

Blessed are the Forgiven

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[0 : 0 0] I thought it would be helpful just to quickly remember what we've covered in the Psalms so far and where we're up to. Psalm 32 is in the middle of the first book of Psalms, which goes until Psalm 41.

But the entire collection of the Psalms are headlined by Psalm 1 and 2. Psalm 1 tells us about the good life, the blessed life. The blessed man delights in the law of God.

He meditates on it, which then in Psalm 2 is focused in on the anointed son of God, God's chosen king. And the blessed life is one that takes refuge in that son of God.

So then as you get into the rest of book 1, the overarching question is, well, is David that anointed son of God? And the answer is, well, kind of yes and kind of no.

He's the afflicted king of God, but he's still messy and broken. And so as the Psalms move on, it asks, is it Solomon?

[1 : 0 0] And so on and so forth. And then by the end of book 5, we're left without this anointed king yet being revealed. But we're encouraged to keep delighting in God's law and to continue to hope.

Hoping in God's steadfast love and for his eternal rule to be established. Now, that's a bit of a quick overview and we're still towards the start of that overall arc. But let's read from Psalm 32.

Psalm 32. A mascal of David. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity and whose spirit there is no deceit.

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.

I acknowledged my sin to you and I did not cover up my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

[2 : 1 7] 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. 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. 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. Let's pray. Lord, you are good and gracious.

Your love knows no bounds. Help us to know your mercy, that we may have boldness to come before you and confess our sins and experience the joy of your forgiveness.

[3 : 1 9] Amen. Now, I wanted to start this morning by thinking about why you're here. It's a good question to check in on and ask yourself every so often.

Why are you at church today? I always love meeting people who are new to church. And if you are new today, we're so glad that you're here and would love for you to stick around, grab some morning tea afterwards, and give us an opportunity to meet you and get to know you.

But one of the questions that always crops up when meeting new people is, what brought you here? Or more bluntly, why are you at church? And we could ask that same question of the regulars here today as well.

And, I mean, we just heard from those three youth why they have come along to church and why they enjoy church.

And, I mean, there are some excellent reasons to keep coming back. There's great community, good singing, and a good kids program. But it's much more than that, isn't it? We're here to remind ourselves and encourage each other of the solution to the greatest problem we've got.

[4 : 30] That problem being our brokenness and sinfulness, and that solution being the forgiveness that Jesus offers any who will trust in Him. It is that forgiveness that Psalm 32 is all about, and like a balm for any ailment, it calms and soothes even the most broken of souls.

Because we are all broken, aren't we? In the sight of God, by our own human nature, we are all sinners. Before Him, we are all guilty. If you don't feel guilty, then this Psalm is not for you.

But if that's the case, if I may be so bold, you're lying to yourself. Because you are guilty. We all are. But if you do feel guilty, if you feel broken, if you feel as if you're not worthy to lift up your hands and cry out to God, this is the Psalm for you.

For the murderers and rapists, the thieves and liars, the drunkards and abusers, for the angry, the jealous, the lazy and the gossips. Maybe this week you spoke disrespectfully about your boss or co-worker, or you let your anger get the better of you and said something you wish you could take back.

You watched something you wished you never touched, and you feel so ashamed and dirty and guilty. Well, my friends, this Psalm is for you. I know that for my own laziness and short-temperedness, this Psalm is for me.

[5 : 53] And if that is you, how beautifully do these first few lines of this Psalm resonate and encourage us? 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. What such reassuring words these are for the guilty, that there is forgiveness.

So let's look a bit more closely at Psalm 32 and the good news that it proclaims. As you'll see, the structure is there in your outline. And in the first two verses, we see David's headline, his introduction to the Psalm, which is then followed by the two major body sections.

Firstly, David's learning or his experience in verses 3 to 5. This then transitions into David's instruction and teaching that he wants to pass on. And then wraps up in verses 10 and 11 with a choice, a decision, to either live as the wicked or as the righteous.

So, straight up. In verses 1 and 2, we get David's headline. I want to say his thesis statement, but perhaps that's a bit too impersonal and academic.

