

Psalm 32

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[0 : 0 0] start the service. It's really good to see everyone here today. I can just thank Paul also for leading us through the first part of the service, and thanks to all who have taken part in the service and have made everything go so smoothly this morning. Thanks to Karen for leading us in prayer, and thanks to the musicians and singers. I've always wanted to say that. Let's just begin with a moment of prayer, and I'll read our scripture text for today. Let's pray together. Our Father, we just thank you again for this time when we can gather together this morning to worship you. We are glad to be in your house today, and we can truly say, just in the words of the psalmist, I was glad when they said unto me, let us go to the house of the Lord. Lord, it's our joy to be here this morning, our joy to be able to praise and to worship you. We thank you, Lord, for giving us health and strength to come along to the service today. We just want to commit to you now our time as we read a passage of scripture and think upon it. We pray for the help of the Holy Spirit, and ask, Lord, that you would just lead and guide us this morning. You know all of our hearts, Lord, and all of our needs, and we just pray to you for help. Reminded, Lord, of that boy who came to the

Lord Jesus with five loaves and two fishes, and we just recall, Lord, how that all ate and were satisfied. We pray, Lord, that this morning as we look into your word that none would go away empty or feeling that they haven't got anything out of the sermon today. But, Lord, we just ask that you will bless each one and help us to truly rightly understand your word and put it into practice.

We pray all these things in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. Our Bible reading today is Psalm 32. Psalm 32.

I'll read the whole Psalm. If you're maybe not so familiar with the Bible, the book of Psalms is roughly right in the middle of the Bible, and we're looking at Psalm 32 this morning. Or you may prefer just to listen as God's word is read. The heading of the Psalm is actually part of the Psalm text, so I'll read that as well.

It's a mascal of David. Mascal is just really a psalm of instruction, if you like. It's a teaching psalm, and it's written by David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

[3 : 0 7] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in 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. Selah. 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. Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you in 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.

Selah. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Do not be like the horse or mule without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.

[4 : 20] 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.

Amen. The Lord will bless the reading of his word. So I divided the psalm up into five sections. I don't know if it's possible to see the last slide filled just with all the five points.

So that's where we're going this morning. The blessing of forgiveness, verses 1 and 2. And then David's testimony, verses 3 to 5. And there's a call to prayer in verses 6 to 8.

And then there's instruction and warning in verses 9 and 10. And concluding praise in verse 11. So that's the rough outline of the sermon today.

First of all, then a few words of introduction. Psalm 32 is without a doubt one of the great psalms of the Bible. I don't know if you have a favorite psalm at all.

[5 : 30] Maybe that's a good topic for conversation after the service. You know, what's your favorite psalm in the whole Bible? Personally, Psalm 32 is one of my favorites. Maybe Psalm 121 is also one of my favorites.

I can recall my godly mother used to quote that psalm every single day of life perfectly from memory. And even when her memory was failing somewhat, she was able to remember the words of Psalm 121.

Remember the words of that psalm. I lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. I don't know if you've ever memorized the whole psalm, but I can commend that to you.

I don't know if there's anyone that wanted to take up that challenge maybe this week that lies ahead. It's maybe not so difficult as you might think. And some psalms are very, very short, like the 117th psalm.

Some are very long. So Psalm 119, of course, is extremely long. If you can memorize that, then you'll definitely get a prize, I think. But I'll leave that challenge with you.

[6 : 41] Psalm 32 is our text for today. It's a great psalm. It's been a help and a comfort to many. It deals with some big subjects. Justification by faith is one of the big subjects of this psalm.

And then there's the subjects of sin and of forgiveness and of prayer and praise. In our modern culture, I don't think we like to really talk about the subject of sin very much.

And it's not something that really come up in a conversation. It would be so interesting, wouldn't it, just to go down to Prince's Street, maybe to the East End, or the Mound even, and just ask people what they think sin is.

What is it? I don't know what sort of response we would get if we did that. It would be so interesting, though, just to speak to people about this subject and just to understand what their conception is of sin.

Maybe some people would say that sin is a bad thing. And maybe others would say, well, it's not really of any relevance. It's just relevant to people who are interested in religion.

