

The Art of Happiness

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Date: 18 January 2009

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[0 : 00] giving you a gift God is putting into your hands a key or the very key to happiness. God is giving it to you today and putting it in your hands through the word of this psalm, psalm number 32. It's God's key to happiness even in troubled times and there's enough trouble going around for everyone and in the newspapers and such media outlets they're very gloomy right now but actually God himself speaks today a word showing us the path to happiness and so I'm actually very glad and very happy that you're here and I'm very glad and happy to be sharing this message with you today, this psalm of how to be blessed by God, how to be happy before God. This is God's way to us and the psalm is a psalm of that great King David and this is quite telling I think that King David was one of the great men of the Bible but also one of the great failures of the Bible that he was a man after God's own heart but also an adulterer and a murderer and at times selfish and lazy and self-serving.

So how can this man be happy before God? He's a sinner. Well he's going to share with us how he was happy before God and let me ask you at the outset when have you ever seen a political leader or someone in public office freely and openly tell the world how bad they are. It doesn't happen does it?

This is a sign that this way is not the world's way to happiness. King David's sharing of his sin and of his need for forgiveness is God's gospel way to happiness. It sort of turns the world's values upside down doesn't it because the world says hide your failures put up a show and impress people especially if you're a leader and yet King David actually does the opposite of that and that's how we know what we're dealing with here is the truth. It's actually God's way it's not the way of Oprah or the way of the world for happiness. Here's what he says, Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit. Happy is the man whose transgression is lifted, whose sin is forgiven. It's a beautiful image of not something that's sort of a maybe but it's a definite thing that an individual person can have to know the blessing of God, the grace of God in the forgiveness of your sin. Before every person, every person he has carried in with them a little bit like one of those brides in those, have you seen those Greek weddings where the bride, it's kind of a good tradition I guess, they pin cash on the bride and she's like a walking bank by the end of the reception. Every one of us has pinned to us our sin. Everyone has pinned to us every disobedient act we've done, everything we've done against God or to forget God, everything we've done to use or hurt or abuse others. Every law of God we've broken or failed to, every good thing we've failed to do is stuck on you, pinned to you, covered. You are covered head to toe. It's labelled on you,

God sees it, greedy, selfish, liar, user, abuser. And every one of us, it's a different set of sins for every person but we are all covered in them head to toe. Do you know what's tagged on you? Do you know what God sees when he looks at you? What is pinned on you? What's pinned all over your body, all over your back? God alone I think really knows. I think we often have no idea. God's word can show it to us and it's worth doing that, going to that place so that you can follow God's recipe for happiness and that is this. Happiness is to have those tags removed, to have those things that are pinned on you, against you, to have them lifted off, to have the sin covered, to have it wiped clean.

Then you can be happy before God. It's January and we're doing a little bit of spring cleaning. It feels like an impossible task and I'm not a very kind of clean kind of guy but I know the feeling of when you really spend a couple of hours and knuckle down and do some housework, it feels good to have things clean, doesn't it? It feels good to have a bench that was covered in just junk, completely clear.

[5 : 20] I like clear benches. I like, you know, in our house, and I'm part of the problem, every horizontal space contains a pile of junk and it just feels great to get that clear. I mean even if you just toss everything in the trash, that feels good, even though there's probably some bill there that needs to be paid. That's a good feeling, isn't it? And that's a very shallow analogy really but it helps I think. It's a good feeling when you work in the garden and you clean up, mow the lawn and weed all the gardens and prune what needs to be pruned and pick up all that kind of hard rubbish that's piling in the corner and all that green, all those branches, those big trees, get rid of everything and then exhausted at the end of the day. You look back on a clean, clear, beautiful kind of as it should be garden. That is a happy feeling, isn't it? Well that in a small way, a very, very small way is what it is like to know that your tags are lifted, your tags of sin have been removed by God and your sin is forgiven. Because where the analogy falls down is quite obvious. Do you see where that analogy of the clean house or the clean garden falls down? We clean our own houses and gardens but we cannot clean ourselves. We can't remove the pins that have described our past sin. They are sins against God and only God can forgive them. Only God can remove them. We cannot do it ourselves. So come with me on

David's journey about how that happened for him and it's God's word so it's promised to us as well. He says in verse 3, When I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night, your hand, as God's hand, was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

What happens in an individual's life to a person when they hide their sin, when they ignore the fact that they've sinned, when they bottle it up or when they avoid thinking about their failures before God?

What happens to a person like that? Well, what happens is God's hand is heavy on you and you'll feel that in terms of guilt but God's hand will be heavy on you. You'll be burdened. David says, I was groaning all day long. It was such a burden for me to think. And he had big sins. I mean, he had adultery. He had murder. I mean, among other things, he was groaning all day long. His spirit was dried up. That's what happens to us. That's what happens to the Christian who sort of falls out of step with God and has stopped caring about confessing their sin.