[7 : 01] It's more his revelation, his big idea that he wants to share. And just in case you haven't already picked it up, Psalm 32 is all about forgiveness. 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. Blessed. It's a bit of a weird word. Over time, it's come to have a strong religious association, but that isn't particularly how it's being used here.

Blessed. It just means to be happy, approved of, or to be envied. Glad is he who is forgiven. This is the good, the happy life.

This is David's secret to happiness, forgiveness. Surely there can be no greater feeling than the joy experienced when a past wrong is forgiven by a close friend.

When you come in true repentance for a misdeed, and the offended chooses to overlook it, to not seek justice, what a relief that is. And not only that, but here we see that it is forgiveness granted by Yahweh, the Lord himself.

[8 : 10] This is true blessing. It is good news of great joy, that no matter what, God's forgiveness means that we no longer have to face the penalty of our sin.

We are counted as sinless before him. No more does our guilt have to weigh us down. Instead, God's forgiveness frees us from that weight, and covers over our sin.

No longer regarded, no longer does it have to be looked upon. It is put away from God's reckoning. But, if it is so blessed to be forgiven, how is it that this forgiveness can be grasped?

How can we take a hold of it? Well, immediately we see the way not to do it. We see David try to hide his sin, and the outcome of doing that. David keeps silent about his sin.

Rather than confessing his sin to God, and seeking his forgiveness, David remains silent. Now, to be clear, this isn't a patient silence, as if David is putting up with his sinful nature, in some way that could be construed as honourable or noble.

[9 : 18] No, this is David keeping his sin to himself. Trying to keep it secret and private from God, rather than confessing it. Which I know I am prone to do, and perhaps you are too.

We like to hide our sin, don't we? We try to keep it secret from others and from God, and in doing so, deceive ourselves in one of two ways.

Either because we're so fascinated by and in love with that sin, that to confess it means that we would have to give it up, or because admitting it means that we have to come to terms with the fact that we've got a problem, and aren't quite as perfect as we think we are.

I mean, it's the classic first step of Alcoholics Anonymous, or for dealing with any addiction, for that matter. First, you have to admit that you have a problem. You can't deal with anything you don't think is there.

A change in behaviour first requires a change in heart and mind. But nonetheless, both of these positions are incredibly proud positions, aren't they?

[10 : 23] Ultimately, we don't know David's thinking here as to why he kept silent, but we can see the result of it. In verse 4, God's hand is heavy upon David, and it draws the life out of him, doesn't it?

His very bones waste away. There's a reason why someone's skeleton is the last part of them to remain after they die. Your bones are the strongest and the toughest part of you.

But in his silence, in David's silence, under the heavy hand of God, it's as if even his bones are crumbling away into dust. His strength dries up as by the summer.

I mean, if there was ever a biblical illustration written for Brisbane, I feel like this has to be it, doesn't it? This is the experience of the Brisbane summer. You go outside, as we just were, and the harsh sun leaves you drenched in sweat within a couple of minutes.

You stay inside without air con, and it doesn't take long for the sweltering heat to just permeate through the building, sapping away any strength or motivation that you might have. So it's pretty easy for us to imagine what David is feeling here.

[11 : 34] Like the drain of heat in summer, God's wrath against David, as he tries to hide his sin, empties him. It's quite reminiscent of Psalm 31, which we read it out a couple of months ago now, but you should be able to see it there just back on your page.

But Psalm 31, verses 9 to 10. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress. My eye is wasted from grief, my soul and my body also, for my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing.

My strength fails because of my iniquity and my bones waste away. This is the horrifying experience of God's wrath on sin, wasting away our very bodies.

However, as soon as David speaks up, there is forgiveness. Notice the remarkable change that happens between verses 4 and 5. As soon as he confesses his transgression, God removes his heavy hand from upon David and forgives his iniquity.

When David stops covering up his sin, God covers it over. As much as he may want his sin to be of no consequence, that's not for David to decide.

[12 : 55] But as soon as he hands it over to God, God can decide to do that. And he does. Here he chooses to cover it over and to punish it no longer. Now notice the order of events here.

Notice how David's confession flows out of faith. His changed heart and mind flows out into a change of action. That is to say, his act of confessing his sin were not some magic words devoid of faith that twisted God's arm into forgiving him.

