

Psalm 32
How Blest the Forgiven Man!

A Maskil^[a] of David.

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

² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD
counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.

⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up^[b] as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶ 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.

⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

Footnotes:

- a. [Psalm 32:1](#) Probably a musical or liturgical term
- b. [Psalm 32:4](#) Hebrew *my vitality was changed*

Main Idea:

The blessedness of knowing forgiven sin and walking in faith and fellowship with God.

Intro

Psalm 32 that we are looking at today, in conjunction with our summer series on the Psalms, is one of the clearest passages in the OT that captivates the essence of how men and women must come before God, and how they, burdened and permeated with sin, can come to be forgiven and enter into the joyful relationship of forgiven people before the holy God of all the earth.

One of the commentators notes that this was St. Augustine's favorite psalm and he had it written on the wall next to his death bed so he could meditate more easily on it.

As we walk our way through this Psalm we read about the joyful testimony of a forgiven man. We learn something of his spiritual journey. He had been through an excruciating time of suffering because of his sin, but he came to the point where he confessed his sin and Yahweh forgave him, cleansed him, restored him. How wonderful to have ones sin taken away! What greater joy is there?

Then we read about the blessings of walking before Yahweh as forgiven people. The Psalm begins with the blessedness of being forgiven and ends with an exhortation for God's justified people to rejoice in him.

1. The Blessedness of the forgiven man whose sins are forgiven. v.1-2

Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,

Notice here that the Psalmist does not begin with his time of suffering from unrepentant sin, but he begins with the joy of being forgiven.

This is the major thing here; it is not his sin, but the forgiveness of the Lord, of Yahweh, which has captivated him. The great experience of being forgiven is his focus.

Meaning of “blessed” – the word is actually plural in Hebrew: blessednesses. It means supremely happy, satisfied.

Now he gives the reason he is so blessed, so happy:

A. *The forgiven man’s transgression is forgiven*

“Transgression” means “a going away or a departure” (Boice), thus it is “rebellious disobedience.” (NBC). It a going away from God, of rejecting him and his law. This man had committed transgressions; he’d been a rebel before Almighty God. He knew the right thing to do but he went the opposite direction – away from righteousness and toward evil.

But look! In spite of his wickedness, he says he was forgiven by Yahweh.

What does “forgiven” mean here?

It literally means “lifted off” [Boice] or “carried away”

This idea is expressed in John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim Progress* where we see the main character called Christian carrying a heavy burden (the burden of sin) on his back and then it is removed and tumbles away and it is gone forever.

So to have our transgressions forgiven by God means that the heavy burden of them that we have been carrying all our lives is lifted off by Christ, in particular, and thrown away and buried – never to be seen again.

B. *Secondly, the forgiven man’s sin is covered*

whose sin is covered.

Meaning of sin:

“a falling short” [Boice] – the idea is of an archer using his bow to shoot at a target and the arrow falls short – it misses the target. So a sinner misses obedience to God’s law – he fall short. He fails to do what he should do.

J. Boice notes that this idea of “covering” goes back to the OT Day of Atonement in which the high priest once a year entered the Holy of Holies, the inner sanctuary of the tent that the Israelites carried for 40 years in their desert wanderings. In this tent there was the ark of the covenant with the broken stone tablets which represented the law of Yahweh. The high priest entered with the blood of a slain animal such as a bull and he

sprinkled it over the top of the mercy seat to avert the wrath of God against the sins of the people.

So it is this sacrificial offering of worship that was the only means by which the worshipper's sins, his failing to hit the target of God's will and God's law, was covered. It was covered with the blood of an innocent animal to protect the sinful man or woman from Yahweh's wrath against sin.

David and every other worshipper of Yahweh in the OT had to avail themselves of the only means to have sin covered – it was through the sacrificial death and shed blood of an innocent victim. It was only through such prescribed acts of worship that sin could be covered over and its destructive effects removed.

C. Thirdly, the forgiven man's sins are no longer counted against him

² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,

The word "against" here shows that God is opposed to sinful humans.