You lack spiritual vigour. Praying becomes impossible. Reading the Bible becomes impossible. Even enjoying other blessings from God become impossible because every time you enjoy something, you think, I don't deserve this. I've got these beautiful kids. Give me joy. I don't deserve that. I'm a sinner. And so even the good gifts become a reminder that you've got pinned to you your sins. I think everyone knows, even the unbeliever knows instinctively that God has a day coming called the day of judgment. We know that from the word of God but it's instinctive in us that we know we're going to give an account to the maker who made us, who made us to live for him.

[8 : 59] We know we're going to have to stand before him and give an account, the day of judgment. This is what the Apostle Paul taught to some philosophers in Athens in the first century.

He said to them, God has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed. And of this man he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.

You know who the man is, don't you? It's our Lord Jesus Christ. But God has fixed a day. God has a calendar and he has a day set in mind. Nobody knows what that day is.

But every one of you will stand before God on that day. And on that day it will be clear what is pinned to you. It will be crystal clear what God sees, you will know and everyone will see.

And so friends, what are we going to do? We face that day and if we don't survive that day, we face what Jesus described as eternal punishment, unspeakable torment.

[10:09] You know, it's serious, isn't it? It's serious. I don't think you can be a happy human being. You could have every toy in the world. You cannot be a happy human being when your sins aren't forgiven.

It just can't be done. You cannot be a happy human being if God owes you judgment. You will groan. God's hand will be heavy on you. But then David did something quite simple really, but quite profound.

He said to God, Verse 5, That's the key point in this psalm.

It's the turning point. David acknowledged what he knew to be true in his heart about his faults, about his rebellion, about his transgression.

He decided to not hide it anymore. And what he confesses to God, he's open about to everyone else. He did not deny that he was pinned head to toe with things he'd done wrong.

[11:23] But then God, he says, You forgave the guilt of my sin. God forgave him. Not because God owed it to him, but for this reason, for the sake of Jesus Christ.

God forgave him for Christ's sake. Because King David knew, even in the Old Testament, that God has provided a provision for forgiveness.

David knew it through the prophetic structures of the Old Testament temple and sacrifices that were made for sin. We know it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

There is a means by which God promises to forgive, not because we deserve it, but because Christ has died as a sacrifice for that sin. And so God freely forgives.

And that is David's turning point. That is his key to happiness. So then David dishes out to us a challenge. In verse 6, Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you.

[12:27] At a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. Let all who are faithful, that is you and me, friends, we are called to faithfulness to God, offer prayer to him.

This kind of prayer, prayers of confession, prayers asking for mercy in Jesus' name. Now, I can easily make you feel guilty by just asking you, how is your prayer life going?

We all feel like we don't pray enough. And that's because none of us pray enough and we ought to all pray more. When you do pray, think about this. Do you ask for forgiveness every time you pray?

It's a good thing to pray for. When you ask God to forgive you when you pray on your own, do you confess sin to him? And if you do confess sin, do you confess specific sin?

Let all who are faithful offer prayer to you. Friends, how is your prayer life going? Let me encourage you to begin your prayer life by asking for forgiveness in Jesus' name.

[13:31] That's a great start. See, we think foolishly that prayer is for sort of saints or sort of holier than our Christians who haven't done anything wrong. Actually, prayers, biblical prayers for people like us who have fallen short and need to ask for forgiveness.

And then we can start thanking God and then we can start adoring God and then we can start asking him for help with things we need. Ultimately, David says to God in verse 7, God, you are a hiding place for me.

You preserve me from trouble. You surround me with glad cries of deliverance. David, see, here's sort of the secret of the gospel, which you cannot get just with mere logic, that we are rescued from God's judgment by hiding in God, by making God our hiding place, by coming to God in the name of Jesus, by hiding in the Son of God, who is part of who God is.

We actually hide from God's own judgment on us. The death of Jesus Christ, the death of God incarnate, is the sacrifice that makes us able to be forgiven in the gospel.

And so, do you see kind of the, there's no logic in this, because we ought to run from God. And people do run from God. We ought to run from God's judgment. But actually, the way to survive the judgment of God is to run straight to Him, to run straight into it, and in Jesus' name, through it, and to hide in God.

[15:11] Many people feel guilt, and they will not pray. They will not open the Bible. Maybe they'll stop coming to church because they feel too guilty, and church somehow reminds them of their sin.

But do you see how actually, you shouldn't run from God when you feel that guilt. You have to run to God in the gospel, and hide in God in the name of Jesus.

That's the only hiding place from the judgment of God which we deserve. And that's the only true source of happiness. David then encourages us and says, I will instruct you, and teach you the way you should go.

I will counsel you, counsel you with my eye upon you. King David says to the readers in Israel, he says, walk my walk. Come with me. Let me be your teacher.

There's a sense here which the forgiveness experience is not meant to be a one-off thing, but it's meant to be an ongoing walk with God where continually confessing our sin, being forgiven, and learning to walk with Him in new ways, learning to think in new ways, learning to behave and talk in new ways, in the power of God's Spirit, guided by His Word.

[16:26] It may be that you've had a time in your life where God's forgiveness just smashed you over the head, and you felt such joy. And those times are great to have, but you need to keep going in that.