[7 : 55] Maybe other people would say, well, sin's not actually a bad thing. Sin is a good thing. And they would see it as something that's taking risks or, you know, a night on the town or a weekend away with your mates, a weekend of sin for them might be something that is to be desired rather than to be avoided.

But when we come to the Bible and hear to the first two verses of Psalm 32 in particular, we discover that sin is serious and not to be taken lightly. In fact, it is rebellion against God and against his word and his law.

And we find that we're all sinners by nature and by practice, and sin puts us at a distance from God. And this is a human predicament. It's a human condition. And it's the sin problem.

And one of the reasons that we meet together week by week here in church, as well as to pray and to praise the Lord, is simply to declare the good news of the gospel, that there is hope and that there is a solution to the problem of sin.

And there's a free offer of forgiveness found in the Lord Jesus Christ through faith in him. And it's through faith in him that our sins are forgiven and washed away.

[9 : 15] And by turning from our sins, turning to the Lord and putting our trust in him, we can have peace with God. Psalm 32 has a lot to say about what sin is, and we'll get into that just in a minute.

But just to mention that this psalm is grouped together by scholars, really, with another six psalms known as the penitential psalms.

I think penitential is maybe a word that's unfamiliar to many of us, but it has to do with the confession of sin. So these psalms are grouped together in that group, the penitential psalms.

And if you were to ask me what's the main teaching of this psalm, I would say it can be summed up quite perfectly in two verses. One is from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament.

Proverbs 28 and verse 13. He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

[10 : 19] And then in the New Testament, 1 John chapter 1, verses 8 and 9. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

But if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. So these two verses really, I think, sum up the main teaching of the psalm.

Psalm 32 was penned under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by King David. And the words of it flow out of his own personal experience, his own bitter experience, I would say, and his own failure and sin.

But here in this psalm, he begins with his own experience and turns it into instruction and warning for others. And this instruction and this warning is for us today.

So let's have a think about this. Remember, David was a very great man, and I'm sure if you were to have a sort of top ten list of the great characters in the Bible, then King David would certainly be in the list and near the top of the list.

[11 : 28] He was a hero, and that in the best and truest sense of the word. A man after God's own heart. A fearless shepherd who battled with lion and bear and lived to tell the tale.

But God took him from tending sheep to look after his own people, Israel. And David was a great warrior. And remember how he defeated Goliath with a sling and a stone.

Incidentally, I was just reading the other day in the book of 2 Samuel. I don't know if you ever knew that Goliath had a brother. And do anyone know the name of Goliath's brother? So it's a good question for a Bible quiz.

Goliath had a brother called Lami. And I didn't know that. So you're learning new things about God's word all the time, but learned about Goliath's brother. David was an expert musician, the sweet singer of Israel, and he also was a triumphant military leader with many successful campaigns to his name.

He was hunted down by Saul in the wilderness, but remained steadfast in his faith in God and went on to be crowned king. By all accounts, he was a great man, but he had his failures, big failures in fact, and we might say even that he really blew it.

[12 : 49] And we can read about this in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12. And if you know your Bible well, you remember that in 2 Samuel 11 and 12, we read about the time when kings go to war and David was alone walking on the rooftop of his house.

And he looked out from that vantage point and saw a woman named Bathsheba. And she was a married woman and her husband's name was Uriah the Hittite.

But despite the fact that David knew she was married, he sent his servants to bring her to him and David committed adultery with Bathsheba and she became pregnant.

And David went on, as we recall, to murder Bathsheba's husband, Uriah the Hittite, and then try to cover it all up.

And, you know, as I was preparing this sermon, I've read those chapters many times, several times, and I've been struck by the cruelty of David's actions.

[13 : 58] One thing that got me most, I think, was how when David summoned Uriah the Hittite from the battle and brought him back to Jerusalem, David actually put a letter in Uriah's hand and sent him back to the battle to give this letter to Joab.

That letter was actually Uriah's own death warrant. And you think of that, how cruel, how cruel. And remember how Uriah went back to the battle.

Well, obviously, Uriah didn't read the letter. Maybe he wasn't able to read the letter. In those days, perhaps, he might not have been able to read. But Joab put him in the fiercest bit of the battle.

And as we recall, that led to Uriah's death. And David tried to cover all of this up. But what cruelty and what failure David failed big time.