The word "count" is similar an accounting term. An accountant writes things down in the ledger book. He records income and expenses.

We can likewise think of God having a great record book of all the sins, both great and small, that have ever been committed by every human being. In that book all our transgressions, sins, and iniquities are listed. 'But the amazing thing is that there are some people to whom God does not count their sins. They are removed because of the shed sacrificial blood of innocent victims. Yahweh in his grace and mercy crossed out the sins in his book against Davie, to count them no more against him..

Meaning of Iniquity: "inward corruption" NBC or "twisted, crooked" [Boice]

D. And fourthly, the forgiven man's spirit is delivered from deceit

and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

How is it possible for David to say this? He had certainly been guilty of deceit when he sent Bathsheba's husband into the front lines of the battle where he would be killed.

But David is cleansed from that sin. Yahweh does not count it against him. It's as if it never happened.

For the forgiven man or woman there is a real sense in which we've been delivered from deceit.

Because of the confession of our sin, there is an honesty before God. We confess our sin to God; we are not trying to deceive God, our ourselves or others, that we are better than we really are but we are honest about our weaknesses and sins. We are humble before God.

This isn't perfection, of course, but I believe it is humility and honesty before God and others

Cf John 1:47 - ⁴⁷ Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, ^(A)an Israelite indeed, ^(B)in whom there is no deceit!" Nathaniel must have been that kind of man.

II. The forgiven man's previous suffering of unconfessed sin – v. 3-4

**³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.**

The "silence" here is silence regarding his sin. He didn't talk to God about it, nor to anyone else.

Cf. Psa. 31:10 -
my strength fails because of my iniquity,
and ^(A)my bones waste away.

Was this physical suffering? It seems to be so.

Was this referring to David's sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah? We know Psalm 51 was centered on his confession of these sins, but we're not sure of the circumstances that led to Psalm 32. It could also refer to this incident, or to another, or be a summary of the whole experience of suffering from unconfessed sin and then receiving the joy of forgiveness upon confession.

David was silent about these sins, whatever they were. He kept them to himself. Yet he was suffering greatly. He knew the law of God. He knew the 10 Commandments: you shall not commit adultery; you shall not murder. If this was the sin with Bathsheba and against her husband, He had violated these two clear and fundamental commands of Yahweh for his people.

David was a man extremely sensitive to Yahweh who had treasured countless times of rich communion and fellowship with him. He was very aware of Yahweh's holiness and righteousness.

So his flagrant sin weighed heavily on his heart and mind. He had sinned against his Maker and his Redeemer. He had violated the trust of his loyal subject, Uriah. He was no longer worthy to be king. He was no longer worthy to be a leader of his people.

He must have been suffering tremendous internal turmoil and grief. He must have been about to explode with guilt.

Then God was merciful. The prophet Nathan was aware of his sin. Perhaps he had heard other observer's of David's two great sins who had come to talk to him. Sin cannot be hidden. It often becomes public when we foolishly think it can remain hidden.

Nathan came to David:

2 Sam. 12:9 - ⁹ (E) Why have you despised the word of the Lord, ^(G) to do what is evil in his sight? ^(H) You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and ^(I) have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.

v. 13: - ¹³ (K) David said to Nathan, ^(L) "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan's confrontation brought it all to a head. David's sin was presented openly to him. God used the prophet. And David did not deny but acknowledged his sin. He did not say, I have sinned against Yahweh – we hurt people but the sin is against God.

**⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up^[b] as by the heat of summer. *Selah***

We see here the results of unconfessed sin:

Yahweh's hand was upon him.

He was not like the tree in Psalm 1 planted by the streams of water so that its leaf did not wither in the dry season. David's leaf was withering. He was fading.

The price of unconfessed sin was heavy on his mind and his body.

III. The forgiven man's relief of confession – v. 5

**⁵ I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;**

Finally, David acknowledges his sin to Yahweh. He makes it known to his God. He had been covering it, hiding it, but now he brings it out into the open. He came to his senses, the way the Prodigal son in Luke 15 did after he had squandered his inheritance in wild living:

Example of repentance and confession: Prodigal Son:

Luke. 15:21:

²¹ And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. (A) I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'^[a]

**I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah***

To confess means literally "to agree with." He agreed with Yahweh that he had transgressed, that he had been a rebel and disobedient. He uses all three words for sin here: transgression, inequity and sin – that is, rebellion, corruption, missing the mark.

