

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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<b>Series:</b>	<b>The Psalms</b>		Pastor/Teacher
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<b>Text:</b>	<b>Psalm 32</b>		
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### The Peace of Forgiveness

#### I. Verses 1-2: The blessing of forgiveness

- A. In the first two verses here David sets up the main theme of the whole psalm. There is no greater blessing than being forgiven your sin before God. When you consider which verses of this psalm mirror each other, it makes perfect sense that this great blessing of forgiveness should result naturally in great gladness and joy (verse 11).
- B. The Hebrew word for “taken away” in verse 1 is a common word for forgiveness which also often means lifting something. Usually, when this word is used for forgiveness, it is the forgiven individual who is being “lifted up.” Taken together with verses 3-4, the unusual usage of this word brings to life a vivid picture of God lifting great burdens (i.e. their transgressions) off of the shoulders of those whose bones cannot bear the weight (of their soul-crushing guilt).<sup>1</sup> If you have read Pilgrim’s Progress, this imagery should feel very familiar.
- C. In verse 2, David uses the same word for “counts” as Moses did in Genesis 15:6 where God “counted” Abraham righteous by faith in his saving promises. In Romans 4:1-8, Paul explicitly makes this connection: Moses and David used the same word as two sides of the same coin. To not have your sins “counted” against you (Psalm 32:2) is to have your faith “counted” as if it were righteousness (Genesis 15:6).<sup>2</sup>
- D. Also notice that the word, “iniquity” in verse 2 is a very strong word for sin. “Iniquity” does not refer to eating unclean food, for example. It usually refers to willful breaches of God’s Law, or the guilt that is a result of such actions. Generally, only the word for “abomination” is more severe (e.g. Deuteronomy 7:26-27). This means it is possible for God to forgive even extreme and severe sins, such as David certainly had.
- E. David says that a man who is forgiven all his sins has no deceit in his spirit. What does he mean by this? Based on the example that follows from his own life in verses 3-4, it appears clear that David is referring to living with integrity. In other words, not living a double life, where you act righteous and pious on the outside but bear the crushing weight of unconfessed sin within.

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<sup>1</sup> Notice that, throughout Leviticus, God repeats again and again that a certain person “shall bear his iniquity.” E.g. Leviticus 5:1, 5:17, 7:18, 10:17, and many more. Moses drilled into the Israelites that sin and the guilt that comes from it are not abstract concepts; they are very real, and feel like a weighty burden when left unaddressed.

<sup>2</sup> “What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was **counted** to him as righteousness.’ Now to the one who works, his wages are not **counted** as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is **counted** as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God **counts** righteousness apart from works: “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not **count** his sin.” - Romans 4:1-8, ESV.

## II. Verses 3-4: The unbearable weight of unconfessed sin

- A. It is remarkable that when David wants to give an example of a man who had a deceitful spirit, he doesn't use one of his enemies, like Saul. He uses himself as a very negative example here. David describes his guilt as if it were a crushing weight, even the very hand of God, pressing down on him without ceasing. When you have sinned and you know, deep down, that it is truly sin, that knowledge is oppressive.
- B. Arizonans should have no difficulty guessing why David puts dry summer heat in parallel with this imagery of a heavy weight on your back in verse 4. If air conditioning had never been invented, it's difficult to imagine nearly as many people would have settled here in the valley. Without powerful relief, the heat here would truly be like an unbearable burden for most people.
- C. Note that not everyone feels this weight; most feel only a part of it and are unaware of how truly far and wide their guilt extends. Some have such seared consciences that they feel nothing at all about their wickedness.<sup>3</sup> Oftentimes people who feel the weight of their sin try to rationalize it away through all kinds of foolish means, making themselves neurotic in the process. They convince themselves that a command applies only very narrowly. For example, recently more and more Christians have questioned whether anxiety is a sin at all. The solution to the guilt of that sin is not to deny that it is a problem; the solution is to come to your heavenly Father and lay your fears on him through Christ, because he loves you despite your weakness and sin (Matthew 6:25-34).

## III. Verses 5-7: The sweet relief of confession and forgiveness

- A. The solution to David's burden was not to pull himself up by his bootstraps and atone for his own sins, as people often think. The solution was simply to lay his burden before the Lord in prayer, and he was immediately relieved.
- B. Note that the word for "covered" in verse 5 is the same word he used in verse 1. This forms a simple and beautiful picture of confession and forgiveness: David uncovered his sin before the Lord, and the Lord covered it for him. Therefore the Lord covers David as a hiding place (verse 7); a place of rest and refuge from the tumult of his unclean conscience.
- C. Verse 6 is at the center of the psalm, and so we should pay special attention to it. This, along with the first and final verses of the psalm, is the main message that David wants to get through to us.<sup>4</sup> While you yet have time in this life, confess your sins to the Lord and put your faith in his forgiveness. Do not hide and make excuses for your sin. Do not put it off, thinking you will "get right with the Lord" at the end of your life, as if you can settle your accounts on your own terms. When the flood-waters of God's judgment come, as we saw in Psalm 29, it will be too late. The Ark's door will be closed at that point, so come to him now

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<sup>3</sup> The Apostle Paul says that false teachers in particular often have seared consciences. "Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." - 1 Timothy 4:1-3, ESV.