And we're sort of left asking the question, you know, David, how could you do that? We think of David's greatness and all that he achieved, all these great psalms that he wrote. The 23rd Psalm, which is so familiar to all of us.

[15 : 14] David wrote the original lyrics for that song that we sing so often. David was a great man, but he sinned. And remember, after the period of about one year, God sent Nathan the prophet to David and called him to account for his wickedness.

And David took Nathan's rebuke to heart. And Psalm 51, if you might like to just briefly look at the first few verses of that psalm.

Psalm 51 is really a record of David's confession of sin and prayer for forgiveness. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to your steadfast love.

According to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. And then, at a later date, David penned the words of this psalm, Psalm 32.

David had failed, but God forgave him all of his sins. And so, my first point is this. And we're looking at verses 1 and 2.

[16 : 26] We will spend a little time on verses 1 and 2, but my other points will be very, very brief. So do not fear. I'm not going to preach long today. I don't know about you, but when you read the first two verses of Psalm 32, personally, anyway, I sense that these are the words of a man who had much to be thankful for.

Perhaps he sat down with pen in his hand and perhaps with tears in his eyes, dripping down onto the page as he wrote and remembered his past. And yet, he was able to say personally, blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

David had blown it, and the consequences of his sins no doubt went on to haunt him for many years to come, and probably till his dying day. But he knew for a fact that his sins were all forgiven, once and for all and forever.

The beginning of verse 1 is, in fact, an exclamation. So the Bible scholars, Hebrew scholars, tell us that, and of course the Old Testament is written in Hebrew and the New Testament in Greek.

The Hebrew text here is quite emphatic, and the words really come from the heart. It says something like, oh, the blessedness, or oh, the happiness.

[17 : 50] He says literally that, oh, the happiness, transgressions forgiven, sins covered. And then, in verse 2, he uses the same word again.

Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him, and in whose spirit is no deceit. So David here was in no sense trying to just sort of done. He uses three very highly descriptive words for sin.

Why didn't he just use one word? Why didn't he just say sin three times? Well, maybe that's a feature of the Psalms in Hebrew poetry. Remember, this Psalm would originally have been sung, but it's more likely, in my opinion, that David here is putting sin under the magnifying glass for all to see, in order to magnify the name of the Lord who has forgiven him all his sins.

There are three words here for sin, and there are three words for forgiveness. I don't want to get too technical in this sermon today, but I think it's important to mention these three words for sin and three words for forgiveness.

The three words are these, transgression, sin, and iniquity. We need to look at the original to get the sense of these words, but it's not difficult, what we're looking at today, and very, very likely, if you've attended sermons before or have studied the Bible before, that you will already know what I'm about to say today.

[19 : 21] Firstly, then, the word transgression means rebellion, to rebel against God. And then secondly here, the word translated sin means to miss the mark.

It can also mean to take a wrong step or to stumble or fall. I've really enjoyed watching the Olympic Games recently and the Paralympics, and I was watching the Paralympics again yesterday.

These events are so impressive, and the amazing achievements of the athletes are so impressive. I'm really impressed with the archery competition, and on the face of it, it doesn't look too taxing.

You don't have to cycle 50 kilometers or do these amazing superhuman feats. It just involves standing still, shooting this arrow, but it's not really apparently as easy as it looks.

I need to be perfectly still. Just one deviation from the line, and your arrow's going to go away somewhere else. You're going to miss the target. You're going to miss the bullseye. Sin is missing the mark.

[20 : 28] Sin is transgression and rebellion, and sin is missing the mark. In the Bible, in the book of Judges, we read about the men of Benjamin who were left-handed and could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

The same word is used there about missing the mark. It's coming short of God's perfect standards. David was guilty of breaking all the Ten Commandments because if you've broken one, then you've broken them all.

covetousness and adultery and murder. David was guilty of breaking the thou shalt nots of the Ten Commandments. David was guilty, and we also are guilty, for we all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

Thirdly, sin is iniquity. Iniquity is deceit. It's wrongdoing and criminality. Those are the three sin words that we have here in the first two verses. But let's move on now to the three words for forgiveness.

Why three words for forgiveness? Why not just one? Surely it's to emphasize the greatness of the forgiveness. And these three words for forgiveness are linked with the three words for sin.