Notice here the immediacy of David's forgiveness. As soon as he confessed his sin, God forgave him. David did not have to go through some kind of acts of penance, he did not have to repeat so many prayers on a prayer bead, he did not have to crawl on his knees, he did not have to give some money to the church, he did not have to spend days agonizing over his sin and beating his chest – as soon as he confessed, as soon as he acknowledged his sin, God immediately forgave him.

How could God do this? How do you explain this immediate and total forgiveness to a man who had committed adultery and had manipulated the death of one of his most loyal soldiers?

One way we understand this is because of the very nature of Yahweh himself. Listen to how he describes his own nature when in passed by Moses on that day when Moses asked to see his glory:

Exo. 34:7:

7 (A) keeping steadfast love for thousands, [a] (B) forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin,

And in the great Psalm of confession, Psalm 51, David prayer of confession regarding his sin with Bathsheba:

Psa. 51:3 – (B) Have mercy on me, [a] O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your (C) abundant mercy
(D) blot out my transgressions.

2 (E) Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and (F) cleanse me from my sin!

Here we see that David understands the kind of God Yahweh is:
He's a God of abundant mercy – he is not stingy with his mercy -
who is governed by steadfast love.

And he prays that Yahweh would remove every vestige of his sin: his transgressions,
iniquity and sin.

So God can forgive David because he is a forgiving God. Yet there is more to the story
than this. There is a concrete basis for this forgiveness. It is because sacrifices were
made for sin.

The cost of David's sin had been paid, the punishment was meted out on the innocent
animal had died and its blood offered up to cover David's sin. This innocent sacrificial
animal also pointed to the real and final payment for David's sin – the death of the Son
of God, Jesus Christ our Lord, who would truly and completely pay for and remove the
guilt and punishment of the sins of all God's people of all ages.

IV. The Life of the Forgiven Man: v. 6-11

*A. Because of his experience of Yahweh's answer to his cry for forgiveness, the
forgiven man exhorts all godly people to do likewise:*

**6 Therefore let everyone who is godly
offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; v. 6a**

Meaning of "godly"?

Those who are aware of God, who fear God, who seek to live to please God.
They are not perfect; they don't go around with some halo on their head. They are

humble people: that is, people who acknowledge the greatness of God and the great need of themselves for cleansing from their sin. They are in active fellowship with God by his Spirit, and though still troubled by their own sins and failings, they seek to know and live in the will of God. They are beggars, homeless people, who have found spiritual food and a spiritual home in God and in his people, and they want to share these great blessings with others.

The “therefore” here means that because of what preceded, that is, that the LORD forgives sin when confessed, it means the godly should be encouraged to confess their sins to the LORD, for he will forgive.

B. God comes to the deliverance of the forgiven man from trouble – v. 6b and 7

**surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.**

**⁷ You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts of deliverance. *Selah***

In fact, he will do more than forgive us as we confess our sins to him; he will come to our aid in the time of trouble. The fact that he forgives us when we confess our sins, he answers our cry for mercy – gives us hope that he will also come to our aide in other areas of our lives – in whatever trouble or hardship or distressing circumstances we are facing.

C. God teaches and guides the forgiven man – v. 8

**⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.**

Here we see Yahweh speaking directly to David with a promise. He will instruct and teach David in all things...He will keep a watch over David. David will always be under the watchful eye of his God. God knows us and our circumstances better than we ourselves. He is the all-seeing God.

Verse 9 is a Warning to the godly:

The danger of ignorance of God and his will:

**⁹ 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.**

Here is an exhortation from Yahweh to his own people. They are not exempt from remaining in ignorance of Yahweh and his will. If they do, God will have to treat them like a horse or mule – they must be forced to obey by bit and bridle. So the idea here may be for us to take the initiative to learn of God, to follow him, to seek and do his will. Don't remain in ignorance so that God has to use force on you to get you to conform to his will.

