

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Are You Burdened by Sin?*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's gospel verse by verse. We are in **Luke 15**, but first I would like to have you open to **Psalm 32**.

Please stand with me for the reading of God's Word.

Psalm 32:1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. 3 For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah 5 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. Selah

You may be seated. Let's pray.

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We got a children's version of Pilgrim's Progress for Christmas for one of our kids and we started reading it together as a family...again...because we didn't finish it the first time.

Christian carries a heavy burden at the beginning of his journey that symbolizes his sin. This burden is what initially prompts him to seek salvation. It isn't until he reaches the place of Deliverance, or the Cross, that he gets rid of the burden.

And this brings us to lesson one...

Lesson One: Sin is a heavy burden to bear.

Listen to the lyrics of this well-know hymn...

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!

Why does it say He bears them?

Because they're a burden.

Are we weak and heavy-laden,

This is how a heavy burden makes us feel.

Cumbered with a load of care?

More language of a heavy burden.

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Psalm 32 probably contains the best description in Scripture of what it feels like being burdened by sin. Look at verse 1...

Psalm 32:1 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Do you remember when we talked about double imputation last week?

- Our sins imputed to Christ's account
- His righteousness imputed to our account

This verse describes that imputation.

The words **the Lord counts no iniquity** mean he doesn't impute our sins to our accounts.

These are the verses Paul quotes in **Romans 4** to explain imputation.

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The verse says **blessed is the man against whom the Lord [does not impute sin]**, and that's a great reason to feel blessed...but it's not the reason David says he was blessed.

Notice the first word of **verse 3** – at least in the ESV – is **for**, which means, because.

David says he's blessed **for**, or because, of the reason he's about to give...basically, so he wouldn't have to keep feeling the way he was feeling!

Look at **verse 3**...

Psalm 32:3 For when I kept silent,

What does this mean?

Here's the context...

David committed adultery with Bathsheba, had her husband, Uriah, murdered, but instead of confessing his sin, he covered it.

One of the marks of the integrity of Scripture is it records the lowest points of some of its greatest people. No punches are pulled. The following two verses show the agony David experienced when he kept carrying his burden.

Look what he says...

Psalm 32:3b My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

This isn't what we'd expect. We'd expect David to talk about the spiritual consequences – and he will – but first he talked about the physical consequences.

He felt his body wasting away.

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Listen to the ages these people died:

- Abraham 175
- Isaac 180
- Jacob 147
- Moses 120
- Joshua 110

David was 70!

1 Kings 1:1 Now King David was old and advanced in years. And although they covered him with clothes, he could not get warm.

David was one of the most vibrant and vigorous men in Scripture, but how does he sound now?

Like a sick, decrepit, old man.

His body was failing him. His health deteriorated dramatically at a young age, especially in Old Testament times, and especially for a man as physically gifted and strong as he was.

What happened?

Sin took a toll on him, and he described it here: he could feel it in his **bones**.

We think of sin affecting us spiritually, but it also affects us physically.

There's a quality of life that we're afforded when we submit to God...and there's a wear-and-tear we experience when we don't.

This is part of the burden of sin.

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Look at verse 4...

Psalm 32:4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

The words **my strength** – or other translations say vitality or life – was drying up. He could feel himself slowly dying.

More than likely David hoped the conviction and guilt would go away...but it didn't. He said it was heavy on him **day and night**, which means nonstop:

- He couldn't eat.
- He couldn't sleep. Nighttime wasn't any more comforting than daytime.

The more David covered his sin the more he suffered and the worse his life became. He was paying an excruciating price for carrying this burden.

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Look one chapter to the left to **Psalm 31:10**...

Psalm 31:10a For my life is spent with sorrow,

He had no joy.

Psalm 31:10a and my years with sighing;

He's filled with grief.

Psalm 31:10a my strength fails because of my iniquity,

Again, losing vitality or life.

Psalm 31:10a and my bones waste away.

Again, physical suffering.

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Turn to the right to **Psalm 38:3**...

Psalm 38:3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of your indignation; there is no health in my bones BECAUSE OF MY SIN.

The words **soundness in my flesh** and **no health in my bones** show he's talking about his physical suffering, and he says it was **because of [his] sin**.

These are vivid descriptions of the physical burden sin brings.

