at the reality of sin in our lives - where does that leave us?

Are we depressed, has our self-esteem taken a huge blow, are we tempted to despair and beat ourselves up and say that we are worthless?

If we are friends then we have one sin left to confess – that we were looking for happiness instead of salvation...

Because friends when we are made wise for salvation, and we have been assured that in Jesus Christ whatever we have confessed is forgiven – then we are filled with joy!

Notice how at the beginning of this Psalm David says “Blessed is the one who...” which is a declaration about our external state of being – and it is irrespective of our internal state.

But by the end of this Psalm David can command us in vs. 11 to “rejoice in the Lord, and be glad, and sing!” In other words take the happiness that you now feel on this inside after confession and express it on the outside.

So contrary to what we’ve been trained to expect from “positive wisdom” – this whole endeavor of turning away from the pursuit of happiness and examining ourselves for sin instead, so that we can be made wise for salvation through confession, has brought us to a place where we are full of joy that can’t be contained!

So friends – as you go from here this morning will you continue to pursue happiness, or will you choose wisely and seek salvation instead?

Here’s a final meme for you – I pray that it makes you wise for salvation.

“Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord’s unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.” (vs. 10)

Amen.