

The Exhilaration of Forgiveness

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[0 : 00] We thank you that you give us the forgiveness of sins, and we pray that as we hear about your gift to us, that you will change our hearts and our minds, and that you will grant us a grace-filled life.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Please be seated. We're looking at Psalm 32. It's on page 488. And as you're turning there, I just want to also draw your attention to a sermon card that has the next sermon series that's going to be starting next week on the Beatitudes, on the blessings that God gives to us.

And just invite you to read Matthew 5 in the week to come, and to pray and think about it as well, that God will speak to you through it. And that actually helps your listening to the sermon as well, and that's always good for the preacher.

So, we're finishing a sermon series today on forgiveness, on learning how to forgive. Forgiveness is something, I think, as you've been listening to the sermons, you probably have been considering people that may be very difficult to forgive.

[1 : 15] And you might be realizing that this is a lot of work. And it's real stuff. It's about facing the awfulness of sin and killing our resentment and hatred and desire for revenge that so easily comes up within us.

That doesn't mean that you will necessarily trust the person that you are forgiving. It may not mean either that... It means that you will continue to work for justice as well, if that's involved.

But what it does mean is that you will forgive that person in your heart. Forgive the person from the depth of who you are. And that's hard to do.

Even though we know it's right. It's difficult in real life to do it. And the key to it all is that we work with God in it. That it is by His grace that we do it by remembering what God has done for us in Jesus Christ by forgiving you and giving you His Holy Spirit to strengthen you.

And I believe that as we think about God's grace to us, that the Holy Spirit will change your heart and your mind by bringing to you the reality of God's forgiveness.

[2 : 30] And I really think that Psalm 32 does that for us. It brings home to our hearts God's forgiveness. It's a psalm that tells us from the point of view of somebody, David, who is in great need of God's forgiveness.

And knowing and receiving God's forgiveness is not a one-time thing for us either. That every day we need to know that God forgives us. Every day we consciously need to receive God's grace. And that's why we pray, forgive us our debts in the Lord's Prayer. You will be blessed and strengthened to forgive when you do this. And so Psalm 32 is a big help to us because it talks about the powerful effect that God's forgiveness has on a person.

It starts by actually saying what we heard the choir sing in the first two verses. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity. And you need to understand that that word blessed is an exuberant word.

[3 : 39] It's something that actually means happy. You know, blessed is often sort of a placid word for us. But here is a joyful expression of what happens to somebody through God's grace.

Happy is the person whose sins are forgiven. And you know, that concept of happiness is very important in our society today.

Scientists and psychologists and philosophers actually study happiness, where it comes from, to be able to try to explain and to teach about how you can receive happiness.

But it's very interesting. As I looked at some of these studies, I found that they're all inconclusive.

The experts all say a variety of things, and they don't seem to really know where happiness comes

from.

There was one senior visiting fellow at the Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, and he played it safe. He said, So in other words, if everything's going great for you, you're going to be happy.

[4 : 50] He got paid for that study, apparently. And another one, a consultant psychologist at the London Medical Center told the BBC News, We can all be happy in a heartbeat if we make the decision to be so.

So there's the answer to happiness. Another, I think, example of inconclusive where happiness comes from is, if any of you saw the game last night, and I saw about 10 minutes of it, I happened to see the part where Calgary caught up to Vancouver.

And I saw these, you know, 20,000 red-shirted Calgary fans in a delirium, shouting at the top of their voices, very, very happy. And I need to admit that I didn't stay up late enough to see the Calgary, I mean, the Canucks goal at the end of the game, to see them win.

But I can just imagine that that place was pretty silent. And, you know, that's only about an hour or so later. It shows that happiness is so variable and temporary, and we can't manufacture it.

The more cynical said about these happiness studies that they're all a waste of time. He said, It's no use asking people how happy they are, because most people are simply wrong.

[6 : 10] He said they are simply deluded about what constitutes real happiness. And he may have something there. This must have been a cat lover who said in his study that happiness was being owned by a cat.

Probably that was the biggest word of wisdom in all these studies. You know, they may be a waste of money, but these studies do deal with an issue that's very important to us. And that is, What does bring lasting happiness?

Where is the answer to that? Does it come from our family? Does it come from friendships? Does it come from a satisfying occupation that we have? Does it come from good health?