John Donne said, "*Sin is a serpent, and whoever covers it only keeps it warm so it may sting even more fiercely, and disperse the venom more effectively,*"

In other words, carrying around the burden of sin only makes the suffering worse.

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When we are burdened by sin we wonder things like:

- *How much longer can I keep living like this?*
- *Do the people around me know what I've done?*
- *What is God thinking, and what is He going to do to me?*
- *When will I be found out? When will:*
 - *My husband or wife find out?*
 - *My parents find out?*
 - *My children find out?*
 - *My friends find out?*
 - *My church find out?*

These sorts of questions weigh on people...heavily. And I don't mean they just weigh on us spiritually. I mean they weigh on us emotionally, mentally, and physically...as we see in these verses.

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Turn back to **Psalm 32**.

Maybe the worst thing for David is he knew where this affliction came from!

It came from God:

- **Psalm 32:4 YOUR hand was heavy upon me.**
- **Psalm 38:2 YOUR arrows pierce me deeply, And YOUR hand presses me down.**
- **Psalm 38:3a There is no soundness in my flesh because of YOUR anger**

David knew it wasn't just his conscience or guilt affecting him. He knew it was God Himself.

God chastened David for almost a year and made him miserable while he refused to confess his sin.

Spurgeon said, "*God does not permit His children to sin successfully.*"

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The weight of conviction and shame is a horrible feeling:

- Every day the struggle gets worse and worse.
- Sometimes it's a relief to be found out:
 - So you don't have to hide anymore.
 - And so you're forced to get the help you need
 - We've probably all heard stories of criminals who leave clues, because they want to get caught and bring their nightmare to an end.

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God pressed on David so hard, he finally – and wonderfully – broke. Look at **verse 5**...

Psalm 32:5 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.

Three different ways David describes being unburdened of his sin:

- 1. Acknowledged my sin**
- 2. Did not cover my iniquity**
- 3. Confess my transgressions**

David’s misery was a gift from God, because it brought him to repentance.

The confession of **verse 5** is God’s way of delivering us from the agony of **verses 3 and 4**. Repentance allows us to experience freedom from being burdened by sin.

When we’re in verses 3 and 4:

- We feel the heaviness of sin.
- We feel the guilt and shame.
- We feel the toll being taken on us mentally, emotionally, and physically.
- We feel the separation from God.
- We feel God pressing down on us, trying to break us.

But when we repent, we experience relief.

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Now please keep this in mind and turn to **Luke 14**.

Let me remind you of the context of this morning’s verses by briefly getting you to look at the end of this chapter...

Luke 14:25 Now great crowds accompanied him, and he turned and said to them,

Thousands followed Jesus, but he knew they weren’t true disciples. He knew the crowds were inflated, so he preached the following verses to thin them out.

Just to briefly remind you:

- In **verse 26** he said if anyone wants to follow him but doesn’t hate father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even their own life, they can’t be his disciple.
- In **verse 27** he said whoever won’t carry their cross can’t be his disciple.
- In **verses 28-32** he said to count the cost before deciding to follow him.
- In **verse 33** he said if people aren’t willing to give up their possessions they can’t be his disciple.
- Finally, in **verses 34 and 35** he said salt that has lost its taste, or that has become worthless, illustrating worthless disciples, is good for nothing but being thrown out.

Now look at the end of **verse 35**...

He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

And guess who had ears to hear?

Look at **Luke 15:1** for the answer...

Luke 15:1 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him.

They not only heard and continued following but pressed in closer.

It isn’t what we’d expect, is it? We’d expect these people – the very worst of society – to stand up and turn away.

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Now here's the question:

- Why didn't they?
- Why did they draw nearer to Jesus?

The same thing we were reading about in **Psalm 32**: they were burdened by sin...and they wanted that burden lifted...and this brings us to lesson two...

Lesson Two: Sinners draw near to Jesus to have their sin burden lifted.

Notice the verse says **sinners were all drawing near to Jesus**. The way this is worded implies some are **sinners** and others are not.

But that's definitely NOT what's happening here.

Instead, these people are called **sinners** because they were the notorious **sinners**:

- Think of criminals and others who were known to have been in trouble with the law, probably arrested, probably unable to find work or people to trust them
- Think of harlots and other sexually immoral people
- Think of drunkards who had probably embarrassed themselves and their families and friends with their behavior

And these people wanted their burdens lifted. They were tired of the guilt and shame they were carrying. It was exhausting and miserable.

