

October 10, 2021

THE BLESSING OF CONFESSING OUR SINS

Psalm 32

*(4 of 11 in a series of selected Psalms)*

Have you ever wondered why it's so much easier to mention our health needs in a prayer meeting than our spiritual ones? Now, in bringing that up, I'm not condemning mentioning our health needs for prayer. I brought up a health issue myself a few prayer meetings ago. But it is obvious to everyone, I assume, that if you open up the floor for believers to share prayer requests, you'll likely get four to five health needs for every spiritual need. Why is it that when believers are together, it's easier to ask that we'll physically get well than to ask that we'll pray more faithfully, meditate on the Scripture more regularly, or fight against some particular sin more successfully? I suppose someone could say that it's because of embarrassment. After all, if I get cancer that's not a humiliating admission. I'm the victim, in that case, of this horrendous disease. But if I tell you that I'm not regularly praying, then that reflects on me in a way I might not welcome.

But it may also be that we just don't feel the urgency or pressing need to address our spiritual health as much as we do our physical health. It may be that disease or disability feels like a greater threat to us than sin. And this may explain why we might find ourselves being overwhelmed with joy as someone is cured from cancer while not quite having that same level of rejoicing when someone repents of some long-held sin. And if that is the case, then Psalm 32 is an antidote to that kind of thinking.

Psalm 32 is a psalm written by David to remind us of the joy and beauty that is found in forgiveness so that we might be moved to confess our sin and know that joy. David writes the psalm after having confessed his own sin, after having held onto that sin for a while, trying to ignore it. It may well be that David wrote Psalm 32 after his sin with Bathsheba, when we consider that he committed adultery, had her husband killed, and then tried to leave that sin unaddressed until confronted by the prophet Nathan. That progression obviously matches this psalm well. However, we might be a bit naïve to think that there was only once that David sinned and decided to try to hide or ignore his sin for a while before confessing. Therefore, we can't say for sure what specific incident in David's life this psalm revolves around, but it isn't terribly important. The application is clear. David wants his readers not to make the mistake he made when he went some time trying to cover up or his sin. Therefore, he urges us to confess our sin immediately and know the beauty that is found in forgiveness. And so today if you've attempted to cover or ignore sin, let's walk with David through this psalm and let him lead us to the joy that is found in confession. David begins by showing us the beauty of God's forgiveness.

**The beauty of God's forgiveness**

In verses 1-2 David writes, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit

there is no deceit.” In one sense, it’s odd that David begins the psalm this way. He’s going to go on to relate a season in his life where he attempted to ignore or hide or cover his sin and how it devastated his life until he confessed and found forgiveness. And, as I’ve noted, his aim is to tell us not to linger with unconfessed sin the way that he did during that season. That’s why I say it’s odd that he begins with the beauty of forgiveness. You’d think he would bring this up at the conclusion of his story. Instead, he comes out of the gate by talking about how blessed the person is who is forgiven. And the reason why, it seems, is because he wants to begin with enticement.

Imagine, if you will, that you’re holding on to a secret about what you’ve done that is killing you. And I likewise had once been where you are, but then I confessed and found forgiveness and cleansing and freedom from the guilt that was weighing me down. In order to convince you to confess as well, wouldn’t it make sense for me to open my conversation with you by saying, “Man, confessing and being forgiven is the most glorious of realities”? My hope would be that you’d think, “Man, I want that.” Well, that’s what David is doing here.

David tells us that the man is blessed whose sin is forgiven, covered, and not counted against him. In other words, this man knows that on the day of judgment, his sin won’t be mentioned. It’s not recorded. It’s been covered. It’s been removed as far as the east is from the west. Forgiveness is the most glorious of realities. And if you’ve ever seen your sin for what it is, you know what I’m talking about. Do doubt you’ve experienced the reality of feeling the weight of your sin, knowing that there’s no reason in yourself that you should be forgiven, confessing your sin, and then being reminded that you’re forgiven. I remember a Sunday morning specifically when the enemy’s attack was deep, I came in (having already confessed my sin) doubting the reality and certainty of my forgiveness, and instantly we began singing a song that reminded me of the glorious truth of the gospel, and it was a reminder to me that what the enemy had been telling me was too good to be true really was. I could hardly sing anymore. I was overcome with gratefulness to the Lord, overwhelmed at the reminder of his grace. Forgiveness is such a glorious truth to be reminded of, rest in, and rejoice over. And that’s what David is doing in verses 1-2.

