

How Blessed are the Forgiven

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Psalm 32

I. Introduction

a. Typical culture

- i. It is typical in today's culture, with many people living as practical atheists, to view life's events as a series of random events
 1. If things go well, a person calls himself lucky
 2. If things go poorly, a person calls himself unlucky
 3. It is amazing that people will deny the existence of God but then substitute this invisible force called luck which operates in ways nobody understands
- ii. A related viewpoint is one where a person complains about a string of seemingly random hardships that he sees as entirely undeserved or unfair
 1. Such a viewpoint stems from a karmic view of life
- iii. Then there is the life of mounting hardships caused by repeated sin, and even generational sin
 1. Though the person in this case is the primary source of his own hardship, he loves his sin so much that he will not see it as sin and will refuse to connect the hardships experienced with the sins performed
- iv. Fourthly, there is a view of life whereby a person complains of hardships caused by other people's sins
 1. Though we have all experienced this phenomenon, we cannot escape such hurt entirely because we live in a fallen world
- v. I must say that none of these views leads to a joyful life beyond periodic temporal happiness

b. Bible's view

- i. Now rather than look at the world as entirely random, or hide in a shell of self-righteousness as we self-destruct, or complain that we are victims of the actions of others, we rather need to look at life the way the Bible looks at life – that a person is either blessed or not blessed

- ii. For all of his faults, Esau understood what it meant to have the blessing of his father or lose the blessing of his father
- iii. We might then wonder what it means to be blessed
 - 1. To be blessed is to be in a blissful state of joy and happiness, without wrong or guilt, and to be in right relationship, most especially with God
 - 2. Likewise, to bless someone is to say or do something that moves a person toward the state of blessedness
- iv. Though we may think of ourselves as blessed in some ways and not blessed in others, the Bible tends to speak of blessedness in holistic and ultimate terms
 - 1. We might think one day that we are blessed to have the vehicle we have
 - a. Then when it breaks down, we think of ourselves as no longer blessed
 - b. Which may lead to cursing by the owner
 - 2. Such thinking is very granular and temporal, which thinking will distract us from the big picture and ultimate realities
- v. So how do we start thinking in Biblical terms of blessedness so that we do not bury our heads in the details of life?
 - 1. The best way is to search the Bible for what it tells us about true blessedness
 - 2. There are many examples of blessedness in Scripture
 - a. Psalm 1 starts, "How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked..."
 - b. Psalm 41 starts, "How blessed is he who considers the helpless..."
 - c. Psalm 119 starts, "How blessed are those whose way is blameless..."
 - d. Psalm 128 starts, "How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord..."
 - e. Jesus, in the sermon on the mount, tells of many who are blessed, and why it is they are considered blessed
 - i. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" Matthew 5:3

- ii. And so on
 - vi. But for today we will walk through Psalm 32, one of the psalms of David, in order better to understand the blessedness of being forgiven
- II. **Structure**
 - a. Overall
 - i. It is helpful first to understand the structure of the Psalm, and then walk through each part
 - ii. Overall Psalm 32 can be likened to a movie that starts in the present and then does a big flashback to tell the story of how the characters came to be as they are, which in turn results in a lesson
 - b. The first section, in verses 1 and 2, contains the summary statements
 - i. Here David writes of the blessedness of one forgiven
 - c. The next section, in verses 3 and 4, is the flashback
 - i. David looks back at the wretched state he found himself in and the misery he encountered there
 - d. Then in verse 5 we see the point of turning, which is the point of confession and forgiveness
 - e. Having turned from his sin, in verses 6 and 7 we read of the lessons learned by David, which brings the reader to the present
 - f. And then finally, in verses 8 through 11, David takes what he has learned and instructs and exhorts the reader
- III. **The State of Blessedness**
 - a. Having defined blessedness earlier as being in a blissful state of joy and happiness, without wrong or guilt, and being in right relationship, most especially with God, we now look at how that arises from the beginning of Psalm 32
 - b. There are four elements mentioned in verses 1 and 2 that characterize the blessed in this context. The one who is blessed is
 - i. He whose transgression is forgiven
 - ii. He whose sin is covered
 - iii. He to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity
 - iv. He in whose spirit there is no deceit
 - c. The first three elements speak to having your sins forgiven. You are blessed if your sins are forgiven. Why?

