

Exod 04-10-31a

This is Sunday, the 1st of November, 2004. Actually, this is not the 1st. This is the 31st of October.

My cheap, foreign-made watch, shall we say, doesn't seem to have a 31st. This happened to me once before where it skipped a day. I think there's a flaw in the program.

Of course, that could be due to its antiquity. It is pre-Y2K, pre... In fact, I think this watch is about 20 years old. Anyway, it is the 31st of October.

I happen to know that because of the pumpkin proliferation. And we continue this morning our study in the book of Exodus. We will take a moment before our scripture reading to take a look at our own hearts, remembering that God the Holy Spirit is present to overcome the limitations of the presentation or even the limitations of our concentration.

If we are willing, if we are receptive, the power of the Word of God will enter our souls and will make a difference in the way we think and therefore in the way we live. But it is up to us to cultivate and develop that mind which was in Christ Jesus that we are commanded to have. And one of the ways we do that is by going before the Lord in prayer and expressing to Him our desire to live in a way that is pleasing in His sight.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank You for the strength that You provide to us. Not only are we redeemed and rescued from a certain ultimate fate in keeping with the corruption in which we are born and the sin that we commit, but You have given us a positive direction in which to move, a positive plan to implement. We are not just delivered, but we are also commissioned.

We are not just rescued, but we are also planted on solid ground and given the opportunity to walk a straight path that leads to life eternal in the fullest sense of that term. We thank You for the Lord Jesus Christ most of all. We thank You for His faithfulness to Your plan, His love for us, His willingness and dedication to fulfill that plan, motivated by His love so that He is now seated at Your right hand.

He intercedes for us. He awaits the day when Your command will send Him back here to receive us to Himself and to move into the next phase of the great scope of human history that encompasses His thousand-year reign on this earth. We know that at the end of that time Your kingdom will come in, a new heaven, a new earth, a new Jerusalem, and even greater opportunities to learn and to function, to serve, and to reflect His glory and Yours.

We pray that our study this morning will prepare us for those days to come. It will prepare us for the challenges of this life. We ask Your blessing on our nation and its leadership in this time of turmoil surrounding the election process.

We pray that Your guiding hand will stabilize and assure the result that is in keeping with the

blessing of Your people, the recognition of the remnant that exists. We know that even in the entire city of Sodom, if there were ten righteous, You would spare it, You would preserve it. And we ask on behalf of our nation that You spare us to continue to have the opportunity to learn and grow and communicate the truth to one another in love.

We ask again Your blessing on us as we study Your word. May we rightly divide it. May it transform us.

May the growth process take place so that we increase in knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We pray it in His name. Amen.

Our scripture reading this morning is in the Psalms, as is often the case. Psalm 32. I will, by way of reminder, since it's been two weeks since we were in Exodus, put you in remembrance of the current location of our study in Exodus chapter 34, where Moses is seeing the glory of the Lord troop by.

And God makes a pronouncement about Himself in that context. He says, The Lord, the Lord, the merciful and gracious God, long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth, as it has it in your English, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation. The focus of our study this morning is going to be on those three terms related to sin.

Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. What is the nature of those three terms? Why does God use three of them? Why doesn't He just say forgiving sin? Well, our scripture reading in Psalm 32 incorporates the same three words. And we will be returning in the course of our word studies this morning to this chapter.

But it is a fitting place to begin this morning. Psalm 32, it is the Psalm of David. It is a contemplation or a masculine.

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity. And right there we have already used all three terms.

And in whose spirit there is no deceit. When I kept silent, my bones grew old. Through my groaning all the day long, for day and night your hand was heavy upon me.

My vitality was turned into the drought of summer. Selah. I acknowledged my sin to you, and my iniquity I have not hidden.

I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. And you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah.

For this cause, everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when you may be found. Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. You are my hiding place.

You shall preserve me from trouble. You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule, which have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle, else they will not come near you.

Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, you righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart. Well, I could go into a lesson long explanation of this psalm, but it will be very helpful if we get the definition of sin, transgression, and iniquity, such as we find used both in this passage and in Exodus 34.

It will enable us to understand this much more clearly. I will point out, however, in verse 9, of course I'm on sort of a personal campaign, a private jihad against Calvinism and the inroads that Reformed theology has made on the understanding of the church at large of God's word. Take a look at verse 9. What does God say, even in the Old Testament? Do not be like the horse or like the mule, that have no understanding, which must be harnessed with bit and bridle.

God says, don't be the kind of creature that I have to put a strap around your nose and a piece of iron between your teeth and yank your head in one direction or the other. We are supposed to choose without being steered by an outside source. You don't find Arthur Pink or B.B. Warfield or Shedd or Hodge or any of the other great Reformed theological spokesmen or proponents of that view coming to this passage.

