

Explore the Bible: The Cleansing

July 26, 2017

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for Aug. 13 focuses on Psalm 32:1-11.*

In the earliest years of my preaching, while still in high school, one of my favorite Scriptures was John 10:10, where it is recorded that Jesus said: “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” Looking back, I now realize I was preaching about something I had yet to experience myself. My preaching was the verbalization of my own aspirations. It bothered me that I was promising others something I had yet to encounter myself.

It probably didn’t sound that way. My sermons about the abundant life included a great deal of scolding of the listeners for failing to experience what Jesus promised. In addition, I had no idea what the “abundant” life might look like. I promised a great deal about the possibility of permanent happiness in this life, something Jesus himself didn’t promise.

Importance of integrity

In Psalm 32, David sheds more than a little light on both the nature of the life Jesus later would promise, as well as how to experience it. It boils down, mostly, to one primary thing—integrity. Life’s miseries, more often than not, are rooted in the way we accommodate secret sins in our lives instead of coming clean with God about them. The result is to live a double-life with part of us out in the open and other parts hidden away. There is no healthier, or miserable, way to live.

David wrote: “Happy are those whose ... sin is covered. Happy are those ... in whose spirit there is no deceit. While I kept silence, my body wasted

away through my groaning all day long” (vv.1-3). It’s important to take note of the things David acknowledges to be the source of our spiritual misery.

He spoke of “covered” sin. Not sin that he kept covered up, but sin that had been confessed and covered by the mercy of God. When we try to “cover up” our sin, much like Adam and Eve, we find our guilt follows us with every step we take, our standing up and our lying down. It infects every segment of our lives. “For day and night your hand was heavy upon me” (v. 4). It’s as though a snake crawled into our sleeping bag to threaten even our most restful moments. Guilt tracks us down and follows us like a very unwelcome hitchhiker.

However painful it may be to confess our sin, it is all the more painful trying to keep it hidden. David even spoke of physical deterioration as one of the consequences of expending the energy of our soul trying to keep something from God.

A weight is lifted

We often hear people bear witness to the health that comes with being forgiven, even physical health. “It felt like a ton had been lifted off my shoulders,” they will say. There is more truth to that feeling of liberation from the unbearable weight of moral guilt than first meets the eye.

One summer, while in college, a friend invited me to go backpacking with him in New Mexico, in the Gila Wilderness near his home. The night before we set out, his mother helped us pack our backpacks. She was afraid we’d get out in the wilderness without something we needed. She threw in canned goods and even a heavy-gauge cast iron skillet for cooking the fish we caught fresh every day.

After she finished, I weighed my backpack and discovered I’d be hauling 75 pounds of his mother’s love into the hike. The next day, I only was able to hike about a quarter of a mile before having to stop and rest. The pack was

just too heavy to bear. It felt like it would break my back.

Unresolved guilt can be like that. It can break us, cripple us, physically and emotionally, even force us to stop because we simply can't carry it anymore. Too much guilt even can have the same effect on our most important relationships.

Evangelist Billy Graham is reported to have commented on this very issue upon completing a crusade in the United Kingdom. He said something along these lines: "There is nothing wrong with these folks that couldn't be fixed if they could just find forgiveness."

Eventually, the only remedy for that heavy load is integrity. Integrity is the state of being one with ourselves and our God. It means to have all that we are integrated into one. Sin divides and destroys. Confession reunites us with ourselves and our God. Happiness is the result.

In a sense, happiness is the caboose on the train whose engine is integrity and confession. We all seek shortcuts to happiness only to find we become like a caboose trying to push the train.

We are no healthier than our secrets. That's one reason James penned these words: "Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you can live together whole and healed. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with" (James 5:16, The Message).

As time has gone by, I've come to understand "abundant life" differently. To experience the abundant life Jesus promised does not mean always being happy, no matter what. To live an abundant life is to experience the kind of meaningful and purposeful life that is the supernatural result of entering the presence of God with nothing left to hide.

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