

Good morning. Good morning. Good to see a good crowd here on this last Monday of the semester. As Dean Gordon said, final week of classes. You got a big push through finals week and the holidays. We want you to know that we're praying for you in these final weeks of this term, that you might have all that you need in terms of God's grace and strength and wisdom to finish and to finish well. This morning, I want to look at the passage that was read as the final installment in this semester's series on Strong Medicine for the Soul. So do keep your Bibles open to Psalm 32, but I want to set a little more context and share a few thoughts before we actually look at those verses.

This series this semester, Strong Medicine for the Soul, as I've been reminding you each time, is based on that colloquialism, which is not all that familiar anymore in terms of strong medicine. We think in our day and age of comfort and convenience and painlessness and all the things associated with it and medicine that has been colored and sweetened to look like the Kool-Aid of your youth. That strong medicine is sometimes thought today to be something that is powerful. And while that is true, the colloquialism is it's strong, that is the bitter pill, the medicine that's hard to swallow because it's difficult for us to bear in the moment but benefits us in the end. My argument this semester is that the Scripture is full of those kinds of truths that are strong medicine. They're difficult for us to take in the moment, but good for us in the end. We started by looking at the purposefulness and the purposeful nature of the word of God, that it is not just inspired but profitable for teaching and for reproof and rebuke and instruction. It gives us all that we need to know what it is to live a life pleasing to the Lord and the power of God's word and the importance of our disciplining ourselves to spend time reading it, to dwelling on it, to make it a serious part of our lives because in the end, it is good for us. And yet so often it's hard to undertake that discipline or to take the difficult truths of God's Word. We talked about the importance of obedience, what it means to yield our will to the Lord, to desire what is pleasing to him, to bend our knees and bow our heads in humble to the Lord. Last time on the issue of discipline, the bearing up under hardship because the Lord loves them that he disciplines, that it's for our good to actually be moved from where we are to where the Lord would take us, that we don't chafe against that, push back against it, resist it, but actually learn from life and the hardships that are a part of it as discipline, which is for our edification, for our paideia, for our strengthening and learning.

Today, I want to look at this issue of confession, and by implication, the issue of repentance that accompanies it. I want to talk about confession and that idea that we would not just say our sins out loud, but acknowledge them before the Lord, honesty before God, with ourselves and before the Lord, and the result in turning from those things to a new way of thinking and living. But I have to say, in thinking about this issue of confession and repentance, it really is strong medicine. You know that if you just think about our cultural aversion to it. When I think about conversations I've had over the years with those who are not members of the Christian faith, are not part of the body of Christ, who struggle with the good news of Jesus, and I think about loved ones that I've attempted to share the faith with over the years to to share the good news of Jesus. So many get hung up on this idea that somehow there's a need for a savior, meaning I have to indicate that I am somehow lacking, deficient, sinful, wrong, outside of fellowship, that there is something in me that is lacking that needs to be changed, that I am a sinner in need of a savior. That's a bitter pill to swallow. Until the Lord gets a hold of you and you come to the realization that you are that, you are a sinner in need of a savior, that you are in need of God's grace and love and mercy. You come running into his arms for that transforming experience of placing faith in Jesus as the atoning sacrifice, payment for sin that purchases for you, redemption and forgiveness, and gives you the promise of eternal life, conquering once and for all sin and death, that you may live forever with him and enjoy him for all eternity. That's the good news of Jesus. In order to come to that, we have to come face to face with the reality of sin and sinfulness.

But I think the problem that we have as we look at the world in which we live, and I've been watching this for a long time, there is a cultural disposition to this idea of confession and repentance. It's somewhat offensive to suggest to people that there is a need to confess your sins, to repent. It's in some way seen as being harsh or judgmental or punitive. It's at its worst, oppressive, and at its least, a downer. I mean, it's The last week of classes and Christmas is on the horizon, and I'm talking to you about confession and repentance. Why throw a wet blanket on something good? Why do something like this? Well, it's really an interesting picture, right? Because if we actually think like the world around us thinks about confession and repentance, we do see it that way. We struggle with it. Why is there

such an aversion to this idea of confession and repentance? Those things indicate that something is wrong. If you think about it, if there was no need to confess and no need to repent, the Bible wouldn't talk about it, but the Bible does talk about it.