But he does throw in one element in verse 2 that seems a bit different in light of what he’s said in the earlier portions of those opening verses. After describing the blessed man as the one who is forgiven, whose sin is covered, and whose sin is not counted against him, he adds, “in whose spirit there is no deceit” (v. 2). In other words, he’s setting us up to focus on the blessing of confessing our sins instead of ignoring them, trying to hide them, or trying to cover them up. The man who is delighting in forgiveness is the man who is willing to confess his sins, not the man who tries to cover them up. Right now, if you’re ignoring your sin or trying to cover it up, you’re not allowing yourself to delight in the beauty and glory that David is celebrating in verses 1-2. But David says this about being open rather than deceitful because he knows well what it’s like to try to cover up our sins, which leads us to our second section of this psalm—the agony of ignoring or hiding our sin.

### **The agony of ignoring or hiding our sin**

In verse 3 David lets us know that he can speak with great authority on what life is like on the other end of the spectrum from what he's described in verses 1-2. As opposed to the man who opens his heart in confession, hears forgiveness, and delights in the reality that his sin is not counted against him, David once tried to hide his sin, cover it up, and keep silent concerning what he'd done. And it was agonizing for him. He writes, "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" (vv. 3-4).

Now, I've already mentioned that we can't know for sure that David is describing the incident with Bathsheba, but that situation gives us a glimpse of how David once went about trying to cover up his own sin as an example of what he's describing in these verses. We no doubt know the story from 2 Samuel 11. In the season when kings go out to battle David decided he would stay home and let others fight this time, putting himself in a place where temptation could be ripe. And one night he sees a lady bathing on the rooftop who was beautiful, and he sent some messenger to get her, bring her to him, and he was intimate with her (That's how things work when you are king!). And then she returned to her house. It was over. It didn't have to be brought up. No one would have to know, right? David had sinned, but it could be ignored.

But there was a problem. Bathsheba soon sent word to David that she was pregnant. Soon everyone would know something was up because her protruding belly combined with the fact that her husband, Uriah, had been away at battle would cause all kinds of questions. David's sin was about to find him out. As best as we try to hide our sin, it typically has a way of finding us out, doesn't it? But David had a plan. He'd bring Uriah back from war and give him a night at home. Surely he'd take the opportunity to be with his wife, everyone would soon think the baby was his, and all would be well. The problem is that even though Uriah came back, he didn't go down to his house. He wanted to show solidarity with his brothers who were still in battle. So he slept with the servants instead of going down to his house. But David's pursuit to cover his sin didn't stop there. He decided to have Uriah stay another night, but this time he'd get him drunk, and then he'd no doubt pursue his wife. But that didn't work. David even tried it again, but it didn't happen.

At this point you might think David would just break down and confess, but he didn't. Covering our sin presses us to go further and further in our scheming, and so David developed another plan. He would have Uriah killed. He sent the soldier back with a letter to give to the commanding officer to have Uriah fight in the most heavily embattled area, pull back from him, and let him be killed. And he did so. Uriah was dead. And so David swiftly stepped in, took Bathsheba as his wife, and now everyone would think that her pregnancy happened once they got married. Maybe the baby would be born just a bit early, but it was no big deal. David had gotten away with it. No doubt that night when he wanted Bathsheba, he never thought that covering up his sin would mean he'd have to have a man killed, but nonetheless, he'd done it. No one would know.

Well, God knew, and we'll get to that in a second, but David tells us in this psalm what it felt like when he decided that instead of confessing his sin, he'd be silent, cover it up, and try to act like it didn't happen. He says he was being eaten up inside. It's like his bones were wasting away. He was groaning. The Lord's hand was heavy on him. There was no spring in his step. It was always on him, weighing him down. His strength just completely went from him. We might say that he had all the signs depression. He was wasting away under his sin. As a reader of 2 Samuel 11 you can think, "I can't believe he's getting away with it," but what looks like hiding his sin was actually David being destroyed inside.

And maybe you're right there right now. Maybe as you heard the description of verses 3-4 you know exactly what David was describing. You've sinned, you know you've sinned, and instead of coming clean and confessing it, you're just trying to move past it. No one knows. It feels like you've gotten away with it. Except God knows. And his hand of discipline is weighing heavy on you. It's taken away your sense of joy or delight. You feel like you're walking around under a dark cloud. Well, brother or sister, you don't have to. Turn to the Lord in repentance and confess it. David did. After this season of trying to cover his sin, David writes in verse 5, "I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgression to the LORD,' and you forgave the iniquity of my sin."