I wonder how long they felt miserable – like David in **Psalm 32** – before drawing near to Christ to be delivered?

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There's kind of this lingering idea that sinners drew near to Jesus because he was very kind to them, and he wanted nothing more than to be friends with them...but without wanting them to repent.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

And in fact, I would say they were drawing near to Jesus, because they wanted to repent. They were burdened by sin, and they knew this was how to have their burdens lifted.

Here's why I think that...

John the Baptist was Jesus's forerunner. Listen to how John began his ministry...

Matthew 3:2 “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

This is how John prepared the way for Jesus.

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Listen to how Jesus began his ministry...

Matthew 4:17 From that time (from the time that Jesus's ministry began) **Jesus began to preach, saying, “REPENT, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”**

John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus by telling people to repent, and Jesus began his ministry by telling people to repent.

The **tax collectors and sinners** in **Luke 15** knew following Jesus meant repenting. They knew following Him meant doing what David did in **Psalm 32** and:

- **Acknowledging their sin**
- **Not covering their iniquity**
- **Confessing their transgressions**

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But not everyone was happy about this. Look at **Luke 15:2**...

Luke 15:2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

What was so upsetting about Jesus eating with these people?

Kenneth Bailey wrote, “*In the East today, as in the past, a nobleman may feed any number of lesser needy persons as a sign of his generosity, but he does not eat with them.*”ⁱ

In the ancient world eating a meal together meant something different than it does in our day. It communicated acceptance of that person’s actions and lifestyle.

The religious leaders’ words reveal this. Notice they didn’t just say Jesus **eats with them**. They said he **receives [them]**. Like he approved of them.

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And eating with people was an act of becoming one with them.

They would typically sit at a table and have a common bowl in the middle with something like soup in it. The host would take a loaf of bread, break off a chunk, and pass it around the table.

We are most familiar with this because of communion. When Jesus broke the bread and passed it around at the Last Supper, He was doing something that He had done with the disciples many times before. But this time when He broke the bread He said it represented His body.

As people ate the bread, they first dipped it into the soup. They ate the same loaf of bread, dipped it into the same bowl of soup, and so were nourished by the same food.

The last thing the religious leaders would do was eat with sinners because it communicated that they were becoming one with them, and they thought this made them unclean.

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So how do we explain Jesus being so close to the unclean...but not becoming unclean himself?

Let me show you by having you turn a few chapters to the left, to **Luke 5**.

If there’s one condition in all of Scripture most associated with uncleanness, it is leprosy. When lepers came near, instead of yelling, “Lepers, lepers,” they would yell, “Unclean, unclean!”

Look at verse 12...

Luke 5:12 While he was in one of the cities, there came a man FULL OF LEPROSY. And when he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

This man didn’t have a little leprosy showing. It says he was **full of leprosy**. It was in a very advanced state.

And there was one thing you never did with lepers if you wanted to remain clean: you never touched them.

But look at **verse 13**...

Luke 5:13 And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, “I will; be clean.” And immediately the leprosy left him.

Jesus didn’t have to touch this man to cleanse him, but He did to make a point.

Now pause for a second and let me ask you to really pay attention, because I want to tie this together with the previous two sermons...

In the first sermon we looked at verses in Haggai about cleanness and uncleanness. Let me briefly reread them...

Haggai 2:11 “Thus says the Lord of hosts: Ask the priests **ABOUT THE LAW: 12** ‘If someone carries holy meat in the fold of his garment and touches with his fold bread or stew or wine or oil or any kind of food, does it become holy?’” The priests answered and said, “No.”

According to the law if something clean touches something unclean:

- Whatever is clean becomes unclean
- Whatever is unclean does not become clean

But notice something about this account...

The exact opposite took place:

- Jesus touched the leper and made the leper clean without becoming unclean himself.
- The verses in Haggai are about the law, and because Jesus is greater than the law, or because he does what the law can’t do, He was able to cleanse the leper and avoid becoming unclean Himself.

Because leprosy is the most dramatic picture or type of sin in Scripture when Jesus cleansed this man it is a picture of the double-imputation we talked about last week:

- Jesus reached into this man’s life and took away his leprosy like He reaches into our lives and takes away our sin.
- Then Jesus said **be clean**, filling this man with cleanness, like He fills us with His righteousness.