- i. It is sin that from the beginning caused us to be separated from God, that is, God who is the source of all that is truly good and lasting
- ii. Having our sins forgiven brings us back into right relationship with God
- iii. There is no more blissful state, no more joyful disposition than being in right relationship to God
- iv. You may recall the account of some friends of a paralytic man hauling him to Jesus to be healed (Mark 2)
 - 1. They were thinking of blessedness in terms of him regaining the use of his legs
 - 2. But Jesus says to him, "Son, your sins are forgiven"
 - 3. There was argument about whether Jesus had authority to forgive sins, but don't be distracted by that
 - 4. Recognize that what Jesus did for the paralytic at that moment was to usher him into the greatest state of blessedness the man could ever want, even though he was still a paralytic
 - 5. Jesus ended up also blessing him with healed legs which I'm sure was a great blessing to the man, but it paled in comparison to having his sins forgiven
- v. When we are hurting or downtrodden, we do not necessarily feel the blessedness of having our sins forgiven, which is why we need to think beyond our circumstances to the greater reality of life with Christ in God
 - 1. This point becomes painfully clear in the beatitudes where Jesus states, "Blessed are you when men cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
 - 2. So in the midst of being reviled we are to rejoice, because we are blessed, not temporally, but eternally, and far beyond what we can imagine
 - 3. Can anyone live this out?
 - a. In Acts 5:40-41 we read, "And they took his advice; and after calling the apostles in, they

- flogged them and ordered them to speak no more in the name of Jesus, and then released them. So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for His name.”
 - b. The apostles understood their state of blessedness, rather than being diminished by being flogged, was instead confirmed by it, which was cause for their rejoicing
- d. Now back to the fourth element listed in Psalm 32:1-2: He in whose spirit there is no deceit
 - i. First, this idea ties directly to the beatitudes where Jesus states, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”
 - ii. In a real sense we must not deceive ourselves, that somehow we are OK before God based on being good enough and thus never seek forgiveness from God and thus are never reconciled to God
 - iii. In addition, we must not be looking to deceive others as Ananias and Saphira did, wanting to look holy and good while being rotten
 - iv. The Pharisees as well were full of deceitful showmanship
 - v. Paul writes to Timothy (3:13), “But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”
 - vi. You are blessed if you have a pure heart. You are not deceiving and being deceived, but come to God in truth and live with Jesus who is the truth

IV. **The State of Wretchedness**

- a. Then in Psalm 32:3 David looks back at a time when he was far from blessed. He was in a state of wretchedness
- b. He writes that when he was quiet about his sin, his body wasted away through his groaning
 - i. Because of his sin, he was not reconciled to God, and he was doing nothing to become reconciled
 - ii. His life was disordered, not in line with God’s ways
 - iii. By being quiet, he was denying the reality of his situation, he was deceived

- iv. In 1 Corinthians Paul is addressing the problem of a person in the church who is committing egregious sin without remorse or repentance
 - 1. His answer to the situation is thus, “I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 5:5)
- v. Our bodies are not disconnected from our sin, but rather our bodies will eventually suffer in addition to our spirit with regard to our sin
- vi. In such cases, some will turn to doctors instead of to the Lord
 - 1. If the cause of the malady is persistence in sin, then the doctors cannot much help
 - 2. King Asa of Judah became angry at a prophet who told him what He did not want to hear (2 Chronicles 16:10ff)
 - a. Asa put the prophet in prison and oppressed some of the people
 - b. Shortly after we read that “In the thirty-ninth year of his reign Asa became diseased in his feet. His disease was severe, yet even in his disease he did not seek the Lord, but the physicians.” And so Asa died
- c. David then writes that God’s hand was heavy on him
 - i. God’s hand is heavy on us when He wants our attention regarding sin – because He wants to deal with it
 - ii. “The Lord disciplines those whom He loves...” (Hebrews 12:6), and discipline is not pleasant
 - iii. God will keep bringing the same message back to us in various ways, the message we would rather not hear
 - iv. He will interrupt and frustrate our lives in various ways to get our attention – because He loves His children
 - v. Has God been working to get your attention regarding a matter? Are you ready to listen?
- d. Then David writes that his vitality was drained away as it does in the scorching heat of a desert land
 - i. When your energy is drained, you focus your remaining energy only on that which is most important

