

[Save as Psalm 32]

126. Q. What is the fifth petition?

A. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. That is: For the sake of Christ's blood, do not impute to us, wretched sinners; any of our transgressions, nor the evil which still clings to us, as we also find this evidence of Thy grace in us that we are fully determined wholeheartedly to forgive our neighbor.

Tonight we are looking at what it means to pray,
“forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors”
from Psalm 32.

Psalm 32 is called a “Maskil of David.”

We don't know for certain what a Maskil is.

It is probably a type of song.

Also, three times in Psalm 32 you see the word “Selah” at the end of a stanza.

No one is quite sure what this word means,
but it often shows up in the Psalms.

It probably is a musical term that signals the singers or musicians to do something here.

It would help if we knew more about the musical culture of ancient Israel!

But apparently God did not think it was all that important for us to know about that.

What we *do* know about Psalm 32 is what it says,
so let's focus on that!

Psalm 32 is not itself a prayer,
but rather a song of instruction.

The voice keeps changing in this Psalm.

Verses 1-2 are in the third person.

Verses 3-7 shift to the first person addressing God as “you.”

But then verses 8-9 stay in the first person,

but the second person addressee is now the hearer,
as David instructing his hearers in the way “you” should go.

And then verses 10-11 conclude with an exhortation to “you”
but now the “you” are the righteous.

So you have to pay attention to the pronouns here!

*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.*

Psalm 32 opens by declaring the blessedness of the one whose sins are forgiven.

Psalm 1 tells us “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly...”

But we have sinned.

We have walked in the counsel of the ungodly.

We have listened to the voice of folly

and have transgressed the commands of our God.

How can there be a blessing for the one who has sinned?

“Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.”

There is forgiveness!

God will cover over sins!

How?

“Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.”

What is David saying?

For that, we need to understand what comes next:

*For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. (v3-4)*

When I kept silent, I was in agony.

I didn't want to repent of my sin!

I wanted to hide from God – to cover my own sin.

But that works about as well as hiding a poopy diaper under your bed!

Pretty soon it reeks to high heaven!

And so David says that God's hand was heavy on him.

God will not let you hide from him.

Keeping silent and hoping that it will just go away *won't work*.

Sin doesn't just go away.

If you keep silent, if you ignore it, it will eat away at you until you waste away.

And so David says:

*I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgression to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. (v5)*

If you are wasting away under the withering heat of your sin,
then confess your transgression to the Lord!

David says that he stopped trying to cover his own iniquity.
In verse 1 David says "blessed is the one whose sin is covered" –
so long as it is God who covers your iniquity!
You need to stop hiding and covering your tracks,
and you need to confess your sins to God.

And when you do confess your sins, as John says, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins,
and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (I John 1:9-10)

David is using the language of sacrifice here.
The blood of the sacrifice "covers" the iniquity – the sinfulness – of sin.
Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

David tells us that he confessed his sin,
but he doesn't actually give us a prayer of confession.

To see an example of a prayer of confession, turn over to Daniel 9.
Daniel recognizes that the 70 years prophesied by Jeremiah are complete.
And so he prays.

We've seen before that prophets not only speak the Word of God to the people,
but they also intercede for the people before God.
Daniels offers up a prayer of confession on behalf of the people of God.

*O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love
with those who love him and keep his commandments, (v4)*

Our Father in Heaven, hallowed be thy name.
Daniel's prayer starts by identifying who God is.

And even though he plunges immediately into the confession of sin,
you can see the Kingdom focus as he recites the history of Israel's sin:

*We have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled,
turning aside from your commandments and rules.
We have not listened to your servants the prophets,
who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers,*

and to all the people of the land. (v5-6)

And in verses 7-10 Daniel contrasts what belongs to the Lord:
righteousness, mercy and forgiveness,
and what belongs to us:
open shame because of our rebellion.

*To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness,
but to us open shame, as at this day,
to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel,
those who are near and those who are far away,
in all the lands to which you have driven them,
because of the treachery that they have committed against you.
To us, O LORD, belongs open shame,
to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers,
because we have sinned against you.
To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness,
for we have rebelled against him and have not obeyed the voice of the LORD our God
by walking in his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets. (7-10)*

Daniel shows us that it is appropriate to include “our fathers” in our confession.
If there is a pattern of rebellion that has continued throughout generations,
then we need to own that and acknowledge that!

The failure of the church in America to demonstrate visible unity is one such sin.
Our individualism and materialism would be others.
We and our fathers have prized “stuff” more than God.
We and our fathers have sought “all these things” rather than Christ’s kingdom!

*All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice.
And the curse and oath that are written in the Law of Moses the servant of God
have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against him...*

Moses had said this was going to happen.
He had warned them.
And the prophets continually called Israel back to the LORD,
but Israel would not listen.

And so in verse 16 Daniel prays
*O Lord, according to all your righteous acts,
let your anger and your wrath turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy hill,
because of our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers,
Jerusalem and your people have become a byword among all who are around us.
Now therefore, O our God,
listen to the prayer of your servant to his pleas for mercy,*

*and for your own sake, O Lord,
make your face to shine upon your sanctuary, which is desolate. (16-17)*

Daniel now prays, “thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
Remember your promises.
Remember what *you said you would do!*

*O my God, incline your ear and hear.
Open your eyes and see our desolations, and the city that is called by your name.
For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness,
but because of your great mercy.*

*O Lord, hear;
O Lord, forgive.
O Lord, pay attention and act.
Delay not, for your own sake, O my God,
because your city and your people are called by your name. (v18-19)*

Notice that Daniel prays all this for the sake of God’s name.
What drives Daniel’s prayer is that God’s name – God’s honor – is at stake.
God has said that he would restore Jerusalem in 70 years.
The 70 years are up.
What is God going to do?

And so Daniel prays with confidence,
“O Lord, forgive.
O Lord, pay attention and act.”

Do what you said you would do!
The time has come for God to do something,
so Daniel prays that God would do what he said!

In our role as prophets,
we are called to pray that God would do as he has promised.

Psalm 32:6-7 speaks of what happens to the one who prays in this way:

*Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.
You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. (v6-7)*

God is our refuge, our hiding place – our sure deliverer.
When trouble comes, you may have confidence

that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ
will hear you when you come to him in faith,
because he is near to those who seek him.

But then David turns to his hearers:

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. (v8-9)*

Don't be stubborn.
It's not worth it.
It doesn't work!
When you sin, repent!

Have you ever seen a recalcitrant mule in action?
There's a reason why they call it 'mule-headedness'!

Don't be a stubborn donkey!
Let your heart be soft and tender before the Lord.

David closes with a reminder of the benefits of this way of life—
a life of confession, of repentance and forgiveness:

*Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.
Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart! (v10-11)*

I should point out in closing that Jesus adds something different to the fifth petition.
All the others seem to grow naturally out of OT teaching.
But when he says, "as we forgive our debtors,"
he is saying something stronger than his disciples would likely have heard before.

Jesus says explicitly in Matthew 6 that if you do not forgive your neighbor,
then neither will God the Father forgive you.
"For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you,
but if you do not forgive others their trespasses,
neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Mt 6:14-15)

This may seem backwards:
we should forgive *as* we have been forgiven!
That is true (and that is Paul's point in Colossians 3).

But here Jesus is very clear that God's forgiveness of *us*
is dependent upon our forgiveness of others.

Are you holding grudges?

Are you refusing to forgive someone who has repented of his sin?

Then don't expect God to forgive you!

In the fifth petition you are asking God to use the same standard that you use.

This is why we need mercy!

And so let me ask you...

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