

The way to forgiveness

Psalms

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Psalm 32, the Psalm begins,

1 Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. 2
Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in
whose spirit there is no guile.

And our theme then is simply forgiveness, forgiveness, the way to forgiveness. This Psalm was probably written after David's repentance of his great sin with Bathsheba when he committed adultery and brought about the death of Uriah the Hittite, Bathsheba's husband, and it shows the way that a non-Christian should approach God for the first time and how Christians who have sinned ought to return to him again and again.

First of all, the blessedness we all need. The blessedness we all need. "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven." People define blessedness or happiness in their own terms. The ungodly crave a happiness in that which is not God and they define happiness in terms of their own vision, as it were, and it does not rise up to God. They spend their money for that which is not bread and their labor for that which satisfies not. The scriptures define blessedness or describe blessedness or give the cause of blessedness in various ways, but it is always something that comes from God and is found in God. It always is a God-given blessedness and it always is a blessedness in God himself, and in terms of our relationship to God, whether it's forgiveness, as here, or whether it's the positive enjoyment of fellowship with God, the blessed man is the man in fellowship, in communion with God. In this case, in this place, it's the negative of having sin removed, forgiveness of sins.

First of all, notice under this general heading that sin is described, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity." Three English words are used, transgression, sin and iniquity, and these correspond to three Hebrew words of which they are the translation. The word rendered transgression is a word that means rebellion, lifting up against God. The word rendered sin means a falling short of that which is required by God. And the word

iniquity describes the idea of twistedness and going astray. And of course, our sins are all of these, there is rebellion, there is a falling short, there is a twistedness, a perversity, a going astray.

So these three terms describe sin in its different aspects, but then we have sin removed and the term used is forgiven, meaning to take away, to bear away. In Isaiah 53 and verse 12, Isaiah 53 and verse 12, "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors." He shall bear the sin of many. As the Lamb of God Christ would bear away, and those who trust in him, their sins are borne away by the Lord Jesus Christ. But then the other word used is the word covered, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." The cover is that which removes the wrath of God against sin. The Hebrew Old Testament word atonement is derived from this word to cover, to cover or to appease. It's used even in human displeasure in Genesis 32 and verse 20, "And say ye moreover, Behold, thy servant Jacob is behind us. For he said, I will appease him with the present that goeth before me, and afterward I will see his face; peradventure he will accept of me."

So the idea is of appeasing, of bearing away wrath to cover the face so as not to see sin, and the mercy seat is the place of covering, the place of where sin is covered and where it is remembered no more. And then the term in verse 2, "Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity," not regarding as ours, our iniquity. Imputation means treating something as if it belongs to that person, whether it does or it doesn't but it's treated as belonging to. To not impute, in this case, means that that which is ours, that is our sin, our transgression, our iniquity, is not reckoned as ours anymore. And then verse 2 ends, "and in whose spirit there is no guile." The characteristic of those who are believing in the Lord Jesus Christ is that they are like Nathanael, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile; honestly repenting and believing, not pretending, not professing something that isn't true, but they're tirelessly trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so their sins are not imputed because they've been covered by the Lord Jesus. He was made sin for us who knew no sin that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

So then that's the language of forgiveness, the blessedness we all need. Secondly, the guilt that should be felt. The guilt that should be felt. Verse 3,

3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.

The guilt that should be felt. David felt an awesome sense of guilt. Now, the degree to which sinners feel their guilt prior to turning to Christ does vary, but it must, as we mentioned on the Lord's Day, it must be sufficient that they despair of themselves and trust in the Savior. David's sense of guilt after his sin with Bathsheba, this murder of Uriah, was very great. It made him ill. It made him ill, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long." His bones waxed old, that is, it was as if

he was aging prematurely because of his sense of guilt. "My moisture is turned into the drought of summer." He was dried up. Conviction of sin can have that physical effect. And it was continuous. He says, "For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." Day and night but it was of the Lord. He says, "day and night thy hand was heavy upon me." Thy hand. It didn't just happen. It was the Spirit of truth convincing of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. And the man who doesn't feel his guilt is out of touch with reality. The careless sinner is not the realist. The fact that he doesn't feel great guilt doesn't mean that he isn't guilty. When the Spirit of truth convinces of sin, he is simply, to some extent, bringing a sinner face to face with what is true. This isn't some psychological trick or manipulation, he actually is guilty and the Spirit of truth causes him to see the truth of the matter that his guilt before God is very great. And at first David did not repent. We are told, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old." He kept silence, yes he roared, but not apparently to the Lord, at least not in repentance, not at first and so he lay under this sense of guilt and yet did not turn to the Lord.