And I’m telling you all this, because it is also why Jesus could be so close to the unclean tax collectors and sinners without becoming unclean Himself.

Just as He touched this leper without becoming a leper – instead taking away the leprosy – he had close relationships with sinners without becoming a sinner himself...instead taking away their sin.

Listen to **Luke 15:2** one more time...

Luke 15:2 And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, “This man receives sinners and eats with them.”

Let me ask you to think about something: the religious leaders could only say these words if one thing was true...

They did not think they were sinners...and this brings us to lesson three...

Lesson Three: The self-righteous never have their sin burden lifted.

If you remember last week’s sermon we talked about the dangers of self-righteousness:

- It causes us to think we are spiritually healthy when we are spiritually sick

- It prevents us from wanting Jesus's righteousness, because we already think we are righteous
- It is shooting at the wrong target...it is trying to be righteous by works instead of by faith

One of the other dangers of self-righteousness is it causes us to look down on others.

The only way the religious leaders could look down on the people Jesus was eating with and call them sinners was if:

- They didn't think they were sinners.
- They thought they were better than them.
- They believed there was a large chasm between them.

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Let me conclude by showing you some verses in **Isaiah 65**. Go ahead and turn there. We won't come back to **Luke**. Isaiah is the first prophet after the poetical books. Turn past Psalms and Proverbs.

Look at verse 2...

Isaiah 65:2 I spread out my hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not good, following their own devices;

This pictures God repeatedly reaching out to these people, but they won't respond because they are rebellious.

The word **who** is repeated six times to describe their rebellion.

God says they are...

Isaiah 65:3a a people who provoke me to my face continually,

They are openly defiant.

Isaiah 65:3b sacrificing in gardens and making offerings on bricks;

They provoke God with their idolatry.

Isaiah 65:4a who sit in tombs, and spend the night in secret places;

This practice divination. They were in tombs or other secret places to try to consult the dead.

Isaiah 65:4b who eat pig's flesh, and broth of tainted meat is in their vessels;

They ate unclean food that was forbidden by God's law.

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Now up to this point all of this has looked terrible, hasn't it?

We look at the sins the people were engaging in and understand why God condemns them so strongly.

But let me share something interesting with you...

My children started doing speech and debate this year. One of the speeches they can give is persuasive. As a business major I had to take two speech classes in college and I remember being told that when you present a persuasive argument you leave your strongest and most convincing argument for last...so that it remains in people's minds.

As God persuades the people about their sinfulness, look at his last, convincing argument...

Isaiah 65:5 [they are people] who say, “Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you.” These are a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all the day.

Is that the religious leaders or what?

If you write in your Bible, you can circle the words, “**Keep to yourself, do not come near me, for I am too holy for you,**” and write, “**Luke 15:2.**”

God hates this kind of attitude. He condemns the heart that looks down on others. He says it is like smoke in his nostrils that constantly irritates him.

These kinds of people never have their burden lifted, because they don’t think they have a burden to be lifted. Jesus doesn’t take away their sins, because they don’t think they have any sins to be taken away.

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Instead, we want to be like the leper we read about. Listen again...

Luke 5:12 When [the leper] saw Jesus, he fell on his face and begged him, “Lord, if you will, you can make me clean.”

If we will be like this leper, Jesus will reach into our lives and remove our spiritual leprosy.

Maybe you’ve had sin in your life that started out as a few spots:

- You hoped it wouldn’t spread.
- You hoped it wouldn’t be noticeable to those around you.

But it started spreading and became noticeable to those around you.

Come to Jesus like this leper did and have Him cleanse you too.

The leper said, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean,” and Jesus said, “I am willing.”

This is exactly what He would say to us today.

What Jesus did for this man physically is what He wants to do for us spiritually.

Just as willing as Jesus was to cleanse this man of His leprosy, He is as willing to cleanse us of our spiritual leprosy.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

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I will be up front after service, and if you have any questions about anything I’ve shared, or I can pray for you in any way I would consider it a privilege to speak with you.

Let’s pray.

ⁱ Bailey, K. E. (1983). *Poet & Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Combined Edition, Vol. 1, p. 143). Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.