[21 : 43] David could surely look back with tears in his eyes on all that he had done, all of his transgressions, sins, and iniquities. But he knew that he was able to say with confidence and certainty that his sins were forgiven.

Here are the three words for forgiveness. Firstly, David says, Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven. And the word here, forgiven, means to lift up or to carry and take away.

And this can be summed up in those beautiful words of John the Baptist, who pointed to the Lord Jesus and said, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Our transgressions can only be forgiven through faith in him, through faith in the Lord Jesus.

Secondly, sin is covered. Remember in Old Testament times, there was a sacrificial system in place in which the blood of bulls and goats would be shed.

This system was ordained by God and there was a certain covering of sins of individual people and as the nation as a whole as well.

[22 : 55] On the great day of atonement, on the day of atonement, the blood of the sacrifice would be sprinkled on the mercy seat by the high priest. And that covered the sins of the people that the people had committed.

But this sacrificial system was temporary and the blood of bulls and goats could never take away sin. Only Jesus' sacrifice on the cross could pay the penalty for our sins in full.

And that once and for all and forever. The perfect sinless Lamb of God died on Calvary's cross for sinners. And now through faith in him, our sins are not counted against us.

Through faith in him, our transgressions are forgiven, our sins are covered. And thirdly, our third word for forgiveness, iniquities are not imputed to us.

That is, our iniquities are not counted against us. No wonder David was happy. No wonder he was blessed. And we too also ought to know that whether we perhaps feel happy this morning or not as we sit here in church, if we've put our trust in the Lord Jesus, our sins are forgiven.

[24 : 13] They are taken away. They are covered. Not in the sense of just being sort of brushed under the carpet so no one will see. But they're really dealt with. And our position now before God, though we are sinners, is as if we had never sinned.

Well, that's pretty special, I think. And how great to know that we are justified by faith. It's not by anything that we have done.

Not by any good works of our own because we don't have any. It's purely by God's grace through faith that we are saved. Well, I've spent a bit of time on verses one and two and we will move very quickly now through the rest of the psalm.

Point number two, David's testimony. These verses are here for us today. But in the context of David's life, they refer to a period of time when God's hand was heavy upon him.

And in the context of David's life, that was a long period of time, probably about a whole year, in fact. This was after the death of Uriah the Hittite, after David's child was born to Bathsheba, and before Nathan the prophet came to David to call him to account for what he had done.

[25 : 34] During this time, David suffered greatly as he remained silent and refused to confess his sin. C.H. Spurgeon has a great quote about this.

He says, God's hand is very helpful when it uplifts, but it is awful when it presses down. God's hand is very helpful when it uplifts, but it is awful when it presses down.

And when we look at verses three and four of the psalm, we can see what was happening here to David. God's hand was pressing him down. We all like to be lifted up.

We like to be encouraged, and the Lord does lift us up when we are cast down. And we thank and praise him for this. But this psalm shows that there may be other times in our lives when we experience God's heavy hand upon us.

Maybe you've experienced this in the past, or maybe even just now are experiencing this. And as I've been preparing this sermon, I've just been thinking a lot about this and just how that can apply to us as individuals, maybe as churches as well.

[26 : 45] Maybe churches do experience God's heavy hand upon them. As a nation, I wonder at this time, are we experiencing God's heavy hand upon us? We've departed from his word, from his ways, from his law.

I wonder if God's heavy hand is pressing us down. Verses 3 and 4 describe David's condition. His strength was sapped. His bones grew old.

His strength and vitality was dried up as he suffered and groaned at God's hand. Just to be clear, I don't believe these verses are talking about natural old age or infirmity or illness, these sorts of things that affect us all.

It's not clear here if the language is metaphorical, referring to spiritual realities, or whether his sufferings were physical. Personally, I think David's sufferings were both spiritual and physical.

And they're describing a real deep spiritual experience of the soul. Like at those times in our lives when God is really dealing with us for our good and bringing us back to himself.

[28 : 02] And if we've wandered from the Lord, perhaps we need such times as this, with God's heavy hand upon us to bring us back to him. At this point in his life, David was like the prodigal son.

He was in the far country, we might say, in the pigsty. But the Lord, in his grace and compassion, was waiting with open arms just to welcome him back to himself again. Verse 5 of this psalm describes the turning point in David's experience.