You know, all these baseline things. Well, the Bible doesn't talk about the source of happiness being in those things. Always. Always. It talks about our happiness having its source in God.

And C.S. Lewis spoke on this very helpfully. He said, You know, we as humans are half-hearted creatures. We fool about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered to us.

[7 : 18] We're like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea.

And that's something that God challenges us with in this psalm. Because it's about the offer of infinite joy in forgiveness.

Saying that in that work that God does that takes away everything that separates from God and coming into the presence of God through Jesus, we actually can know God.

We can know the one who gives us happiness. And true happiness, according to David, is being in this healed relationship with God. Which was the point of Jesus rising from the dead.

Which we were celebrating last week. And that's why David is happy. The full extent of sin has been lifted away. If you look back at verses 1 and 2, he talks about sin in three different ways.

[8 : 23] He talks about transgression. He talks about sin. And he talks about iniquity. And those words fill out what sin is about. You know, transgression is an act of rebellion against God.

Sin is the offense of turning off from the true path. And iniquity is criminal behavior of not respecting the divine will. And with all this, David says, I've been forgiven.

In other words, the burden has been lifted up. That sin is covered. In other words, it's not accounted against him. Like in an accounting ledger. And he says, it's not held against me.

It's not imputed. The charges are dropped. And that's important for us to see how he talks about the fullness of sin. Because in Jesus, we have the forgiveness of sins completely and totally.

And to the depth of our being. To the depth of sin. And it's probably important for us to know that there is an ongoing nature to this forgiveness.

[9 : 30] And to our own sin. There's two types of forgiveness in the Bible. There's a judicial forgiveness that deals with sin's penalty. It has to do with us going from darkness into light.

And that's what happens when we come into faith in Christ. But there's another kind of forgiveness called parental forgiveness. And that deals with sin's consequence.

It deals with the things that continue to distort our relationship with God, our Heavenly Father. That affect that relationship. And so, in our daily walk with Christ, we aren't seeking pardon from an

angry judge.

Because Jesus has already brought us to God by pardoning us. However, we are meant on an ongoing basis to seek mercy from a grieved father.

We're meant to come to Jesus with everything that clouds our relationship with our Heavenly Father. And David gives testimony about how that happens in his own life.

[10:34] And you know, it brings him so much joy that he actually gives a testimony. He says, this is what has happened to me. And he starts out in verse 4. He gets personal here. And he says that sin deeply affected him in the first part of his testimony.

Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me. My strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. And I wonder if you experience that in your own life.

You know, maybe you're experiencing that this morning. That there is a heaviness of sin. Such as those that we might be refusing to forgive. And there certainly is a psychological and emotional and physical hardship that comes when we hang on to sin.

In other people and in ourselves. David is very honest. He's very earthy here. He knows what that is like in his own life. And he shares that with us.

But he goes from that to the beginning of verse 5. And the second thing that happens for him is he says, I acknowledged my sin to you. I did not hide my iniquity.

[11:42] I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord. Well, that's the step of confession. That's what we call it today. It's the step of faith.

It's what you say to God when you repent. And it's actually a risky thing to do. It's something that's described as not hiding from your sin.

But being very vulnerable to God. It's about having a spirit with no deceit. As verse 2 says. And I wonder if you remember Adam.

What was the first thing he did after he sinned? Well, he hid. He tried to hide from God. And that's human nature. We've been doing the same ever since.

There are things that we are ashamed of. That we don't want anybody to know. And so we have relationships. That we want to keep from God. I don't want to have God interfere with my anger.

[12:41] And my resentment. I'm holding on to them. And there's things that we want to keep to ourselves. And hide. Because it's often very hard to look at them. And to allow God's light to actually shine on them.

Well, for David. Confession is a gift. Because it acknowledges sin. It says, Here is my sin, Lord. I need your forgiveness.

I will not hide. And I believe that this aspect of forgiveness is incredibly important for us. There's no way to forgive somebody who has deeply hurt us if you have not acknowledged your own sin before God.

You can't truly forgive until you know the parental forgiveness of God. Because we are by nature forgetful people.

That's why the Bible was written for us. To remember who God is. We quickly forget the mountain of debt that God has forgiven us. And we hold on to the debt that other people owe us.

[13:47] But you see, what happens in the confession of sin is we realize, we understand what our debt is. We see the hurt and wrong that we owe in our relationships with others and with God.