Being convinced of sin in itself is not repentance. Judas knew he had sinned. King Saul knew he had sinned. Even Pharaoh said, "I have sinned." And devils tremble at the thought of judgment because they know that they have sinned. But David ultimately confessed his sin to the Lord. Felix trembled but did not repent in Acts 24 and 25. In hell there will be an awareness of guilt but there will be no hatred of sin, no turning from it, no repentance. And David here describes his state as he stubbornly refused to turn. It's natural to us not to repent; even if shaken over the pill of hell, we still don't repent, except by the Spirit of God. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, he implied that if Lazarus went back from the dead, his brothers would see, if they were given the opportunity he wasn't, his brothers would repent. But he was told that if they don't listen to Abraham and the prophets, if they don't listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they repent, though one go back from the dead. And so David, for a time, did not repent. He felt the guilt, but he kept silence. And then we have this Selah, which may be a musical notation, or it may be pause and reflect, or it may indeed be both, a musical notation to pause and reflect on what has gone before.

Then thirdly, the climb down we must all make. The climb down we must all make. Climb down is a fairly modern term and it doesn't altogether describe what we have here, because people think climb down because they've got no alternative and yet their hearts are still seething, but we'll make use of it for the present. The climb down we must all make. Verse 5,

5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. 6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him.

He confesses his sin. "If we say we have no sin, we make God a liar and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. For we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the

righteous," that's in 1 John chapter 1 verse 7 to the second verse of chapter 2. And it was a full and unrestrained confession. See there in verse 5, "I acknowledge my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said I will confess my transgressions on to the LORD." You see that David here, describing his confession of sin, uses the very three terms that are employed in verses 1 and 2 and it indicates the completeness of his acknowledgment of sin to the Lord, that there was no minimizing, that there was no trying to provide mitigation and extenuating circumstances. He confessed it fully and without reserve and that's the way to confess sin to the Lord, fully, completely, without any hedging. He doesn't just say, "Oh well, I know I'm not perfect." He confesses the reality that he's a sinner, a transgressor. guilty of iniquity, that his sin had been rebellion, of falling short, of twistedness. We mustn't play about with God as concerning our sins, as if they're just little weaknesses, as if it's just a minor matter. Our sins are high treason against the Almighty Maker of heaven and earth and each one of them deserves everlasting wrath. When the Spirit of God brings a sinner to repentance, he doesn't quibble. His Spirit is without guile. Firstly, before God, there must be a guilelessness before God as well as before man.

The result is given at the end of verse 5, "and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah." God promises to forgive those who come through the Lord Jesus Christ. He indiscriminately tells sinners, "Come through Christ and I will forgive. I will take all your sins as far as the east is from the west and cast them into the depths of the sea and remember them no more." And he does it, those who come, he fulfills his word. Psalm 130, my hope is in his word. Where else should it be but in his word, what he has promised, he will perform.

And then, after the Selah, there is a general truth in verse 6, "For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." Because God promises this, all the godly will draw near in this way. That word godly is the word that we see too many times for covenant love. It's a form of that. The covenant loved, those separated by the covenant love of God, they will call upon the Lord in this way. Those to whom God comes in his grace and takes them to be his, they will call upon him in this way in a day when he may be found. All men should do this. They will do it. They shall be made willing in the day of his power and they shall keep on doing it all their days in this world. As Luther says, the Christian is repenting all the while on his way to heaven.

And then the floods, "surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him." The floods are a symbol of judgment. Noah in the ark, the floods did not come near to him. God's wrath may fall all around the Christian, but it will not come upon him. A thousand might fall at his side, ten thousand, but the Lord will know them that are his, and his wrath will not fall upon them.

