

The Road to Joy

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[0 : 0 0] Well, friends, I think we're ready to start. So good afternoon and a very warm welcome to the Tron Church for our Wednesday lunchtime meeting today. We're delighted to see you all here and I hope that you have enjoyed the spring sunshine.

Well, let us bow our heads together and let's pray to the wonderful Lord we've been singing to. Other refuge have I none. All my hope in you I see. Leave, oh, leave me not alone. Still support and strengthen me.

Gracious Father, we thank you so much that you have given to us a refuge and there is no other. The refuge is our wonderful Lord whom you have sent your own son, your only son to be our savior.

The one who was willing to leave the glory and the courts of heaven. So as to become a human being, to take our frail flesh, our vulnerable flesh upon himself.

To experience humanity in every respect except sin. And he being sinless was willing to lay down his life as a sacrifice willingly for our sake.

[1 : 2 5] So as to carry in his own body. The penalty, the just penalty for our sins so that we might be forgiven and freed forever.

So our dear heavenly father, fill our hearts afresh with confidence in the truth of the gospel we pray. And for this short time together this afternoon, we pray indeed that you will build us up and give us joy in knowing you and trusting you.

And we ask it in the name of Jesus our savior. Amen. Well, let's turn in our Bibles to Psalm number 32.

Psalm 32. And you'll find this on page 462 in the big hardback Bible if you have one of those. Page 462. This is the last in this short series on songs of David.

Psalm 32. David's words. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

[2 : 3 1] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

For day and night your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity.

I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.

Surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

[3 : 41] Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

This is the word of the Lord, and may it be a blessing to us today. Well, now I want to give to this psalm the title, The Road to Joy, as a kind of strapline for us to understand what's going on.

The Road to Joy. Because this psalm does describe a road or a progress. David, the author, moves from A to B, and it's a very great distance from A to B.

It's a long road, and it's a wonderful road. Look at point A, where he begins in verse 3. When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

Well, David is in deep distress at that point. But look at point B, where he ends in verse 11. Then, be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

[4 : 54] So his groaning and his distress turns into shouting for joy. What is it about God that can lead a person from that kind of distress to shouts of joy?

Let me tell you a true story. I was, I think, 21 at the time, and I went to a 21st birthday party. And sitting at the back of, it was a big hall, sitting at the back of the hall, I noticed a very old man.

He was sitting on his own. He had snow-white hair and a big snow-white walrus mustache. And when he saw that I was looking at him, he beckoned me over. So I went and sat down next to him.

And he started the conversation. He said to me, I'm 90. How old are you? I said, well, sir, I'm 21. Which I was. Anyway, we got talking, and it transpired that he was the grandfather of the girl who was throwing the 21st birthday party.

But he began to tell me his life story. And he told me that he lived way out in the country. He was very lonely. He'd lost his wife a few years previously. And he said to me, will you come and visit me?

[6 : 03] It was about 20 miles from where I was. But I said, yes, I'll do that. I'll do that. So on a number of occasions, I hopped in my car, my Hillman Husky car, and I went out into the countryside and I had lunch with him and chatted to him.

Anyway, I learned his story. He had been a junior minister in Mr. Asquith's government in 1914 or 15 during the First World War.

And something happened in his life. He didn't tell me what, and I didn't quite like to inquire, but he went to prison for 12 months. He was a politician.

He was a member of the government. And yet he'd been sent to prison for some reason for 12 months. In those days, you couldn't recover from that kind of problem. So he'd had to live a quiet life. He'd got married.

He had a big family. And here he was all these years later living on his own. When I used to go and see him, he used to take down a tattered old hymn book. And he would say to me, Edward, can we sing a hymn together?

[7 : 04] So I said, yes, of course we will. And so we would sing a hymn. And there was one particularly which we sang a couple of times. The hymn that begins, praise my soul, the king of heaven, to his feet thy tribute bring.

And as we sang along, we got to the lines, ransomed, healed, restored. And he just couldn't sing the next word, forgiven.

I remember his eyes welling up with tears. He looked at me and he said, Edward, is it possible that I could be forgiven? Well, I hope that my old friend discovered that blessing before he died.

Look at what David says in verse 1. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Now, I don't know whether my friend who'd been living with that troubled conscience for 60 years, I don't know whether he found peace or not.

But what we do know is that David in this psalm is trumpeting to the world the joyful announcement that to be forgiven is to be blessed. He's not talking about the forgiveness of man here.

[8 : 13] He's talking about the forgiveness of God. Verse 2. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. Now, this may be a painful thing for me to ask.

But I want to ask you for a moment to think about the worst sin that you've ever committed. The thing that seems to you to be the worst thing. Remember who's writing here in this psalm.