You need to keep walking with God in that, and you'll keep sinning, and you need to keep asking forgiveness. Don't be like, David says, don't be like a mule. Don't be like a horse without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

Don't be blind to the fact that you need forgiveness. Don't be stubborn. You can even be a sort of stubborn Christian, and you've stopped enjoying forgiveness, and you've stopped confessing sin, and you've just become a really kind of grumpy Christian, blind, stubborn, like a mule, prone, I think, maybe, and God basically has to kind of whip you to kind of keep you in line, and you yourself are kind of angry, and you don't know why.

You've become blind to the fact that you need forgiveness, that that is your key to happiness. Many Christians who have once had a joy of forgiveness have lost their first love.

They've lost the joy of coming before the throne of grace and receiving mercy. They're stubborn Christians without gladness.

[17:59] Ask yourself, am I still grateful for the cross of Christ? Do I still feel grateful for that? Where is my sense of relief and joy that I'm a forgiven sinner?

Ask yourself, why aren't I more thankful for the gospel of forgiveness? Well, the psalm concludes and ends with a sort of a summary, and it ends back at the beginning with the call to be happy.

It ends in this way, many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. See the contrast? You see, there's two ways to go.

Many are the torments of the wicked, both in this life and definitely in the life to come. But steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord. And so here's God's word to you today, God's command to the Christian today, be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous.

God commands your gladness. God commands your joy, your rejoicing. And shout for joy, or you're upright in heart. You have no command to mumble it out, but you've got a command to shout for joy at the forgiveness God has given you through his Son in the gospel.

[19 : 19] Isn't God a great God for commanding our happiness, for commanding our joy in him through the forgiveness of our sin? Well, this psalm is a psalm of blessing.

All the psalms actually, the whole Psalter is a book of blessing. It begins with a call, blessed is the man who walks in the way of the Lord. The whole Bible I think is actually a book of blessing.

The art of happiness is to know this blessing of God. The keys to happiness is to have peace with God, reconciliation with your heavenly Father.

True happiness is in not being fearful about your eternal destiny, not being confident about whether you're forgiven or not. True happiness is knowing that in Christ you have every spiritual blessing.

And do you see, friends, how this is not quite logical. The world will not get this without God's help. But the part of this blessing, to this happiness, is to actually acknowledge that you stink, is to acknowledge your sin.

[20 : 29] You see, that's not logical, is it? That's not Oprah. And there are lots of ways we try and get happiness apart from the forgiveness in the gospel.

Some people try and deal with their guilt by giving more money to World Vision. To sort of console themselves. Some people like to compare themselves against the 90% of people in the room and think, well, I rank higher than them, therefore I'll make the cut.

Other people go for New Year's resolutions. Well, they don't work, do they? You've probably already broken yours, January 18. You can't, and you can't just, this is a big one actually, you can't assume God will forgive you just because that's his job or something.

Because he's generally benevolent. The Bible doesn't picture him like that. He's a God of mercy and a God of judgment. And he's a God of mercy to those who will run to him in the name of Jesus Christ.

So friends, let me challenge you to do that. To make this psalm the embodiment of your life. To make it your daily bread. Your regular habit, both individually and us as a church, the confession of our sin and the claiming of forgiveness.

[21 : 43] And I couldn't put it bolder, but this is the key issue facing humanity in the coming year. This is the key global issue, forgiveness of sin, that every human has to deal with because every human is hiding from God.

Every human has pinned to them their sins. No one is exempt from this. This is a big global issue. This is a bigger issue than climate change. As one person I've heard say, more important than the increasing heat of the sun is the eternal tormenting heat of the wrath of God's sun.

See how that's so much more important. To receive the blessing of forgiveness, you have to acknowledge your need of it before God.

You have to stop hiding your iniquity. You have to acknowledge that you stink. But friends, this is the path to happiness before God. Because when you come to the mercy seat of God in Jesus' name, there is a rich store of grace awaiting you.

God's grace is like an ever-flowing fountain of mercy in which we can be happy knowing that we have made, that we are at peace with God and we can then walk with God.

[23:08] Remember the man who said, I came to seek and save the lost. Remember the man who said, I have the authority to forgive sin. I have the authority to forgive sin.

Our Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, throw away, just completely throw away the mud pie recipes of worldly happiness. They do not work and instead throwing away those mud pie recipes come to the banquet table of forgiveness that God has in store for those who will ask him in the name of his son.

Let's approach God now and let's do that right now. We're going to confess our sins later in the service but let's do it in part now. Let's pray. Our dear Lord God, we thank you for showing us the way that we would not have figured out or would not have guessed of confession of our sin and of your mercy and grace.

Lord God, we are sorry that we have fallen short of your standards, that we have failed to love you as we should and love each other. There is much good that you've put before us to do that we haven't done.

Lord God, there are many bad things, many guilts that each of us carry that feel unforgivable but we ask you in the name of Jesus Christ through his precious blood to forgive our sin.

[24:34] Lord God, make us thankful, make us ever grateful, make us ever glad and joyful that you have done this and that you go with us before us and please Lord God, be our joy and help us to respond to your command to be glad in you.

Amen. Amen.