And that's why it's so healthy for us to confess daily. You know, one of the things that I think is wonderful about the Anglican tradition is that every time that we gather together in church, we confess our sins in a general confession.

And that written prayer reminds us that together we must bring to light the things in our life that God needs to take away and forgive.

It is really about all of us together coming out of the place of spiritual hiding. So that we can know the reality of God's grace. And I want you to look at God's grace.

Because the third part of David's testimony, after feeling the weight of sin, and after confessing to God, he testifies the high point of this psalm.

[14:53] He testifies about God's grace. In these few words he says, Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin. Thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.

And those words are words that actually describe the source of his happiness and his joy. It's the reason why he says blessed so many times.

The weight of sin is suddenly gone and that's why he is exuberant. He experiences the goodness of God. And he goes from being feeling wasted away physically and spiritually and emotionally to having his guilt lifted.

There's a strong sense here of being made whole. And that's why James tells us that to confess our sins to one another.

You know, to listen as we are confessing together in church and pray for each other that you may be healed. And one of the earliest sermons that the Christian church gave was through Peter.

[15:59] And he said, Repent and turn to the Lord that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord. Times of refreshing.

Times of healing and joy. And you know, David is calling us to that in this psalm. He wants people to learn from his experience.

In fact, he wants them to pray to God. That's why he calls them, let everyone offer prayer to thee in verse 6. He wants them to share that happiness and joy.

The way he describes it is wonderful. In verse 7, he says, Instead of trying to hide from God, through his confession and forgiveness, God is now the hiding place.

It's the place where David actually seeks out. And he finds that God preserves him from trouble.

And he guards over him. And he talks about God encompassing him.

[16:57] You, thou dost encompass me with deliverance. Everywhere he turns, he sees the grace of God taking care of him. And it's not just taking care of him.

God doesn't just forgive and send David on his merry way. He actually promises to teach him. He actually calls him to action. God's eye is upon him.

And so God says, and it's a big change here that happens in the psalm in verse 8. Because suddenly, God speaks. And this is the great blessing of forgiveness, is that you are able to hear God's word.

You turn to him. And you hear God speak. I will instruct you and teach you the way that you should go. How you should act. I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

God is watching him. With care, like a parent watches a child. And what God says to him is that he's not to be like a horse or a mule in verse 9 who's forced to go one direction or another.

[18:00] Instead, he is to be one that walks in the ways of God. To actually take his path and to follow in his ways. And you know, according to God, according to Jesus, that path, the thing that he instructs you into, the ways that he has, is very simply, in the Lord's Prayer, forgive us our debtors in the same way that we forgive.

There's the action. There's the response to the forgiveness that God teaches us. It is to pass that grace on to those who are around us.

And the big help in that, and for David, in that work, that action, is the joy of the Lord. That's our big help. Look at verse 10.

David says here, many are the pangs of the wicked. Here's the contrast. And he knew that very well. He shared that with us. What it's like to not be forgiven and to not forgive. But, he said, steadfast love surrounds him who trusts in the Lord.

And that's why he ends in this incredible expression of gladness. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous. And shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

[19:19] You see, David is summarizing everything here. He is saying, when you trust God enough to confess your sins and truly know his forgiveness, steadfast love surrounds you.

And you know happiness. You know true joy. And that joy will be your strength so that you might forgive others. And that's what we are called to do.

You know, in a sense, we're like the woman that Jesus met and received the anointing of her feet from oil. And she was weeping over him.

And she was known as a very sinful person in the community. And Jesus was chastised for receiving that from her. But his answer was, to his critics, Look, let's say a person owed one day's wages and it was forgiven him.

And another owed 500 days wages and it was forgiven him. And which person will love more? And of course, the answer is, the one who was forgiven more.

[20:22] Jesus said, you're right. He said, this woman knows forgiveness. She has been forgiven much. And that's why she loves much. But, he said, the one who has been forgiven little, loves little.

Well, what David is calling us to do is to understand that we have been forgiven much. And to take joy as we confess and receive his forgiveness in that grace that's given to us. And he calls us to go forward to do his work of forgiveness. Knowing this wonder that Jesus has given us. This deep, eternal way of forgiveness that's deeper than anything David knew. Know that with all your heart and mind. And go forward into his ways. The ways of forgiving. God, give us grace to do this. In Jesus' name. Amen.