Acknowledging this reality that we need to confess and to repent indicates that something is wrong. That's not an easy thing for people to do. They indicate that something is wrong. Well, what's wrong? Well, sin. Sin is what's wrong. And therein lies the problem. We don't like sin. Now, you're not supposed to like it. You're not supposed to like sin. You're not supposed to like the impact of sin. I'm not talking about that. What I mean is we really don't enjoy thinking about it or talking about it. We don't like to think about sin. We certainly don't like to talk about sin. There's a problem with that aversion to it, not just in the broader world in which we live, but when those sensibilities actually creep in to Christian community, to the church, to our faith, to our relationships with one another, there's a problem because sin is reality. You'd have a hard time reading the Book of Romans and not seeing that, right? Romans 3:23, what? All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The reality is that sin is real. We talk about that quite a bit here. The impact of sin in the fall, the judgment of God upon humanity that makes necessary salvation through Christ, and the tremendous grace and love and mercy that's demonstrated by God, that in the midst of that sin and in the midst of that judgment, he has made a way for us. Romans 3:23 says it all, All have sinned, all, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Humankind is in need of a savior because humankind is found wanting because of sin.

If we don't acknowledge sin, then to be perfectly honest, the atheistic argument that there's no need for a savior if there isn't any sin, so I just choose to decide that sin isn't a reality. That's just a humanly contrived, oppressive concept meant to put on people, to have them feel guilty or to control them. But if you come to that conclusion, then you have no need of a savior. Because Roman 3 spells the rest of it out as well. In Jesus Christ, we have redemption and forgiveness. By grace through Christ's death. The satisfaction, he's the propitiation for us. The satisfaction of God's wrath in his judgment against human sinfulness. Jesus is the way. It isn't just the baby that's born, it's the savior that comes to live with us. We have to come to terms with this reality that sin is real and it's a problem, and our aversion to it doesn't make it go away. This is a hard truth because it goes against our very nature.

Now, some of you have issues where you have no problems admitting that there are things that you do wrong. Some of you don't mind talking about yourselves in truly self-deprecating ways, not just in a disarming humor way, but really have a hard time and judge yourselves too harshly. But in reality, in the world in which we live, I think that most people tend not to want to focus on this. It's much better if we focus on the happy. I have to tell you that it's very difficult to actually think about evangelism and the proclamation and preaching of God's word, which, make no mistake about it, the gospel, you live the gospel, you breathe the gospel, and you exemplify the gospel, and you share the gospel. But the Bible is pretty clear that the gospel is to be preached and claimed and declared. It is a truth, a universal truth, that human beings are in need of a savior. There's only way, and that's to put faith in Christ, in his shed blood as payment for sin.

Okay, well, that's easy enough to come to. If we think about it, if we're talking about salvation and evangelism. Of course, we need to deal with the reality of sin. You acknowledge that you're a sinner and you place faith in Jesus Christ as savior. It isn't that you come to Jesus as a self-help guru. You're not coming to Jesus to kick the tires and take him for a test drive and see if you're happier after trying out Jesus for a few weeks. No, you come broken in your sin, wanting salvation. Okay, that's fine talking about the non believer coming to faith in Jesus. But what about for the Christian? How do we deal with sin? There have been some messages this semester that have dealt with that. I want to just draw a few observations for you to be thinking about in terms of your own personal spiritual life.