<sup>4</sup> "The prophet now describes the issue of his misery, in order to show to all the ready way of obtaining the happiness of which he makes mention. When his feeling of divine wrath sorely vexed and tormented him, **his only relief was unfeignedly to condemn himself before God**, and humbly to flee to him to crave his forgiveness. He does not say, however, that his sins merely came to his remembrance, for so also did the sins of Cain and Judas, although to no profit; because, when the consciences of the wicked are troubled with their sins, they cease not to torment themselves, and to fret against God: yea, although he forces them unwillingly to his bar, they still eagerly desire to hide themselves. But here there is described a very different method of acknowledging sin; namely, when the sinner willingly betakes himself to God, building his hope of salvation not on stubbornness or hypocrisy, but on supplication for pardon. **This voluntary confession is always conjoined with faith; for otherwise the sinner will continually seek lurking-places where he may hide himself from God.** David's words clearly show that he came unfeignedly and cordially into the presence of God, that he might conceal nothing." - John Calvin, *Commentary on the Psalms*.

while you have the chance and the door of mercy is wide open! When you do, you will want to celebrate the forgiveness in 32:5 and the salvation in 32:7.

- D. Verse 7 does not mean that God preserves those who confess their sins from any trouble at all in this life. It means that God preserves them from the particular trouble which this psalm is focused upon: the oppression of a guilty conscience and the inevitable judgment of God on your sin.

#### IV. Verses 8-11: Don't be a fool; humbly submit to the love of God and rejoice!

- A. In verse 8 David turns from description and a general statement of what the godly should do, to directly telling us what to do with divine authority. He wants us to listen closely so that we might learn one of the most important lessons of wisdom.
- B. Verse 9 mirrors verses 3-4 where David refused to confess and repent of his sin for a long time, stubbornly trudging ahead into further sin and suffering like a dumb animal. The ESV's translation of this verse is a little unclear; in the Hebrew it is the understanding which will not come near if you are stubborn.
- C. We should interpret verse 10 in light of this reading of verse 9. You will never be free of the constant pain of a guilty conscience (the "many sorrows") if you do not learn to confess your sins. It is humble confession which brings the realization ("understanding") that you are surrounded by the love of the Lord, even in the midst of your external trials.
- D. This understanding of God's love in verse 10 naturally brings forth joy in grateful worship in verse 11. David calls on all whose sins have been forgiven to cut loose their exuberant gratitude for God's mercy. From this we learn that if you feel weighed down and close to despair, the answer is not to try and make it right yourself, or wait until you have enough distance from your sin that you can come to the Lord with your pride intact. It is precisely when you feel guiltiest that you must come to the Lord, because only he can forgive your sins and give you the strength to repent and glorify him with your life. If you struggle with assurance, confess your sins more and trust the Lord's grace still more.<sup>5</sup> Having a clean conscience is like a preview of the Resurrection: where once was misery and despair, there is all of a sudden new life and joy!

#### V. The conundrum of Psalm 32: How can God forgive iniquity in his righteousness?

- A. As we have seen, iniquity and the guilt it brings is not to be taken lightly. We must not think we can sweep our sins under the rug, or that God will, either. It would be monstrously unjust for any judge to let the wicked go without any punishment, and yet God freely forgives those who believe his promises. How can he do this?<sup>6</sup> Only if there is a substitute, bound and united to us as our great king and head, who paid for this extravagant forgiveness.
- B. The Apostle Paul loves to proclaim the wonder of this mystery, when he uses phrases like "him who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5). Paul can only call God this because he sent Jesus as the one anointed to bear the crushing weight of our guilt all the way through God's unbridled wrath.

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<sup>5</sup> Consider 1 John 1:8-10, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

<sup>6</sup> Consider how Exodus 34:6-7 provokes this question: "The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" How can he be both the God who forgives iniquity *and* the God who will by no means clear the guilty?

- C. Having this understanding of God's love, we are filled with joy to pour forth in worship. Worship is the first part of the new life we live in Christ, after being united with him in his death and resurrection.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Consider Romans 6:4, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life." Also Colossians 3:3, "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."