He says, I acknowledged my sin to you and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said I will confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

What a moment that was in David's life. After a whole year, perhaps of stubborn refusal to confess, he acknowledged his sin and turned to God for forgiveness.

And in an instant, he was forgiven. Notice that all three of those sin words that we looked at a moment ago in verses 1 and 2 are mentioned here again. In verse 5, there's transgression and iniquity and sin, all gone, forgiven.

[29 : 15] And surely this was the day for David to remember. And now David gives us good and godly advice. Point number 3 is a call to prayer.

Verses 6 to 8. David speaks of his own experience and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, calls those who be godly to pray and seek the Lord while he may be found.

The Hebrew here reads that we are to call on the Lord at the time of finding. It's a slightly unusual expression. But the time of finding means now.

Now is the time. Now is the day of grace. And now is the day of salvation. Isaiah said the same thing. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Call on him while he is near.

Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the Lord and he will have mercy on him and to our God for he will freely pardon. Now is the time to seek the Lord.

[30 : 17] Now is the time to pray. And then in verse 7 is a very beautiful verse and speaks of the Lord as a refuge for us. A hiding place. The one who preserves us from trouble and surrounds us with songs of deliverance.

No one experiences a trouble-free life. Just as Job reminds us in chapter 5 verse 7. Man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upwards.

And we as Christians are not promised a trouble-free life. In fact, some of us will go through in our Christian lives much sorrow, heartache, and trouble.

But the Lord is our refuge. Our help and our strength and the troubles that do come upon us will ultimately do us no harm if we're trusting in the Lord.

The Lord is a shelter from the storm. He'll not leave us to sink. Remember the disciples in that boat on the Sea of Galilee.

[31 : 16] And the boat was hit by a storm. And the disciples in their unbelief they cried out to the Lord and said, you know, don't you care? We're going to drown here. But the Lord will not forsake us.

He'll not let us drown. He'll not let us sink. With Christ in the vessel we can smile at the storm. Notice in verse 8 of the psalm there's a change of speaker.

In verses 1 to 7 we hear David's voice. And now in verses 8 and 9 the Lord is the speaker. And the Lord himself says to us, I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go.

And what a great verse this is. Who is a teacher like the Lord? Who is a teacher like him? He is the one who will show us the way to go. And his word is the word of truth.

And we have it in our hands. We have the whole counsel of God. And we don't need to go looking elsewhere for counsel. Ultimately we have everything that we need for life and godliness in God's own word.

[32 : 19] And then point number 4 there's instruction and warning. Verse 9 We're not to be like horse and mule which have no understanding. As I was reading this verse I was reminded of that story heard in the news quite well quite a while ago now probably the beginning of this year and there were some cavalry horses that went on a rampage in the city of London and did great damage to buses and taxis really dangerous for all the people that are walking around as well members of the public.

they'd gone on the rampage. What damage we would do to ourselves and to others if we stray away from the Lord.

Let's stay close to him. And if we're starting to wander and waver in our steadfast devotion to the Lord Jesus let's take the warning and come back to the Lord again.

Verse 10 says this that many sorrows shall be to the wicked but he who trusts in the Lord mercy shall surround him. In the ways of wickedness you're sure to find sorrow and grief but as you trust in the Lord you'll be sure that grace and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life and you will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

I really love Graham Scroggie's little comment on this verse. If you're ever tempted to envy the success or prosperity or fame of the wicked just remember this Graham Scroggie says the wicked have a hive of wasps around them many sorrows but we have a swarm of bees storing honey for us.

[34 : 07] You just love that quote. The wicked have a hive of wasps around them many sorrows but we have a swarm of bees storing honey for us. And the final point number five is concluding praise.

Be glad in the Lord and rejoice you righteous and shout for joy all you upright in heart. Why should we do that? What reason have we got as believers in the Lord Jesus to rejoice?

Surely we've got many reasons to rejoice but one of the best of all is this that our sins are forgiven not on the basis of any good works that we have done but only by God's grace and mercy.

Amen. And let's just sing a great hymn of praise together as we gather round the Lord's table for communion and the chorus of this hymn says who is a pardoning God like thee or who has grace so rich and free.

We'll rise to sing. Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all forevermore. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[35 : 18] Thank you.