Again, we see this played out in the Bathsheba narrative. Though David had seemingly covered it up, God knew. And so he sent the prophet Nathan to confront David about his sin. Nathan did it in a genius way, exposed David's wickedness, announced all the consequences that would stem from David's sin, and David responded by saying, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Sam 12:13). There were no qualifications or excuses. David didn't say, "But it was a hard time in my life" or "I acted impulsively and knew I'd be humiliated and so it escalated beyond what I ever thought." No excuses. He just confessed. He'd sinned. And though adultery and murder were both punishable under the Mosaic law by death, Nathan responded—as the mouthpiece of God—saying, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die" (2 Sam 12:13). The Lord has put away your sin.

Yes, there were consequences. Sin always brings consequences. But David heard the most wonderful words imaginable: "The Lord has put away your sin." That's what David is saying here in verse 5. I confessed, and the Lord forgave. Brothers and sisters, why would you try to cover and hide and ignore your sin when if we repent and confess we're met with forgiveness from God? Proverbs 28:13 reminds us, "Whoever conceals his transgression will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy."

So confess and forsake. Know the joy of basking in forgiveness. See the glory that David mentions in verses 1-2. This is David's application, which brings us to our third section: the call to confess our sins to the Lord.

### **The call to confess our sins to the Lord**

David begins verse 6 with “therefore,” signaling that he’s drawing a conclusion for the reader from this autobiographical account he’s given us. Here’s what he says: “Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found” (v. 6). In other words, at the very moment you feel you should confess, confess. Don’t let one impulse to confess and turn from your sin be silenced. Act now. It may be that this afternoon your heart will be hardened. I think that’s why he says, “When you may be found.” It isn’t that the Lord is hiding himself, but your heart might no longer be in a place to want to seek him and find him. Never let the impulse to confess and turn from your sin be ignored.

But there’s not only a negative warning (i.e. while your heart is convicted, before it is hardened), but a positive one. David continues, “Surely in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him” (v. 6). In other words, the Lord will provide protection from judgment. Though the waters rise, you’ll be protected. David repeats this idea, writing in verse 7, “You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.” Run to God—the one who is willing to forgive you and receive you—as your refuge.

It may be that one reason you don’t want to deal with your sin is because of the embarrassment or humiliation of it. It just feels like if you own up to it you have to come face-to-face with the fact that you are the person who violated the very principles you’ve claimed to hold to so dearly. But consider this. With the Lord there is mercy and forgiveness and protection and care. If we try to ignore and cover our sins, then (if we belong to him) his hand of discipline will weigh heavy on us. And if it doesn’t and we stop being bothered by sin, it may show that we don’t know him. So why would you try to ignore or cover up your sin?

Again, David tells us in verses 8-9, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. 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.” Don’t be like a stubborn, foolish animal that has to be driven in the direction he should go. Don’t let the Lord have to bring his heavy discipline on you. Confess and forsake your sin and know his forgiveness and mercy and feel his closeness and his love. And this brings us to our last section of the text: a call to joy.

### **A call to joy**

David began the psalm talking about the blessing of delighting in our forgiveness. He ends the psalm by reminding us that the wicked don’t know that joy. He writes, “Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surround the one who trusts the LORD” (v. 10). So, let’s ask ourselves which we want to be. Do we want to hold on to our sin and know the sorrows of the wicked and (if we know Christ) know the heavy discipline of the Lord? Or do we want to get rid of all the deceit, forsake our sin, confess it, and know that the God whose love is steadfast will receive us in mercy and forgiveness? Isn’t the choice clear? It’s a choice between sorrow and joy in David’s mind, which is why he ends, writing, “Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!” (v. 11). Don’t you want to be among the Lord’s people who know what it is to have opened our hearts, tasted the Lord’s forgiveness, and are

delighting in it? I promise it's better than holding on to your sin, covering it up, thinking you're somehow getting away with it, but wasting away in the process. Run to him in forgiveness. Run to the one who sent his Son to live, die, and be raised for you. As you confess and forsake your sin this morning, acknowledging to the Lord your rebellion, without qualification or excuse, he'll respond—as he did to David—“The Lord also has put away your sin.” Don't you want that? Let's turn to the Lord in confession now, even as we come to the table. Amen.