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Psalm 32:1-5 “The Blessing of Forgiveness”

Intro. I have been preaching from Psalms on Sunday evening, and I decided to preach this Psalm on a Sunday morning as part of our communion service. One of the purposes of the Lord’s Supper is to examine ourselves, as Paul said in 1 Cor. 11. So when we receive the elements of the Lord’s Supper, you will have opportunity to spend to time in quiet reflection. Then, after a time of self-examination, you should confess your sins unto the Lord.

Psalm 32 is one of the Psalms of confession. It is very important that we practice confession of our sin. This is required if we are to receive the blessing of God’s forgiveness, and restore our fellowship with God. So I hope this message will motivate you to confess your sins, and to do so in a proper way.

Now I want to start off by sharing with you why you should confess your sins to the Lord. It is because in so doing, you will experience:

I. THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS

This is stated twice in vv. 1-2, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity....” This Psalm no doubt gives the record of one who has personally experienced the blessing of forgiveness. The word “blessed” refers to a state of joy and happiness. It describes a person who sings for joy. After all, Psalm 32 is a song that was intended to be sung. David knew how sweet it was to have sin pardoned. Forgiveness is especially sweet compared to the backdrop of the burden of unconfessed sin that I will talk about in a few moments.

Jesus spoke of the blessing of forgiveness when He said to the paralyzed man, “Son, be of good cheer; your sins are forgiven you” (Mt. 9:2). There is nothing like forgiveness for making the heart sing and rejoice! A full, instantaneous pardon turns the sinner’s hell into heaven, and makes the heir of wrath (Eph. 2:3b) a partaker in blessing. This blessing supersedes all other circumstances. Whether such a person is poor, or sick, or sorrowful, he is blessed. Pardoning mercy is of all things in the world most to be prized, for it is the only and sure way to happiness.

So who do you think is really blessed? Do you think of some rich movie star, business man, or professional athlete? Well, if such a person is still carrying the load of guilt and sin, and if they do not know God’s peace, then they are not truly blessed. The one who is truly blessed is the one who knows God’s forgiveness.

Why is God’s forgiveness such a blessed experience? David gives 3 different pictures of forgiveness in this Psalm. First of all, according to Psalm 32, we are blessed because:

A. Our Transgression Is Forgiven – Again, v.1 says, “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.” The word rendered “forgiven” in the original means “to lift up; to take away, to carry off.” The same word is used in the last of v.5. The Psalmist is probably picturing the scapegoat. The sins of the people would be confessed upon one goat, and then it

would be driven away into the wilderness. Therefore, Ps. 103:12 says, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”

Forgiveness was actually made possible only because of Jesus. Remember when John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said in John 1:29, “...Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” Jesus bore our guilt upon Himself, and carried it away. It is gone! What a blessing for every believer!

We are also blessed because, according to the last of v.1:

B. Our Sin Is Covered – This is actually a case of Hebrew poetic parallelism. Both clauses are just different ways to express forgiveness. So here we have another picture of forgiveness. When God forgives us, He covers our sin. Our sin is odious and abominable to God, and He delights in covering it. The word translated “atonement” is based on the Hebrew word that means “to cover.”

Our sin can be covered by God, as the ark was covered by the mercy-seat. The ark contained the broken Law of God, but the mercy-seat, which was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice, covered it! What a cover that must be which hides our all the filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit forever from the sight of the all-seeing God! Christ’s atonement is the true covering, the making an end of sin.

Christian, aren’t you glad that your sin has been covered? All of us have done things that we are ashamed of. We want to forget what we’ve done, but at times we are reminded of the shameful sins we have committed. But God is willing to cover our sins, and hide them from His view. Thus, He forgets our sin. He puts it out of His mind and out of sight. A similar picture is found in Micah 7:19, “... You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” Our sins can be covered and forgiven as the waters cover the depths of the ocean. Prov. 10:12 says, “...love covers all sins.” Oh, the wonderful love of God!

There is another kind of covering that is a curse rather than a blessing. It is when *we* try to cover up our sin instead of confess our sins. Prov. 28:13 says, “He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.” It is far better to let God cover your sin than for you to try to cover it.

Then he gives another statement of who is blessed. It is the one who experiences the fact that:

C. Our Iniquity Is Not Imputed - V.2 also says, “Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity...” Now we move to a judicial picture of forgiveness. Or we could call it a picture of an accountant. The word translated “impute” means “to think, calculate, make a judgment.” Here sin is pictured as a debt. But what a blessing it is when the debt is paid and it is no longer on our record!

This reminds me of Phm. 1:18 when Paul said regarding the run-a-way slave Onesimus, “But if he has wronged you or owes anything, put that on my account.”