- ii. God was taking away David's energy to do anything else but turn to the Lord
 - 1. Some people are so persistent in their sin and unbelief that it is not until they are on their sickbed, or even their deathbed, that they turn to the Lord, when their energy for sinning has dissipated
 - e. In essence, David was in a downward spiral because of his sin and his unwillingness to deal with it
- V. **Confession is the Way from Wretchedness to Blessedness**
 - a. When God has put His finger upon your sin, and His hand is heavy upon you, and you are in a wretched state, there is only one way to blessedness
 - b. Verse 5 reveals the turning point for David, as it is for us
 - c. "I acknowledged my sin to Thee"
 - i. No more running from the Lord, no more denials that anything is wrong
 - ii. There is only a truthful acknowledgement of our sin to the Lord, that it is contrary to God, rebellious against Him, destructive to us and those around us
 - iii. There is an acknowledgement that we are to blame, and we deserve the punishment
 - d. David states that he did not hide his iniquity
 - i. In confession there can be no hiding, no half-truths, no trying to save face, no blame-shifting, and no dissimulation
 - ii. The flesh is crucified and we are laid bare
 - e. And so what is the Lord's response to such deep and truthful confession?
 - i. At the end of verse 5 we read those joyful words, "And Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin."
 - ii. We read of this way to blessedness in 1 John 1:8-9
 - 1. "If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - iii. With confession, we are brought again into right relationship with God. We are brought into a state of blessedness

1. The heaviness is gone, our vitality returns, there is a brightness to us that had been missing

VI. **The Lesson Learned**

- a. Having learned such a tremendous lesson, David then testifies and praises God in verses 6 and 7
- b. First he makes clear that everyone who is godly should pray to God and not delay or hold back
 - i. But didn't he pray when he was ungodly, when he was mired in sin?
 - ii. The answer comes when we consider the phrase he appends
- c. He says pray to God "in a time when Thou mayest be found"
 - i. Isn't God omnipresent? Isn't He invisible? When can God be found or not found?
 - ii. Hosea was a prophet to Israel and Judah at a time when the people were growing worse
 1. In Hosea 5:6, 7a, 15 we hear the Lord's words through the prophet, "They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the Lord, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them. They have dealt treacherously against the Lord. I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me."
 2. They were not finding the Lord because they had not acknowledged their guilt, and thus were not truly seeking the Lord, but only any selfish benefit they might get from Him
 - iii. Whether or not you find the Lord depends much on how you search for Him
 1. Deuteronomy 4:29 reads, "But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul."
 2. A half-hearted search, or a self-seeking search will be fruitless for He will not reveal Himself
 3. When you seek the Lord, seek Him with all your heart and you will find Him
 - iv. And then Isaiah speaks well to finding the Lord in Isaiah 55:6-8

1. "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; and let him return to the Lord, and He will have compassion on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."
 2. So it is in repentance that the Lord draws near and may be found
- d. David realizes as well that as troubles abound, God is the One who hides us from trouble as we seek Him, which is a result of blessedness
- i. The prophet Zephaniah speaks of this hiding from the ultimate trouble
 1. Zephaniah 2:3 reads, "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the earth who have carried out His ordinances; seek righteousness, seek humility. Perhaps you will be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger."
 2. What it means to be hidden in the day of the Lord's anger is given in Colossians 3:3-4, "For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory."
 - ii. So God is our hiding place, both temporally and ultimately
 1. And one day, when trouble is past, we will be revealed for who we are in Christ
 2. Truly that will be a day of blessedness
- e. At the end of verse 7 David states "Thou dost surround me with songs (or shouts) of deliverance"
- i. As David has been delivered from his sin and delivered from trouble, delivered to blessedness, he is filled with songs of that deliverance
 - ii. And as he is in the great congregation, he is surrounded by others who are singing and shouting of their deliverances