It was not as if his mere act of confession, through his act of confession, which David was granted grace and forgiveness, but through his confession that flowed out of faith.

And even that faith and repentance, David's changed mind, even that was a gift from God, wasn't it? Because through God's heavy hand, through his punishment of David's sin, he was revealing to him the folly of his ways and leading him to repentance.

Even in his wrath, God was extending grace to David to bring him into faith and repentance and to show him exactly how merciful and loving he is.

[14 : 05] And what an unmeasurable extent of mercy and love it is. Look at God's disposition here. As soon as David confesses his sin, bang, forgiveness. David has been groaning and suffering under God, wasting away.

But as soon as he speaks up, forgiveness is right there. No questions asked. No three-month trial period. Forgiveness is immediately available for those that call out for it.

Because that's the nature of Yahweh, isn't it? That is what his heart is drawn to. And of course, Jesus embodies this in the Gospels, doesn't he? As soon as the paralyzed man is lowered down through the roof, Jesus, seeing their faith, proclaims, man, your sins are forgiven you.

Even before the man gets an opportunity to ask, Jesus immediately forgives him. Dane Ortlund's thinking in his book, *Gentle and Lowly*, is immensely helpful here.

As he puts it, we tend to think that when we approach Jesus for help in our need and mercy amid our sins, we somehow detract from him, lessen him, impoverish him.

[15 : 13] Christ's heart is not drained by our coming to him. His heart is filled up all the more by our coming. To put it the other way around, when we hold back, lurking in the shadows, fearful and failing, we miss out not only on our own increased comfort, but on Christ's increased comfort.

Jesus lives for this. This is what he loves to do. His joy and ours rise and fall together. Did you hear that? When we hold back from bringing our sin to Christ, we deprive ourselves and Christ of such a great joy.

To those who humbly come to God, he does not hold back his grace and forgiveness. And so having been humbled by the Lord and brought to repentance, now knowing the forgiveness that God offers, David turns his attention to those around him and instructs them to learn from his lesson and to follow his example.

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. Now having known the salvation that God offers, now reliant on God and having experienced firsthand his rescue in times of trouble, David calls on others to seek the Lord.

[16 : 48] And there are two things I want to pick up on here. Firstly, why only the godly? And then, why does David say at a time when you may be found? So the godly.

Why is it only the godly who are to offer up prayer? Well, because that is what prayer is, right? Prayer is faith. Its very nature is that you recognize that you aren't God, that you aren't sovereign, and so you call out to the one who is.

True prayer is always from a position of humility. The ungodly are never going to pray because in their pride, they can't see the need for it. Only those who are humble, those who recognize their own sinfulness and need for it to be dealt with, only they will be the ones who are going to call upon God to have that forgiveness extended to them.

And they have to call upon God when he may be found. But God is God, right? He doesn't have bathroom breaks. He doesn't need to sleep and need to be aroused. When wouldn't we be able to find God?

Well, I think this part of the verse here is a warning to seek forgiveness from God now. To not wait. Act in accordance with your repentance, your changed mind.

[18 : 05] Don't realize that your sin is something that you need to deal with today and then wait until tomorrow to do so. As if you'd received a Christmas present on Christmas Day, but want to wait until Boxing Day to open it.

No, don't delay in confessing your sin to God. Don't allow it to fester and slowly chip away at you. Take action now. Cut it out. Confess it to God and seek his forgiveness.

Lest you should delay one day too long and it be too late to repent. As the words of Isaiah 55 puts it, from verse 6, Seek the Lord while he may be found.

Call upon him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts. Let him return to the Lord that he may have compassion on him and to our God for he will abundantly pardon.

For those that do return to the Lord, even though the floodwaters of death may surround and envelop them, there is the promise that God will protect them.

[19 : 13] God's forgiveness brings restoration and deliverance from death. And so David's instruction continues into verses 8 and 9. And like all good teachers, he doesn't just explain what to do, but also what not to do.

An encouragement and a warning. And the imagery is almost funny in how stark it is, but because of it, it's also quite punchy and quite helpful, I think. 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.

Don't be stupid. Don't act like an animal. Animals don't have any understanding. They need bits and harnesses and everything in order not to run away from their owner. Don't be like them.