What about for us as Christians? What about this idea of dealing honest honestly before God with our own sinfulness and these ideas of confession and by implication, repentance? Well, it's difficult for us as well within the church, not just the way in which the culture might predispose us to think about these as not such cheerful subjects and things that we have an aversion to, but there's a bigger problem. The Bible tells us that as Christians, we struggle. We struggle with putting off the old man and putting on the new. We struggle to live in the Spirit, according to the spirit, rather than according

to the flesh. Paul's writings are replete with teachings about this problem that we have as Christians, the struggle with our own sinfulness, even as those who have placed faith in Jesus Christ. We struggle a great deal with those things, and the Bible has a lot to say about it. It has a lot to say about the doctrine of grace. Some of you in the room may struggle with the doctrine of grace. I had a pastor years ago that used to say, If you struggle with the doctrine of grace, it's because you struggle with the doctrine of sin. If you struggle with the doctrine of sin, it's probably because you struggle with the doctrine of grace. Sin and grace go hand in hand. For us as Christians, we're navigating that world. We should be navigating that world. Though some of us may have fallen asleep under the teaching of the gospel and have lost our sensitivity to our own sinfulness and our need for God's grace in our daily lives. Others of you may be shaking your fist at God saying, I know your standards. I choose not to do it. I will not bend my will to yours. Some of you have grown Indifferent to sin, hardened in your heart. Some of you are very sensitive to it and thinking that you'll work your way out of the dilemma. That's why this idea of grace is so important when thinking about the idea of sin. We are objects of his grace. What should we say then? It's the apostle Paul's exact language in Romans 6 in contemplating the grace of God, the immeasurable rich grace of God. What shall we say then? Do we go on sinning that grace may abound? No. The call is for us to deal honestly with our sin. We are new creatures. The Bible is clear. We have been transformed from life to life from death, bought with a price, forgiven, redeemed, restored, all of that in and through Christ and him alone. And yet we still sin.

Now, that's pause number one. Are you aware that you are still sinning? Do you see sin as missing the mark, as offending God? Do you think about the things in your life where you are knowingly, willfully, turning in a direction that you know to be counter to that which is pleasing to God. In your relationships with one another, with members of the opposite sex, in your thought life, in your academic life. You see, an academic integrity violation isn't just the breaking of a rule or trying to get away with something. It is, in fact, sin. To pass someone else's work off as your own, that's not just breaking a rule. That's violating God's standard for personal integrity and honesty and hard work, for taking advantage of another human being for exploiting them, for objectifying them. Those are clear violations of God's standards. We're preoccupied with fleshly desires or material possessions. Those are clearly things that are problematic. We gossip, we lie, we lust, we hate, we envy. All of those violate God's standards. I think I'm on pretty safe ground to suggest that there probably isn't anyone in the room who isn't doing something that violates God's standards. How do I know that? Because we're human beings, and the spiritual life is not a transformation into perfection. The spiritual life that comes as a result of the transforming work of God in our lives is that we begin a walk of maturing, of sanctification, of serving Jesus. It isn't about being perfect. It's about being supple. It's about being willing. It's about being yielded and humbled in obedience and servitude to the Lord.

So we sin, even so as Christians. So what do we do? Well, we want to avail ourselves of God's grace, which is all sufficient. But we also need to take responsibility. It's this that I think is somewhat problematic in the world in which we live. We've been making this argument for a long time that the sensibilities of the world around us often creep in and affect our own sensibilities. If we have an aversion to the idea of sin and sinfulness in our own lives, then somehow we're also going to see that it's someone else's fault and not my own for which I bear no responsibility, let alone the problem we have in our sensibilities to accept the grace of God, to actually yield ourselves and to run to him. But there are some things that we need to undertake with regard to responsibility in the spiritual life, to be obedient and to attend to our spiritual lives. I pray for you as students often. One of the things I pray for is that you would develop, while you're here, a heightened awareness to the need to attend to the spiritual life.

It doesn't happen by accident. It's not just being in a place where there are other Christians. The Christian walk is to be carried out with intentionality and purpose and attention, effort. All that effort while resting in the grace of God. Well, some simple Some observations from this Psalm that Dean Gordon read for us. Psalm 32. The Psalm of David. "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit." Make no mistake, even in thinking about this issue of sin and sinfulness, of confession and repentance, you are loved, you are bought, you are forgiven. Again, going Romans, "There is therefore now no what, condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus." We're not talking about that. We're talking about a sensitivity to what pleases the Lord and the desire

to live a life that is pleasing to him.