How is this possible? Our sin was put on the account of Jesus, since He had no sin of His own. When Jesus died for us, our sin was marked “Paid in full.” God does not impute sin to the one who trusts in Christ. It gets even better. Not only is our sin debt cancelled, but the righteousness of Christ was added to our account! 2 Cor. 5:21 says, “He knew no sin, but was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” In Romans 4:5 we read, “But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.”

Augustine, the brilliant theologian of long ago, loved this psalm. He kept a copy of Psalm 32 over his bed. This comes as no surprise to those who are aware of his reprobate life before his conversion to Christ.

Do you know the blessing of forgiveness? Have you experienced peace with God? If not, you are missing out on a great blessing indeed. Don't you *want* to experience the blessing of such forgiveness? Your sins can be removed, covered up, and taken off your account!

Now to motivate you to seek the blessing of forgiveness, notice by way of contrast in this Psalm:

II. THE BURDEN OF UNCONFESSED SIN

Let's suppose you have sinned against God and others. You decide you will act like you have done nothing wrong. You don't confess your sin but you engage in a cover-up. Well, I want to show you from vv.3-4 the kind of problems you will have when you keep silent, and do not confess your sin. David knew this first-hand, for he tried to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba, and the murder of her husband. For almost a year, David hid his sins and tried to avoid facing the consequences. Yet as long as he kept silent and refused to confess his sins, he was under the chastening hand of God. Here he explains something of the battle that went on in his life as he became increasingly conscious of his sin. First, you will have:

A. Mental and Psychological Problems – In v.4 David said, “For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me....” Clearly, David's conscience was bothering him. A guilty conscience weighed heavily upon him. While we smother our sin it rages within and torments terribly. It is better to suffer all the diseases of the flesh than lie under the crushing sense of the wrath of almighty God. Notice also David's terrible experience was both day “and night.” Under terrors of conscience, men have little rest by night. God's hand is very helpful when it uplifts, but it is awful when it presses down.

Then, you will also have:

B. Physical Problems – In v.3 David said, “When I kept silent, my bones grew old through my groaning all the day long.” The bones are considered to be the strongest portions of our bodies. Also, the health of a person was believed to be tied to one's bones. For example, Psa. 6:2 says, “...O LORD, heal me, for my bones are troubled.” So under the stress of guilt, even his bones “grew old,” or began to “wear out,” that is, began to decay with weakness. The grief of guilt was so intense that it sapped his health and destroyed his vital energy. David probably lost weight during this time of anguish.

C. Spiritual Problems - In the last of v.4 it says, “My vitality was turned into the drought of summer.” The word translated “vitality” is a rare Hebrew word, and can mean “juice.” The word is found only in one other place, in Num. 11:8 where it is translated “fresh.” David could be referring to a physical problem of dryness and dehydration. Unconfessed transgression dried up the fountain of the man's strength, and made him like a plant withered by the scorching heat of a tropical sun.

But He could also be referring to spiritual dryness. Have you ever experienced that? David did. The sap of his soul was dried up. He no longer had the spiritual inspiration he used

to have. God doesn't want us to be dry spiritually, but you will be when you are living with unconfessed sin.

Had David openly confessed his sins immediately, and not tried to hide them, he would have avoided months of silent agony and divine discipline.

One lesson from this is that the child of God cannot sin and get by with it if you don't confess it and deal with it. The hardened, unsaved person may sin and not have these consequences, but the child of God cannot. If you can live with unconfessed sin and not be bothered with guilt, then there is a serious question mark regarding your salvation.

Do you have any of the symptoms of unconfessed sin? If so, then you need to follow the instructions of the last point of my message:

III. FOLLOW THE PATHWAY TO FORGIVENESS

How can we have the blessing of forgiveness? Notice the last words of v.5, "and You forgave the iniquity of my sin." God is very willing to forgive sin. But what precedes those words in that verse is very important. For there we see the pathway to forgiveness from our day to day sin. So notice what David says we should do to receive forgiveness from the Lord.

A. Acknowledge Your Sin – In v.5 David said, "I acknowledged my sin to You..." The word "acknowledged" means "to make known." Actually, the purpose of this acknowledgement is not to make our sin known to God. He already knows it. It is to acknowledge sin to ourselves. It is to agree with God that what we did was wrong. Finally David did this. He would have spared himself much anguish if he had done this soon after his sin. The least we can do, if we would be pardoned, is to acknowledge our fault; if we are too proud for this we doubly deserve punishment.

This is in contrast to what we read in v.3, where David said, "When I kept silent..." David had sinned, but he acted like he had done nothing wrong. Instead of acknowledging and confessing his sin, he kept silent.

Paul, in a context about the Lord's Supper, said, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Cor. 11:31). We must acknowledge our sin and agree with God that what we did was wrong.