King David, who has committed lying and covetousness and murder and adultery. All of those things. I can promise you that I'm no paragon of virtue.

I've done and thought some pretty shameful things in the course of my life. But friends, let's take heart from David. This ex-murderer and ex-adulterer came to understand that his sin was forgiven.

And it made him shout for joy. And if we are Christians, our experience can be the same as King David's. So let's trace his thinking through in four stages.

[9 : 17] First of all, we see the Lord's heavy hand in verses 3 and 4. What a vivid description of a man in distress because of his sin.

Here he is so troubled, so disorientated, so miserable that he's become physically very ill. Now, almost certainly, there was nothing clinically wrong with him.

I think we can be fairly sure that his heart and lungs and his liver and his kidneys were working well. But he felt dreadful, as though his bones were shriveling up and rotting inside him, aching all over his neck and his back and his legs and feet.

And then look at verse 4. All the strength and the energy had drained out of his body, dried up as a plant would be in a hot country under a relentless sun.

He's desiccated. Just think of the active teenager with rosy cheeks who had killed Goliath some 20 or 30 years previously.

[10 : 31] And look at him now, creeping about the palace in Jerusalem, avoiding people. Perhaps a servant appears. He says, Your Majesty, can I bring you tea and biscuits? Maybe a lightly grilled rainbow trout to help you feel a little bit better?

Oh, go away. He says, I can't eat. I can't see anybody. Tell the chief butler that I'm indisposed. What was his problem? Well, he tells us in verse 3.

He says, when I kept silent. No doubt he spoke a few words to his family and to the servants in the palace. But the point is, he was saying nothing to God.

He was silent before God. He couldn't pray because he wouldn't pray. His relationship to God was in tatters. He was estranged from God.

His conscience was so full of guilt and shame that he wouldn't even lift up his eyes to heaven. Silent before God and yet groaning before men.

[11 : 32] And he says groaning, verse 3, all day long. And he couldn't even get a good night's sleep. Look at verse 4. Day and night your hand was heavy upon me. He'd be waking up at 2 or 3 in the morning.

And the sin that lay like an evil beast on his conscience was still there. As he puts it in another psalm, my sin is ever before me.

His mind simply wouldn't let him rest. He couldn't leap out of bed in the morning and throw back the curtain and say, Hallelujah, what a beautiful day. No day was beautiful to him.

He was a man in great distress because of his sin. But had God abandoned him? Had God forgotten him? Where was God in verses 3 and 4?

Was he far away? No, he was not. Verse 4 tells us just where God was. Your hand was heavy upon me. It was God who was making him groan.

[12 : 33] It was the Lord who was pressing upon him and filling him with distress. And what a blessing that was to David to have that heavy hand. It was mercy that moved the Lord to cause David such pain.

The divine surgeon wounds so as to heal. Here was David. He was running away from the Lord. He was refusing to speak to the Lord. But the Lord did not turn away from David.

He laid a heavy hand upon him, a hand of mercy. Now think of us. Isn't it good to know that if we sin grievously, the Lord's way is not to abandon us, but to cause us pain and distress so as to press us to turn back to him.

That heavy hand was a hand of love and mercy. Now secondly, in verse 5, we see the Lord's forgiveness. Verse 5 really is the turning point in this psalm.

I acknowledged my sin to you. That's what he says there. Now he may have confessed his sin to other people, but that's a secondary matter. Important but secondary. This verse is about confessing to the Lord.

[13 : 45] Just think of it. David has been dragging himself around the palace for days, perhaps weeks. His life has become unbearable.

His pain of body and mind is more than he can sustain. But eventually he gets to the point where he seeks out some quiet spot. He falls down on his knees before the Lord and he pours out his confession.

Have mercy upon me, O Lord. Have mercy for I am a sinful man. I'm not trying to justify my actions. I don't try to excuse myself. I acknowledge the dark corners of my heart before you.

Forgive me, O Lord. And, verse 5, you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

But to acknowledge sin to the Lord is hard because it involves facing up to the realities of what goes on inside our hearts.

[14 : 47] It's a humiliating business to say to the Lord, I've sinned. I've done this. I've done that. I've done that. But we shan't know the joy of the Christian life unless we're prepared to tell the Lord where we've gone wrong.

It's not as if we're telling him something that he doesn't know already. Of course he knows it all. We don't confess for his sake. We confess for our own sake so that our groaning should be turned into joy.

So, friends, let me ask this. Is there something that you might have done perhaps even a long time ago which you've always sought to bury? You've sought to put it so far from your conscious thinking that you've hoped you'll never have to think about it again.