Don't mindlessly continue in your ways, wandering this way and that in your sin. Because God doesn't use a bit or a bridle. He uses his heavy hand in punishing sin to bring us back to him.

But even here, we see the grace of God in using punishment on sin to lead us to repentance. Like a good father, he corrects us. And when that happens, don't continue to kick against the goads.

- [20 : 25] Follow David's better way and heed his teaching. Let his counsel guide you. The thing about experience, though, is that it's something that everyone is willing to offer, but no one really wants to accept because it's a humbling thing.

You have to recognize that you have something to learn and be willing to sit under someone else's teaching. This, though, this is the good life. This is the blessed way of living.

This instruction is worth heeding. Don't continue to follow your carnal and sinful urges, but accept our Father's correction. Seek forgiveness from the one who is so eager to offer it.

Which brings us to the summary of the psalm in verses 10 and 11. 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. To conclude this psalm, David presents a choice in contrast between two very different people.

- [21 : 33] Firstly, the wicked. These people sin against God and others. They lie, they hate, they steal. They reject God's rulership. They do it in the pride of their heart.

They see nothing wrong with their actions and they refuse correction. Like the animals that fight tooth and nail against the bridle, they don't accept God's direction and way and rail against him.

As Psalm 10 puts it, the wicked boasts of the desires of his soul and the one greedy for gain curses and renounces the Lord. In the pride of his face, the wicked does not seek him.

All his thoughts are, there is no God. In their pride, they do not see the folly of their sin and that their path leads to destruction. But the Lord's heavy hand will turn against them and all that lies in front of them is sorrow and pain.

But for the one who trusts in the Lord, they get to experience the depth of God's loving character. They are the blessed person experiencing the good life.

- [22 : 43] His steadfast love, which has come up so far, sorry, throughout the psalm so far and will be big throughout the next psalm, shows up here again. For the righteous, the one who trusts in the Lord, the one who humbles themselves and does not cover up their sin, they will be surrounded by God's steadfast love.

The steadfast love that embodies the heart of God's character. The love that drives him to act in the way that he does and to offer forgiveness through the death of his son.

Turn to Romans 3, which uses Psalm 32 to highlight on one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. Now this part comes immediately after telling us that no one can be justified by the law because we have all sinned.

According to the law, no one is righteous. In verse 23 of chapter 3, famously states, Paul has sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

However, God has given Jesus as a gift. Someone who took our place and appeased the wrath of God on sin through his blood, the innocent in the place of the guilty, offered as a free gift that only needs to be accepted by faith.

- [24 : 01] And this is to the effect that it excludes any boasting. Grace and forgiveness are a free gift, can't be earned by any works, which shows God's righteousness in both being just and punishing sin through Jesus, but also in justifying those who trust in Jesus and taking their sin far away, which again is only possible through Jesus.

That's the background. But here we go. Chapter 4, sorry. Chapter 4 from verse 2, which gives us the example of Abraham, someone who lived before the law was given.

From verse 2. If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sin is covered.

[25 : 10] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. What an amazing blessing we have. Out of his steadfast love, God offers Jesus as a free gift to all who believe.

A free gift of forgiveness. One that covers over our brokenness. Attempting to cover over our sin by ourselves is never going to work.

But the gift of God is the free gift of forgiveness that sets us free from guilt. One that makes us righteous before him, accepted simply through faith.

Faith that brings forgiveness, that brings about righteousness. So don't be like David. Don't try to hide your sin or wait until tomorrow to deal with it.

Turn to the Lord today. Seek his forgiveness. Humble yourself and throw yourself onto the one who so freely forgives those that come to him.

[26 : 11] It is his joy to forgive the repentant sinner and it is our joy to be forgiven. It is the blessed, the good life. What an amazing God we have who offers us such boundless forgiveness.

Let's overflow in heartfelt thanks and praise to him. Let's pray and then we'll sing for joy and rejoice together. Dear merciful Father, we are broken and you are the healer.

In our sins we are dead but you are the source of life. We confess the ways we have hated and spurned you. The ways that we have not loved what you have loved and have not hated the things you hate.

Please cover over our sin. Help us to cling to the free gift of Jesus and to forever rejoice and sing his praises. Amen.