VII. **Instruction and Exhortation**

- a. Having experienced the raw goodness of God over against the lies and false promises of sin, and learning the way from wretchedness to blessedness, David now turns to instructing and exhorting others that we might experience the same

- b. In verse 8 we read, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.”
 - i. This could be God speaking through David, or David himself speaking, having learned the lesson
 - 1. Whether directly or indirectly, the lessons come from God, and we can learn the way we should go, so we should take heed
 - ii. Now this bit about his eye upon him, I think means that the instruction and counsel is in a close tutorial or mentor relationship, rather than loose advice thrown out there for anyone to pick up who is so inclined
- c. First and foremost, David instructs us to not be stubborn like a horse or mule
 - i. Those animals need a bit and bridle to keep them going in the direction they should go, or they will follow their own way, not that of their master
 - ii. This picture gives insight as to how the Law keeps people in check who would otherwise act in lawless ways
 - 1. The Law does not change the heart any more than the bit changes the heart
 - 2. But the Law keeps people from doing the wicked they might otherwise do without it
 - iii. Now I will say when the horse has fully submitted to its master, he follows the way his master intends with no more than very subtle indications needed
 - 1. Be like that horse and respond to the subtle indications of the Spirit of God
 - iv. Stubbornness in a person will keep him from admitting, confessing, and forsaking his sin, and so will keep him from the place of blessedness
- d. David then instructs us in verse 10 telling us, “Many are the sorrows of the wicked; but he who trusts in the Lord, lovingkindness shall surround him.”
 - i. The wicked have no greater hope or joy than the pleasures of this world, so every time they suffer, it is catastrophic
 - ii. Their sorrows are not mitigated, and they know no purpose for them

- iii. When death comes to their loved ones, as it inevitably will, they have no hope or comfort
 - e. But the one who trusts in the Lord is surrounded by lovingkindness
 - i. First, the lovingkindness of the Lord, as sung in Psalm 136 and elsewhere, surrounds that one
 - ii. Next, the lovingkindness of God's people, where they are found, surrounds those who trust in Him
 - 1. Thus it is important for God's people to gather together, to visit one another, to check on one another
 - f. Finally, David exhorts us to gladness and rejoicing in the Lord
 - i. Our gladness must be grounded in the Lord
 - 1. He has saved us and reserved an inheritance for us that cannot be lost, regardless of what happens to us on this earth
 - 2. With such promise of eternal blessedness how can we not be glad?
 - 3. Jim Elliot, a missionary who was martyred in the middle of the 20th century, wrote in his journal, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." (very similarly also stated by Philip Henry, father of Matthew Henry in the 1600's)
 - ii. Then the rejoicing is rightfully from you righteous ones
 - 1. It is the righteous who will attain the ultimate state of blessedness, and realizing such should be a source of great rejoicing
 - 2. There are other, smaller matters over which we rejoice, but David is pointing us much higher
 - a. Jesus does the same in Luke 10:20 where he speaks to the seventy returning from a mission trip rejoicing that the demons are subject to them
 - b. He tells them, "Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are recorded in heaven"
 - c. By far the most compelling reason for the greatest rejoicing is that our names are recorded in heaven
 - iii. David then states that the upright in heart should shout for joy

1. Our hearts are only upright after we have confessed our sin to God and turned to Him in truth
2. Again, it is those who have the greatest reason to shout for joy

VIII. **Conclusion**

- a. We don't know how long David languished in a state of wretchedness
- b. But David moved from wretchedness to blessedness in the simple act of acknowledging and confessing his sin to God truly and humbly
- c. Do you want to be blessed? Truly blessed? Deeply blessed? Eternally blessed?
- d. Acknowledge your sin to God and seek Him with your whole heart, for it is in Him that you will find ultimate blessedness, far beyond any other you can even imagine
- e. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."