

Notes on Psalm 32 'A Troubled Psalm'

In the middle of Stanton Moor is a stone circle called the 9 Dancing Ladies. The reason they are called this, as the story goes, is that these 9 ladies were caught dancing on the Sabbath and the local minister turned them into stone for profaning the Sabbath. Outside of the circle is a stone called the King stone, and this was thought to be the fiddler who provided the music for them to dance to. There is perhaps a question which the hasty and Sabbath minded Minister forgot to ask which is why were they dancing in the first place? Psalm 32 gives us lots of reasons to be cheerful and if there are lots of reasons to be cheerful, then perhaps there are also lots of reasons why they, and we, should be dancing!!

Listen to the contrast we find between verses 1 and 2 with those of verses 3 and 4. This contrast is rooted in a children's game, that of hide and seek. Today we watched the story of Zacchaeus, who we all know hid in a tree so that he could see Jesus safely and privately. Zacchaeus was hiding because he knew in his heart and his life something of what David describes here in verses 3 and 4. This is what sin does to us, it makes us hide ourselves, as well as our sins, from Jesus. When we do that these two verses describe what it means to feel and know a life disorientated away from God. It is now a life defined by heaviness and exhaustion that is seemingly unending and when it seems as if God is 'against' you. When we hide in such a way we fall back to the 'common sense' solution of keeping things private and secret using the guard dogs of shame and guilt to keep everyone away from us. When we hide, we bark and growl at any who dares come close to us because we don't like ourselves and we don't imagine that either Jesus or anyone else will want to like us too. These guard dogs persuade and convince us that it is far better to endure the heartache and misery of verses 3 and 4 then risk the vulnerability which openness & confession requires of us. But you, I, we do not need to hide from God like Zacchaeus did, as verse 5 describes the sheer awe and wonder of God's quickness, his enthusiasm and his passion to embrace and forgive us. When we are tempted to hide behind these guard dogs, we need to remind ourselves that they are both liars and deceivers; Jesus loves to welcome us.

David now moves quickly into testimony, and like him I too want to testify to the truth of all that David describes in verse 5, yet I want to testify to more too. I want to testify to what he says in verses 6 and 7 and I want you to know this to be true for yourself in your own life. Therefore, please do not be like the person who David describes in verse 9. Do not in your stubbornness keep sitting in the tree convinced that Jesus wants nothing

to do with you, instead be like Zacchaeus who came down from that tree of isolation and brokenness and discovered that Jesus wanted to eat with him and for him to know he has been found and saved. Jesus stands, as it says in Revelation 3, knocking at the door of our hearts and he wishes to come and eat with us too. Climb down from your tree of guilt and shame, open the door of your heart to him and know him in your life.

Be like Zacchaeus who when he heard Jesus' welcome and invitation responded with joy and gladness because Jesus always comes to seek and save all who know and feel that they are lost. Come whether it is the first time, or the 50th time, but come to Jesus. Come and know the truth, the joy and the reality which verse 7 speaks about in your own life today that today may be a day when we choose to dance on the Sabbath, but don't worry you won't be turned into stone for doing so because such a dance isn't profaning the Sabbath but celebrating all that Jesus has done, is doing and will do for us in our lives as love and serve him.

Questions Psalm 32 'A Troubled Psalm'

- 1 When you read verses 1 and 2 what comes to mind and what reasons can you find for being cheerful enough to dance?
- 2 When you read verses 3 and 4, when have you known such times of disorientation within your own life?
- 3 Andy compares these two verses to the story of Zaccheaus hiding in a tree, do you see the connection with what he is trying to say?
- 4 Andy speaks of the two guard dogs of shame and guilt, when have you heard their furious barking in your life?
- 5 Verse 5 is a celebration of God's enthusiasm to forgive. Is this how you think of how God's willingness to forgive you from your sin?
- 6 What is your testimony to your experience of God's forgiving and gracious love in your life? Please share it.
- 7 David writes excitedly of God's goodness to him in verses 6 and 7, which of these images connects with you the best?
- 8 Are you willing to dance again, like the 9 ladies in that stone circle, and if so, what would you be celebrating in your dance?