They can't figure it out. And in all of the reading I've ever done on those guys, I never saw them come to Psalm 32.9. Because God says, don't be the kind of creature that I have to wrap something around your head and yank you in a direction. You need to be self-guided.

You need to be captain of your own ship and master of your own fate and not have to be bridled and bitted. Well, this along with Psalm 51 is a great passage when you think about the need for ongoing washing of the feet as Jesus did in the upper room. We are saved, we belong to God, we have a relationship with God and yet we transgress.

We err and come short again and again. And when we do this, just as when you get married. You get married, you're in bliss, you just can hardly bear to be separate.

At the beginning when the glow of romantic love has got you, not just your candle is lit, your entire thing is just on fire. You're just inseparable, you're infatuated, all of this is going on. But as a relationship matures and grows and develops and becomes something far more permanent, lasting and meaningful, inevitably the sin nature will out.

We sin against one another and it breaches the relationship. You know this whether you are a child in a family, whether you are a spouse to another person. Inevitably something happens that is disruptive to the harmony and the great fellowship and good thoughts that you have one to another.

What happens when that takes place? Well, the first thing is communication goes sometimes from being verbal to non-verbal. Where before you just share your thoughts and you're in most hopes and dreams and you're just open and transparent, now you get the silent treatment. It's communication with a look, with a brow that's either raised or lowered.

If you're doing something questionable, the brow goes up. If you're doing something that's distasteful to the other person, the brow goes down. Communication gets to a very primitive and non-verbal level in some cases.

Of course in other cases, depending on the relationship, the communication just heats up and it's going both ways at once. It's duplex, full duplex, and it's all transmitting and no receiving generally. Well, it disrupts the harmony and the positive nature of the interaction between the two parties.

And something needs to be done to heal and re-bridge that area. What do we do? We cool off. We calm down.

We come to a better understanding. If we are egregiously in the wrong, we will go and say, you know, I'm sorry. I messed that up.

Or we should. Or the other person, if we're absolutely golden and on a pedestal and in the right, then the other person should come groveling to us and say, you know, I was wrong. You were right.

And then we beneficently enfold them and say, oh, that's okay. This is usually the case. I'm used to being right, so I'm that kind of thing.

But there is this pattern. It's fairly common to our experience where you have a good relationship, something happens to breach it or disrupt it, and then there is reconciliation and there is making up and re-bonding in the old way, ideally. Well, it is no different in our spiritual life.

God has saved us. We are his children. We are united with him through Christ, in Christ, united to each other in the same way, and yet we sin.

We fall short of the glory of God. And when we do, it disrupts the relationship with God and we need a way to repair. Now, it is not God's fault that we sin.

God does not come to us and say, Sam, I'm real sorry. I was sitting back there in eternity past making out my decree. I was distracted.

Gabriel came in and blew a trumpet or something and I left out a detail here. And that's why you sin. It's my fault.

My decrees fell apart. My omnipotence had a little gap there and it all went wrong. And so, I need to apologize.

That just doesn't happen. God does not apologize to us. God does not come to us and say, you know, this whole human history thing, it was a bad idea.

And because I did it, that's why you're sinning. It just doesn't happen that way. People attribute that to God, if you can believe it, but it's not so.

We go to God. That's what Psalm 51 is about. That's what Psalm 32 is about.

So, how does this blessing that David talks about in verse 1 come? Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Notice, you start with blessing, you end with no deceit.

It is not fooling ourselves. It is being honest with ourselves and with God, going to God and saying, against thee and thee only have I sinned. That is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity.

That is the man whose sin is covered. That is the man whose transgression is forgiven. Notice, there is a remedy for each of those three terms.

We haven't studied them yet, but transgression is forgiven, sin is covered, and iniquity is not imputed. So, we'll come back and take a look at the nature of that. Notice verse 3, When I kept silent, my bones grew old, generally speaking.

Now, if your emotions are out of control, sometimes it's better to just hold your tongue and wait until you can be rational. But, generally, it is not good for a relationship to cut off communication for very long. If communication is faulty and does more harm than good, then we can cut it off for a time.

Get a hold of our temper, cool off, get back to objectivity, repair our relationship with God, and then go back to the person and try to repair that relationship. Sometimes you need a period of silence. But prolonged lack of communication is bad for any relationship.

Relationships are, by definition, communicative. And killing communication kills the relationship. It's just that simple.