But you do think about it again. You open some cupboard and there's the skeleton. It never really goes away. Think now of Jesus dying on the cross.

Did he die for all our sins or only for the less serious ones? You know the answer to that question. He died for all our sins.

[15 : 55] His shed blood is utterly powerful. There is nothing so wicked that he can't deal with it. David was a murderer and an adulterer, but he was forgiven and then he was filled with joy.

Just look at the two most important elements in verse 5. First, I acknowledged my sin to you. Second, you forgave my sin.

This psalm is here in the Bible to teach us and to give us an example for us to follow. David is saying to us all, this is what I did and you can do it.

Follow my example. Forgiven. Forgiveness is always at the very heart of our relationship to the Lord God. We never get beyond the place where we need to rejoice in God's forgiveness.

Even in heaven, we shall never forget. The book of Revelation tells us that in heaven, the Lamb of God will be seen by all and he will still have the marks of slaughter upon him.

[16 : 55] We shall gaze on those glorious scars and never forget that we've been forgiven at a very great cost. To be unforgiven, to be unconfessed, is to groan.

But to be forgiven is to be filled with great joy and gratitude. Now, thirdly, from verses 6 and 7, we see the Lord's protection.

Verse 5, as I said a moment ago, records David's critical turning point. But as soon as that turning point has been reached and David's heart is flooded with relief because he's forgiven, he then turns, as it were, to the people of Israel for whom he always feels a responsibility.

But he turns to them like an evangelist. In verse 6, he's saying to them, are you godly? If you want to live a godly life, then pray to the Lord. Pray to the Lord when he may be found.

Now, there's a bit of an edge to that phrase. It's rather like the invitation in Isaiah chapter 55. Seek the Lord while he may be found. In other words, don't put off confessing your sin.

[18 : 04] Don't procrastinate. It needs to be done now while there is still time and opportunity. Pray to him now while you can. And then, verse 6, Now, that rush of great waters, that's a picture of the final judgment.

Jesus uses just the same picture at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where he speaks of two men, and each of these men is building a house. One builds his house on the rock, on a solid foundation, but the other one builds his house on sand.

And then, when the floods and the wild wind and the rain rise up and batter against those two houses, the first one stands firm. It's built on the rock. But the second one crashes with a great crash.

The rush of great waters reaches that house and destroys it. So look again at our verses 6 and 7. The godly person is the one who cannot be touched by the rush of great waters.

The godly person is the one who prays to the Lord while the Lord may be found. And what does he say as he prays? Well, he sets it out for us in verse 7.

[19 : 20] He says, You are a hiding place for me. You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with shouts of deliverance. That phrase, hiding place, suggests great danger.

You don't need a hiding place when you're walking down Bath Street on a sunny day and you're whistling nonchalantly. But when you're in a tight spot, when you're chased by bandits or by a man-eating lion, that's when you need a place to hide.

But David is talking about something much worse than bandits or lions. He's talking about the day of judgment. There's only one place to hide on that day, and that is with the Lord himself.

You are a hiding place for me. That's what he says. Rock of ages, cleft for me. Let me hide myself in thee. You are my preserver, he says in verse 7.

My savior on the day of trouble. And more than that, there's a sense of great joy in this salvation. He says at the end of verse 7, you surround me with shouts of deliverance.

[20 : 24] So he's not on his own. As he rejoices in finding this wonderful hiding place, he realizes that there are lots of others with him, and they're all shouting a song of victory and deliverance.

It is a joyful thing, friends, to belong to a very great company of people who are all together in the hiding place. As it's put in the book of Revelation, a great multitude that no one can number, from every nation, from every tribe and people and language.

When the Lord forgives somebody, he then protects that person right the way through to the day of the rush of great waters. And the deliverance is so great that it's celebrated with shouts of joy.

Now, fourth, from verses 8 and 9, we see the Lord's instruction to the forgiven David. Verse 8, I will instruct you and teach you in the way that you should go.

Now, at this point, we need to realize that at this juncture in the psalm, the Lord himself suddenly begins to speak. It's not David who's speaking to the Israelites in verses 8 and 9.

[21 : 35] It's the Lord here speaking to David. And he says, I will instruct you and teach you. And this is a very great and precious promise of the Bible. Now, it's not very flattering to David.

It's not flattering to us because it's assuming that we are ignoramuses, which, of course, we are by nature. We don't naturally understand God's ways until he teaches us.

And the Lord picks up and uses a common Bible metaphor here, which is the metaphor of walking as a description of the believer's life. I will teach you, he says, in the way that you will go.

I'll teach you the right road. I'll teach you how to walk. And he develops it in the next phrase. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. In other words, I'm not going to take my eyes off you.