In Psalm 32, David is very clear that forgiveness is a blessing. One of the things I think that happens to us too often when we find ourselves struggling with sin in the Christian life is that we don't focus enough on forgiveness. It's almost oxymoronic, isn't it? You have sin in your life and you don't want to deal with it and you're struggling with it. The actual what you need to do to actually address it is to realize how blessed you are that has been forgiven past, present, future, once for all. There is therefore now no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus. There is nothing that can separate you from the love of God. If you put saving faith in Jesus Christ, then this is not the issue. The issue is if you actually focus on the grace of God, the love of God, the mercy of God, and how much you've been forgiven, it might change the way you look at the things you're struggling with. I've been struck over the years. The examples in my life of spiritual maturity, the longer in the faith people go, The less I hear them talking about Christian managing of their money or Christian thinking about their profession, people that have walked with the Lord the longest, who are honest before God about their own sinfulness and need of His grace. They can't stop talking about Jesus and what was done for them in and through him.

David, at the outset of the Psalm, says, We're blessed to be forgiven. Our sin is covered. God counts no iniquity. This idea is that there's a good thing here for us to revel in. So I ask you, are you aware of the forgiveness of God that you enjoy in and through Jesus Christ? Do you think about it? Do you talk about it? Are you thankful for it? Do you express that to God? Do you talk to one another about it? Are you living as though you've been forgiven? There's another set of observations here. "For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groanings all day long. For day and night, your hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer." In this way, David contrast the reality of our being forgiven with the reality of our being silent regarding our own sinfulness and sin. Silence before God regarding your sinfulness and your sin is problematic. David says here, It wears you out. It wears you thin. It wears you down. It makes you weary. It makes you weak.

Some of you in the room who have not hardened your heart but are struggling with sin know that feeling. It bears down upon you. You carry it in silence. You've worked to hide it. You try to put on a good face. You don't want others to know what you're dealing with. You keep trudging along as though everything will be fine, but you feel worn out, weakened, ineffectual, like God's own hand is heavy upon you. That silence is problematic. But look at what happens in verse 5, David says, "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord, and you forgave the iniquity of my sin." Lots of things cycle through the Christian community. I remember when I was coming up and being disciplined, there was this big move toward confession, which amounted to people getting together in what was termed a Bible study, which you know how that goes. Sometimes that's just more than four Christians in a circle. They get together in Bible studies, Bible study about confession, but no one really actually opened the Bible to discuss confession. It was just a time go around the room and tell everybody your sins. Every once in a while, someone would drop a big bomb in the room. But for the most part, people were saying things that are pretty safe. If you find yourself in a confession group and you say, I really struggle with anger, that's a whole lot safer than confessing to a mixed group that you struggle with lust. But I remember even back then as a young man wondering, confessing to us is one thing. But it seems to me that what the Bible wants us to do is acknowledge our sin before God. That's David says that here, "I acknowledge my sin to you, to the Lord, did not cover my iniquity."

I don't really know how I feel about those kinds of group confessionals. I do know how I feel about sacramental confession. There's no absolution from a human being. There's no forgiveness that comes from a human being for your sins. There's no absolution for your soul in a confession booth. But I think acknowledging before God, agreeing with him that what you are thinking and what you are doing is sin and an offense to your creator and savior, and agreeing with him that it is wrong and off the mark. That's a very different approach, isn't it? That's not just saying something out loud. That's saying to God, I acknowledge before you, God, that this is sin in my life, that I envy, that I covet, that I'm angered, that I wish others harm, that I lie, that I cheat, that I steal, that I gossip, that I don't do the things I should do and the things that I shouldn't do. That kind of honesty before God is what David demonstrates here. I acknowledge my sin to you. I didn't cover, I didn't try to hide it. Well, that's

wisdom because David isn't confessing to the Lord so that God knows. Make no mistake. David's confession is not so that God knows, so that once God knows it and I say it out loud, he can hold me accountable for it. That's not what David is doing here. You can't hide your sin from God. If the heart is deceitful and desperately wicked, who can know it? God knows it. He knows its ways. Jesus knows what is in humankind. He needs no instruction about what's in our heart. There's no hiding your sin from God. Even Adam and Eve, after the first sin, they tried to hide. God knew where they were. He knew what they had done. When he says, Where are you? It's not because he doesn't know where Adam is. He wants Adam to acknowledge before God, Here I am, hiding from you because I know I've done wrong. That's confession. God, I acknowledge to you this is sin in my life.