And then the confidence in verse 7,

7 Thou art my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah.

Now that the guilt is gone, he can confide in the Lord once again and find help. And have we not known this in our own experience? We are burdened with a sense of guilt but when that is taken away, we have confidence toward God and everything has changed. The unrepentant sinner can find no help in God but those who bring all their sins to him, and seek mercy in Christ Jesus, they have confidence toward God and he is their hiding place in the day of trouble and they can look to him to give songs of deliverance.

Fourthly, teaching transgresses what we know. Teaching transgresses what we know. Verse 8 and 9,

8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. 9 Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee.

This is probably still David speaking, "I will instruct thee and teach thee." You remember in Psalm 51, "Then will I teach transgresses thy ways and sinners shall be converted unto thee." When we are cleansed, when our sins are forgiven, and when we have the assurance of it, we can teach others the ways of God. And so he gives them counsel like in Psalm 34, "Come, O children, and I will teach you the fear of the LORD." He says, don't be like the horse or the mule who don't respond to teaching and counsel and so they have to be directed with a bit and bridlem they need rougher handling because they won't listen to counsel, so they have to be roughly treated so as to do what they should. And God in bringing the wandering believer back, or indeed in the conversion of many sinners to himself, he brings many of them through rough times as the means. The Philippian jailer, the earthquake, he's ready to kill himself and the apostle says, "Do thyself no harm, for we are all here." And he said, "What must I do to be saved?" There was a rough handling of the man which was the means of his conversion to Christ, and the Lord frequently does use trouble and deal, in a sense, roughly with those who he is bringing to repentance. But David has said, "Learn now. Don't learn the hard way as I did. Learn now. Listen. Take my counsel and seek the Lord the way I did. Be not as the horse, or as the mule which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. Don't be stubborn. Listen and seek and turn."

And then fifthly, joy and peace in believing. Joy and peace in believing. Verse 10,

10 Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. 11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart.

He does not regret having turned. Repentance is not to be repented of. Those who by God's grace trust in him and turn from sin, they don't regret it. Sorrow shall be to the wicked, but mercy, covenant love surrounds the believer in the Lord. "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked, but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy," covenant love, pledged love, faithful love, "shall compass him about all around him," watch over all his

circumstances and ways. The compass, you know, the compass is right round. Well, the covenant love of God, his pledged love and faithfulness sees to everything around us. God governs everything in the interests of his people and nothing haphazard in all the circumstances of the people of God. And isn't it true that when our consciences are clear through honest confession and repentance and seeking of the face of God in Christ, we have a sense of forgiveness that there is a peace that is far greater than anything that all the pleasures of sin can provide. "Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart."

Let us learn then to confess to the Lord, to keep short accounts with God, not to think we have to do something to make amends first. That's a great deceit of Satan that he tells us that our sin is such that we must somehow make amends before we go to God. We can't do anything until we go to God with our sins and seek forgiveness in Christ Jesus. That's true for the non-Christian, but it's true for the Christian under the sense of sin and backsliding. We must take our sins to the Lord first, not think we can do something about it and then go. It's a terrible deception. We must go with our sins through our great High Priest, our sympathetic High Priest who is able to succor them that are tempted and to sympathize with them that are out of the way.

He is gracious and ready to forgive. We can't do anything right until we take our sins to the Lord. We're like someone trying to clean himself but his hands are dirty. It just gets worse and worse. If we don't confess our sins to the Lord, we get worse, not better. We must go straight to God with our sin and our guilt. Even as Christians, we must be bringing our sins to the Lord and seeking mercies and forgiveness and acceptance in the Lord Jesus Christ. He is gracious and ready to forgive. It's a great temptation to think, surely we can't go again, not again with the same sins, but not only may we, but we must. Where else are we going to go with them? There's nowhere else to go with our sins. What are we going to do with them if we don't take them to the Lord? They're the one thing that is truly ours, our sins, and we must bring them to God and seek mercy, seek forgiveness, seek the joy of his salvation and as we seek, we shall surely find.