He's a bit like a parent with a toddler. And the parent is teaching the toddler how to take his first steps. And that toddler needs to be watched all the time, doesn't he? So you think of the parent with the little toddler.

[22 : 38] That's right, little fellow. You're doing very well. Put your right foot forward. Then put your little left foot forward. Now your right foot again. That happened to all of us, didn't it?

He teaches us to walk. The Lord teaches us to walk because we don't know how to walk. Just think of it. If you've been a Christian a long time, think back over the long and winding road of the Christian life.

Isn't this exactly what has happened to us? That the Lord has taught us from the Bible how to live our life. He's taught us that we're sinners who need a savior.

He's taught us that we're weak and we need his help if we're to learn to please him. He teaches us how to be unashamed of Jesus, how to be unashamed of the Bible. He teaches us much about the ethical life, how to be faithful and honest and loyal and true and persevering through hard times.

He teaches us about money, about personal relationships, about sex and marriage, about prayer and evangelism and the joys and responsibilities of belonging to the church and so much more.

[23 : 46] The Bible is full of instruction in the way that you should go. And then you'll see in verse nine, he sends a little shot across our bows. He says in verse nine, don't be like an ignorant old horse or a stubborn mule which remains ignorant.

The only way to control a dumb beast like that is by jerking its head round with a hard bit and bridle. Don't be like that. Be compliant. Be ready to listen and to understand and to obey.

Be a glad, quick learner, eager to be taught, quick to change course when you can see that you're in the wrong. Friends, isn't it a blessing to us to have the Bible to instruct us?

So many folk in our society today are simply unable to live a happy and disciplined human life because they're strangers to the Lord's instruction. They have no moral compass, no magnetic north of truth, just a turbulent ocean of moral uncertainties.

But the Lord promises the believer, I will instruct you. I will teach you. Well, we haven't quite finished. We've still got two verses to go.

[24 : 57] But let's just trace and review David's journey so far. He starts off in misery and groaning with sin unconfessed, indeed, not even acknowledged.

But then there comes the great fork in the road in verse 5, confession and forgiveness. Then, verse 6, in his joy, he reconnects with other people, other believers, and he encourages them to pray and to rejoice in being preserved, to rejoice in the assurance that the day of judgment will not find the believer washed away by the overwhelming flood.

And then, with his salvation now assured and secure, he passes on to other believers the Lord's call to listen to the Lord's instruction, to attend to the words of God with eager and open ears.

And then, finally, in verse 10, he powerfully reminds us of the great divide, that there are only two groups of people in the world.

Verse 10, many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Those are the two types of people in the world.

[26 : 10] The Bible uses many different ways of describing these two types of people. It speaks of believers and unbelievers. It speaks of the saved and the lost. It speaks of the sheep and the goats.

It speaks of those who are in Christ and those who are in Adam. It speaks of the friends of Christ and the enemies of Christ. And here in verse 10, it speaks of the wicked and those who trust in the Lord.

There are only two groups. Everybody in this hall today belongs to one group or the other. And David tells us of the distinguishing characteristics of each group.

The life of the wicked, he says, is characterized by sorrows. Many are the sorrows of the wicked. The pain and desperation of floundering around in a life without hope, without moral compass, and without God.

There is a poignant sadness that runs right through the life of the world without God. This world is a veil of tears. As Jesus said, weeping over unbelieving Jerusalem, If only you had known the things that make for your peace.

[27 : 21] But now those things are hidden from your eyes. Nothing is more sorrowful in the end than resisting God. But verse 10 also tells us what the believer is like.

Steadfast love, he says, surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Steadfast love. That's the Lord's committed, persevering, unfailing, covenanted love.

The love that will not let us go. Isn't it madness to resist the Lord when you can put your trust in the Lord? Isn't it madness to choose sorrow when you can choose his steadfast love?

So let's be encouraged today. David's road starts in grief and groaning. But he faces the Lord. He prays. He listens. He trusts.

The road that starts in groaning ends in joy. And this is why David says in verse 11, and he says it to all of us. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

[28 : 31] Well, let us pray together. Amen. How we thank you, our dear, gracious God, that in the gospel you hold out to us the promise of complete forgiveness as we turn to you and confess our sin.

Not simply a touching up here and there, not simply a tweak and a slight change, but complete forgiveness. We thank you again that our Lord Jesus Christ was willing to go to the cross to offer up his life so that our lives should be spared on the day of the rush of great waters.

How we thank you. And we pray that you'll write deep into our hearts assurance and joy about all these things. That you'll help us to leave here with a light step and a happy heart.

Being able to rejoice with all who belong to you in the glorious gospel of our Lord Jesus. And in his name we pray. Amen.