You cannot have a relationship with someone with whom you do not communicate. Did you have a great close friend years ago? Some of us, you know, twenty, thirty years ago, high school, might have had a bosom buddy, a best friend, a constant companion. But now, you live in opposite coasts or different places.

So, can you say, oh yes, that's my best friend? Well, not really. You don't communicate anymore. It's not a relationship unless you've got some ongoing fellowship.

So, when I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long. For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.

Vitality is what happens in the spring, right? The sap runs. The green leaves sprout. You have lushness and renewal.

And that's great. But then, the heat of the summer, it reminds us of the parable of the seed in the soils where it hits the ground and springs up in a day but its roots are shallow and when the heat of the sun comes, it withers and dies. That's what David says it is like when he kept silent.

It's like weed killer. They didn't have spot shot and that kind of thing in David's day. So, what is it that made plants wither? It was the bright sun.

But if you've ever used one of these things on dandelions, you go out there, bright healthy dandelion one day, you squirt it with that and the next day, generally in my lawn, not only is the dandelion all curled up and starting to wither and turn brown, but a nice 8 inch diameter circle around it of my good grass is also withering and dying and turning brown which the bottle says it won't do, but ever after for the rest of the summer, it looks like some thing with burning footprints has walked through my yard and everywhere it's stepped, I have these round circles of death. That's what David says happens when you do not speak, when you do not communicate. You have to come to God.

It is death to wait. So, he says in verse 5, that I acknowledged my sin to you and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

You know what's interesting about verse 5 is it isn't at the point that David confesses his sin that he is forgiven. It's at the point that he says, I'm going to. At the point that the resolution forms in his mind, I need to go to God and acknowledge my sins.

God sees the change of attitude in the heart and the forgiveness takes place as soon as you make the decision. You know how Jesus said if a man looks at a woman to lust after her, he's essentially committed adultery in his heart. It's at the point that the motivation forms that sin is imputed.

And by the same token, it is at the point that the motivation forms to confess that forgiveness begins. God begins as soon as he sees our heart turn. Now, we can't just say, well, you know, my heart turned, so I'm not even going to bother to acknowledge my sins because your heart has just turned again.

But that's how fast, that's how ready God is to forgive. Even before the words are out of our mouth, he has begun to forgive and to cleanse. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

He doesn't say, I named my sins and you forgave them. That one wasn't forgiven until I named it. I had a list of five.

I named number one and you forgave that, but the other four were still hanging out there at

the point that we decide God forgives. For this cause, everyone who is godly shall pray to you in a time when you may be found. Notice, there is not an unlimited window of opportunity for this.

We can't say, I'm busy, I'll get around to confessing my sins later. Everyone who is godly prays to you any time when you may be found. I think it's a shame in the New King James that they start a new line and a capital letter with the word in there.

This is all one thing. The godly will pray to you in a time when you may be found. That means, you better do it as soon as you think of it.

Don't wait. Don't delay. It's not like it's got a second or third priority.

Surely in a flood of great waters they shall not come near him. Now this is somewhat obscure. It sounds like, well the flood of great waters is going to overwhelm the person but they confessed and so the flood of great waters is not going to come near him.

But I think that's him with a capital H. Everyone who is godly prays to the Lord in a time when he may be found. Surely in a flood of great waters, what is the flood of great waters? That's your details of life. That's your distractions.

That's all of the things that come to overwhelm you. And if you wait and get distracted, you're not going to come near. We are told over and over to come near to God and he will come near to us.

Hebrews chapter 10, let us draw near with a cleansed heart and a full assurance of faith. And if you wait, if you delay, if you get busy thinking about something else, you get your eyes on people or you get your eyes on self or eyes on circumstances that do not realize, like David, that our sin is against God. We may hurt another person, but first and foremost, it is a sin against God.

We've got to go to Him. Notice, David begins the verse in talking in the second person. The godly will pray to you in a time when you may be found.

But in the last part, he says, surely in a flood of great waters, they shall not come near him. And it changes to the third person. You are my hiding place.

You shall preserve me from trouble. You shall surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.

I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like the horse or like the mule which have no understanding. And here in this psalm, if this is sort of a performance piece, punctuated by the word sila, you have different little scenes.

In English, we would do this in paragraph form. And a new paragraph would begin every place where you have sila. And David would sing, beginning in verse 5, I acknowledge my sin to you,

my iniquity I have not hidden.

Verse 6, he will sing again. And then, verse 8, you would have like a chorus kicking in and representing the voice of God. God begins speaking in verse 8. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.

I will guide you with my eye. Do not be like an animal that has no understanding that needs to be harnessed. Then in verse 10, you have the human speaker picking up again.