In other words, be compliant and submissive in God's hand. Heed the instruction of Yahweh in his Word and as that Word is communicated to us through the instruction in the church service and through our study of the Word and through our fellowship with other Christians in which we teach and exhort one another in the things of God.

David in v. 10 reminds us:

¹⁰ Many are the sorrows of the wicked,

Sin and wickedness does not pay benefits – there may be short-term pleasures but sooner or later it brings "sorrows." And not just "sorrows," but "many" sorrows. Why would we want to continue in sin when all that awaits us is "many sorrows"?

But in contrast:

D. Yahweh's steadfast love surrounds the forgiven man:

but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the LORD.

Meaning of "trust:" – not just belief in Yahweh but commitment, total abandonment to him and his will.

Someone once said, "Are you unhappy in God, or you discontented? Then throw yourself into the will of God and you will find happiness."

IL – as one being baptized trusts him or herself to the baptizer by leaning back and trusting him to raising the baptizee up...

E. Joy and gladness mark the life of the forgiven man: v. 11:

**¹¹ Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!**

What are the reasons for the forgiven man to be glad and rejoice and shout?

Yahweh not only forgives sin, but he does not count it against his people. He removes it; he erases it from his record book. There was no more list, for example, of David's sins. There is no more record of adultery with Bathsheba or the planned killing of her husband Uriah.

Yahweh counts his people as "godly" (v. 6) and "righteous" (v. 11) and "upright in heart" (v. 11).

The extent of the forgiveness is so thorough that the forgiven man can be called a righteous person, a person upright in heart.

The righteous person is such through receiving Yahweh's forgiveness.

And he comes to their rescue in times of trouble.

So many and substantial are the reasons for the forgiven man or woman to rejoice in God.

Movement of the Psalm:

A man who had concealed his sin was suffering for this but when he confessed it to the LORD he was fully forgiven. And Yahweh is also the one he can call upon for help, his deliverer in time of trouble.

Applications:

1. Verses 1 and 2 of Psalm 32 are used by the Apostle Paul to substantiate and doctrine of justification by faith in the book of Romans. In chapter four we read:

Rom. 4:1-8 we read first of all how Abraham was justified before God not by his works but because he believed God when God told him in his old age that he would give him a son and many descendants, from Gen. 15:6

We read in verse 3 of Romans 4:

Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”⁴ Now ^(D)to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but ^(E)believes in ^(a)him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ ^(E)“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not ^(G)count his sin.”

Of all the Psalms and all the OT texts, Paul chose this one from Psalm 32:1-2 to teach the way person is justified before God and accepted by him. It is the merciful action of God in forgiving sin, in covering them, in not counting them against the person.

It is God and God alone who justifies the ungodly, who counts, considers, reckons that sinner as righteous in his sight. How is all this possible? It's only because of the cosmic transference of guilt and justification that took place in the death and R'n of Jesus Christ.

2 Cor. 5:21 summarizes this: ²¹ ^(A)For our sake he made him to be sin ^(B)who knew no sin, so that in him we might become ^(C)the righteousness of God.

Here is what sets Christianity apart from all the other religions of the world: instead of working for salvation, instead of trying to earn one's way to acceptance before God, in Christianity God does the work:

He takes our sins and lays them on Christ, and he takes Christ's righteousness, and counts or credits it to our account.

This is the blessing of the forgiven man or woman. We come to God with our sin. We hold not back but confess it to God. 1 John 1: 9 says,
⁹ ^(A)If we confess our sins, he is ^(B)faithful and just to forgive us our sins and ^(C)to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

He forgives us; instead of guilty and condemned, he counts us forgiven, righteous, and cleansed.

He can do this only because of the saving, substituting work of his Son Jesus Christ. So let us go to him with our sins, confess them, receive his cleansing, and know that he counts them no more against us, but instead counts us as justified, righteous, and beloved in his sight. Rejoice and be glad!

Thanks and praise be to our gracious and merciful God now and forever. Amen.

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