I'm telling you, brothers and sisters, if you're struggling with a sin, telling it to a friend, I do this, is not the same as bending your knee before a righteous and holy God and say, I acknowledge before you, righteous God, this is sin in my life. I'm in violation of your holy standards, and I acknowledge that. I agree with you that it is wrong. I will not try to hide it from you for that's futile. Denial of our sin only hurts us. Look, it makes us weary. It wears us out. It drains our strength. Rather, in this approach where our spiritual life, this spiritual breathing, where we confess to the Lord the things that we're struggling with, the sin in our life, honesty before God in our prayer life, to actually tell him that we know he knows. That's not for God's benefit, that's for our benefit. Denial of our own sinfulness only hurts us.

We see that pattern in David's life. Every time he goes off the rails, he's either going to do it by shaking his fist at God, I know this is wrong, I'm going to do it anyway. Or he finds himself in despair, or he finds himself discouraged, or he finds his heart hardened, or he finds himself indifferent to sin. What does he do throughout the Psalms? He comes back, proclaiming the righteousness of God and his own sinfulness. That is the pattern. Of suppleness in the hands of God, confessing to the Lord, agreeing with God. It's for our benefit. We go to God in prayer. There's that old acronym that used to guide prayer for us. We learned this coming up, ACTS, adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. I remember some years ago, I was sharing that with some friends, and I said, I learned this acronym for prayer when I was a teenager. Adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication. What do you think about that? They said, Well, I do a lot of adoration. I love to praise the Lord, and I love to thank the Lord, and I love to pray for others. Yeah, there's one in there that we missed.

It's the C. It's confessing to God. Some of you come from traditions where that happens regularly in your churches. We pray asking for God's forgiveness for the sins we are committing, for the sins that we are committing by omission, things we're not doing that we should do. Some of you come from traditions where that doesn't happen. But I would ask you this. David says here, I acknowledge my sin to you. I confess my transgression to the Lord, and I enjoy the benefits of being forgiven. Because I wasn't trying to hide what cannot be hidden. Rather, in David's communication with God, he acknowledges his own sin. I would ask you in your prayer life, do you do that? Do you spend time actually being honest with yourself before the Lord? Because that's really what this is. Then in Psalm 32: 8-9, "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go, counsel you with my eye upon you. Don't be like a horse or a mule without understanding, which has to be curbed with a bit and bridle to keep it on track or to keep it with you." The picture here is that issue of yieldedness. The act and the practice of confession actually, by implication, rolls in this idea of repentance, that we have a change in direction, not continually going back, but actually changing direction. That's all repentance is. We have this picture of repentance. To want to do what the Lord wants us to do, we must change from these things and turn in a different direction. Now, just practically, I would suggest to you this. Think about the ways in which you fill your time, the decisions you make about what you're going to do, what you're going to think about, how you're going to live. Repentance isn't just being remorseful and wanting to change and not being able to. Years ago, when my dad became a Christian, I was a teenager. Transformational work of God in his life. I mean, unbelievable. Completely different man. Alcoholic, struggled with adult responsibility and when he came to Christ, everything changes. But boy, he was a chain smoker. He started when he was 11 years old. Multiple packs of cigarettes a day. I can tell you as a teenager, I watched my dad walk up the center aisle at church and put a pack of cigarettes on the altar table at least 15 times, and I'm guessing, conservatively.