I'm afraid there is very little confession of sin today. People think that as long as they have not done the "big bad sins," such as murder and stealing, they have nothing to confess. Yet God condemns such things as pride, jealousy, greed, and lack of faith. Then James 4:17 says, "to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin." Furthermore, God's moral law is hardly taught or even believed anymore. People are less mindful of what sin is.

Furthermore, to be forgiven, you must:

B. Stop Hiding Your Iniquity – In the last of v.5 David also said, "And my iniquity I have not hidden." We must confess the guilt as well as the fact of sin. It is useless to conceal it, for it is well known to God. A full confession softens and humbles the heart.

Do you remember what happened to Adam and Eve after they had sinned? They hid themselves from God. That has been our human nature ever since!

So instead of hiding your sins, you should:

C. Confess Your Sins – In the middle of v.5 we read, “I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.’” After putting it off and trying to avoid it, David finally made the decision to confess his sin to the Lord. The apostle John wrote, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). For so long David did not do these things.

I believe this is also brought out by the statement in the last of v.2. The one who is blessed with forgiveness is the one “in whose spirit there is no deceit.” Based on the poetic context, this probably refers to the person who does not try to deceive God about his sin. In other words, he freely confesses his sin to God. We need to be honest with God about sin.

We need to confess sin for what it truly is in the sight of God. We need to agree with God what sin really is. Note in vv.1-2 the three words so often used to denote our disobedience: transgression, sin, and iniquity. David repeats those same words in v.5, “I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’...” This trinity of sin is overcome by the Trinity of heaven.

“Transgression” signifies the “crossing over a boundary, doing what is prohibited.” It is an expression of rebellion. Adam transgressed. God put a circle around the forbidden tree, and Adam was not to cross that line to partake of that fruit. When David committed adultery, he crossed over a significant boundary. God puts a boundary around everyone’s spouse, and we are not to cross the line of intimate touching and sexual relations. God has outlined limits of human behavior and has made it quite clear that He expects human beings to operate within those limits for their own good and the well-being of society.

Even comedian Kathy Griffin understands this concept. After she did a photo shoot with what appeared to be a decapitated, bloody head of President Trump, she apologized and acknowledged that she had crossed a line. Indeed she did!

“Sin” signifies “missing of a mark,” not doing what is commanded. God has a moral and spiritual target that we are to aim for, but too often we miss the mark. It can refer to our sin nature in general.

“Iniquity” signifies what is turned out of its proper course or situation; anything morally distorted or perverted. Iniquity perverts what is right and makes it into something wrong. Or it perverts what is wrong into something viewed as right. Calling sin “good” is a perversion, a twisting of the truth. Our world is full of twisted perversion of God’s moral law. We commit iniquity when we rationalize and excuse our sin, and even twist it into something good and acceptable. David could have thought, “God gave sexual pleasure. I’m a king. I deserve a little extra pleasure.” That’s iniquity!

Do you think that you have sinned very little, and you hardly even need forgiveness? Well the fact is, day after day you transgressed and sinned and acted in iniquity. You have constantly done what was forbidden, have left undone what was required, have perverted that which is right.

So I think we need to confess what sin really is. Call a spade a spade. Don’t rationalize it, or make light of it, but call it what it is: a transgression, a missing the mark, and perversion.

I have talked about the steps we must take to receive forgiveness. Before I close, I want us to:

D. Recognize God’s Part in our Forgiveness – After David had done his part, he said in the last of v.5, “You forgave the iniquity of my sin.” What did God have to do to forgive us of our sin? Forgiveness is free to the sinner, but it is not cheap. The justice of God demands

payment for sin. Justice must be avenged on the sinner, or on a sinless substitute. Heb. 9:22 says, "Without the shedding of blood is no remission." Every pardon comes at the price of blood. Jesus was willing to shed His blood that we might be forgiven!

Our own good works, or even our good intentions, can never solve the sin problem. All we have to do is confess our sins, and trust in Jesus Christ, who died in our place as a sacrifice for sin. The apostle Paul refers to this Psalm in Rom. 4:6-8, where he talks about justification by faith.

The Great Reformer Martin Luther had some real problems finding peace with God and a sense of forgiveness. He tried to do all that he had been taught but still felt guilty. When he finally understood from the Scriptures that salvation, forgiveness, justification, and all the other blessings of God are made available to man on the basis of God's grace rather than man's efforts, he was almost beside himself with joy.

Conclusion: David ends this section with a Selah. Another pause is needed, for the matter is not such as may be hurried over. We should stop and consider what he is saying.

Sources: Stuart Brisco, *What Works When Life Doesn't* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1976); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 2 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1982); G. Campbell Morgan, *Notes on the Psalms* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1947); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 4:23] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2012); Charles H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979 reprint), 89 only; Warren Wiersbe, *Meet Yourself in the Psalms* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books/SP Publications, Inc., 1983); Fred M. Wood, *Psalms: Songs from Life* (Nashville: Convention Press, 1984). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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