Many sorrows will be to the wicked. He who trusts in the Lord, mercy shall surround him. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice you righteous and shout for joy all you upright in heart.

Well, a full understanding of this hinges on what is the difference between transgression, sin, and iniquity. Turn back with me now to Exodus chapter 34. We left Moses standing there with the glory of God passing by, proclaiming His name.

We talked about these words, merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands. And now we're at the point in verse 7 where it says, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. You look at the typical commentary and it says, this is just trying to be comprehensive, trying to cover all the bases.

But there's a lot more to it than that. Let's begin in verse 7 by looking at the first word, forgiving iniquity. The word translated iniquity here is the word *Awen*, A-W-E-N.

This is from a verb, that of course is a noun, is from the verb *Awah*, A-W-A-H. And the verb means to bend, to twist, to distort, to make something crooked. For example, if you look at Isaiah chapter, this is a verb used by the way, the verb is used in Isaiah chapter 24, verse 1, talking about what God does to the earth when he is upset.

Behold, the Lord makes the earth empty and makes it waste, distorts its surface and scatters abroad its inhabitants. Well, the word translated distorts there is *Awah*. That's where we get this word for sin.

So right away we begin to see that this first word translated iniquity has the idea of creating a distortion or a crookedness. You find it in Psalm 38, in verse 4. This is the only other passage we're going to look at in connection with the verb. Psalm 38, where he says, There is no soundness in my flesh because of your anger, nor any health in my bones because of my sin.

My iniquities have gone over my head like a heavy burden. They are too heavy for me. My wounds are foul and festering because of my foolishness.

I am troubled. I am bowed down greatly. And that bowed down greatly, I am bent, I am twisted, I am made crooked, I am distorted by these iniquities.

And so you have the iniquities in verse 4 in the noun form, and you have the verb form in verse 6 of Psalm 38. So, this is the nature of the iniquity, the nature of the transgression. It distorts,

makes crooked, but that's the verb, that's where the noun comes from.

But, in its common usage, this is what awain is. This is the nature of awain, or iniquity. This is the guilt and the liability of sin.

So you can put a-w-e-n, translated iniquity, and the emphasis is guilt and liability. Because I am twisted, because I am distorted, because I am bent and not straight, I incur liability. I am now guilty.

The guilt and liability, when we say liability, what do you mean? We have liability insurance when we drive around, correct? We have liability insurance on our property. What does that mean? It means if something bad happens, and it is my fault, I am guilty of something, there is a penalty. I pay, right? If I am liable for a debt, if I am liable for an injury, I pay.

So the real thrust of awain here is liability to punishment. I have done something that is going to incur a penalty on me. This goes all the way back, and you'll want to put some passages in the Bible with this, because the English is not consistent, unfortunately, in always translating awain the same way.

Take a look back at Genesis 4, verse 13. Now, just based on your general knowledge of the Bible, Genesis 4, who do you think we're going to be talking about? Genesis 1 and 2, you've got creation, creation of man. Genesis 3, man in the garden of the fall.

Genesis 4, where are we going to be? Cain and Abel, right? Genesis 4, verse 13, Cain said to the Lord, My awain is greater than I can bear. They translated punishment in the New King James. And it's not a bad translation because this is, he says, my sin in the sense of my guilt and the punishment that is coming to me because of my sin.

But the two are linked together here. I've been thinking all morning, trying to think of a way to combine these two things. My liability sin, my sin resulting in punishment, the pain I'm going to experience because of my sin, is greater than I can bear.

This is a sin punishment. It is a punishment sin. So it is the guilt and liability.

This is the judicial view. When a judge looks at this, he says, you know what? You did this. Here's what it's going to cost you.

Here's what's going to happen to you because of this. Genesis 4, verse 13, Cain, Genesis 15, verse 16, I'd like to go all the way back through Genesis now and straighten out the different words for sin because it makes a lot of sense. God is talking to Abraham.

Remember the smoking pot, the burning torch, and the pieces of dead meat laying there all day. Shoo the buzzards away. When darkness falls, God comes and speaks.

He tells Abraham, you will go to your fathers in peace. You will be buried at a good old age, but your descendants are going to be servants. They are going to be strangers in a land that is not

theirs.

They will be servants. They will be afflicted 400 years. The nation whom they serve, I will judge.

Afterward, they will come out with great possessions. In the fourth generation, they shall return here, but it's going to be four generations. Why? Because the availing of the Amorites is not yet complete.

The idea is, in the fourth generation, the reason they're going to return is to punish the Amorites. Amorites is a general term for all of the inhabitants of Canaan. And God says, I'm going to have to keep your descendants on the back burner down here suffering and being...