He really wanted to be free of it. He really wanted to be free. He wanted to lay it on the altar and have

it go away. I confess that I'm addicted to these things. I put them down and I walk away. Years later, after he quit, I said to him, Dad, what do you think made that so difficult? He said, Well, as soon as I set him down, I turn around, walk back to my seat thinking, I really wish I wouldn't have done that. I really wish I wouldn't have publicly said, I'm going to stop. I really wish I wouldn't have wasted that pack of cigarettes because I'll never see it again. I'd turn around and walk back and be wishing I hadn't done that. Then all afternoon I'd be thinking about, Could I make it to the evening without having a cigarette? Then the next day I'd be thinking, Can I make it through today without having a cigarette? All he could do was just dwell on that one thing. Then years later, let me be a little transparent here, years later, when we were expecting our first child, we said to my dad, I'm just not going to expose him to second-hand smoke.

If you want to be around, You're going to have to quit. Gone. I said, How did it happen so fast after all those years? He said, I stopped thinking about what I was going to give up and started thinking about what I was going to gain. Folks, we only have so much time, so much energy, so much thought life. If you're repenting from things and all you think about is the thing you repented from. If all you're thinking about is what you gave up in turning and making a change in direction, that's not going to be it. You turn and think on something else. Years ago, I had a student in my office. He was struggling. He broke up with his girlfriend. He said, I can't stop thinking about her. I don't know what to do. I said, Just stop thinking about her. You don't understand. I keep thinking about her. I said, I know. Stop thinking about her. He said, What do I do? I said, How about the paper for my class? How about if you actually put feet on this, that repentance is change of direction. Stop dwelling on the thing that has preoccupied you and start thinking about something else.

We have this problem with purity. We think we're going to maintain sexual purity by thinking about sex all the time. How about if you spent more time praying and evangelizing and thinking about being kind to others? How about if you stop dwelling on the thing that's driving you crazy? David says here, teach me, instruct me, make me go in a different direction. This isn't a harsh, oppressive thing. What David offers here is that many are the sorrows of the wicked, but the steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord. Rejoice, O righteousness. Shout for joy, all you upright in heart. Listen, the confession and repentance, that spiritual breathing, is not to make you feel worse about yourself. It's actually to bring to you the good life of knowing that you stand resting in the grace of God, that you want to live a life pleasing to him. Is it going to be easy? Absolutely not. But joy in thinking about the forgiveness and the righteousness of God. In Psalm 32:10-11, David spells this out for us. When we actually do this, we find ourselves. We find ourselves experiencing God's love and wanting to worship God.

It's very interesting to me. We get it backwards sometimes. We think, well, if something's wrong with your life, worship God. Actually, what you do is worship is a response. This is the thing. Think about all that has been done for you and see if it doesn't change your outlook and change your worship and your prayer life. But it requires a level of spiritual honesty, folks. Spiritual honesty before the Lord. Don't allow your spiritual life to go on unattended. Don't allow your prayer life to either be dormant or perfunctory. Open your heart before the Lord. Acknowledge your sin. Do not cover it. And enjoy the peace and forgiveness that comes from being honest before a righteous and holy God who has redeemed you and purchased you through the shed blood of his son. You stand forgiven, clear of condemnation. While we struggle in this life with the world, the flesh, and the devil, the conflict between our old self and new self, between living according to the spirit and according to the flesh, we would do well to think on this strong medicine that confession is good for the soul. Spend some time with the Lord, being honest with yourself before him. It will only be for your benefit.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you for your goodness and grace, for your loving kindness, for your mercies which are new every morning. You are a great and faithful God. We thank you for your word, for the power that it has to teach us, to convict us, to guide us, to build us up. We thank you for your spirit which indwells us. We pray that you would make us soft and supple in your hands, Lord. Break our wills upon your own. Give us a sensitivity to your work in our lives. Keep us from growing cold and indifferent to the reality of sin and sinfulness. Keep us from the sin of wallowing in our guilt and shame rather than coming to you as our gracious and loving, and forgiving Father. Keep us also from the sin of silence. Give us the grace to pray to you, to be honest before you,

to acknowledge our sin, and to rest in your kindness and mercy and love. We pray in Christ's name.
Amen.