

## Summer Psalms

### “How Fortunate are the Forgiven” (Psalm 32)

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on 7/21/2013

#### Introduction

- ❖ Please turn in your Bibles to Psalm 32. If you look at the header, you’ll notice an interesting label attached to it. It says this psalm was written by King David and was to be used as a *maskil*. That was a term for psalms of instruction. They were psalms written for the purpose of teaching others through singing.
  - ▶ In this case, David is teaching by sharing from his own life experience. He’s teaching a difficult, yet valuable, lesson on the misery of hidden sin and the bliss of being forgiven when we humbly confess our sins to God. **[READ PSALM 32]**
  
- ❖ We’re not given any historical context to this psalm, so we have no idea which sin of his that David had in mind when he penned this psalm. But it’s likely he wrote Psalm 32 in conjunction with Psalm 51, and that psalm is explicitly set in the context of his infamous affair with Bathsheba.
  - ▶ In case you’re not familiar, that was the incident where he slept with another man’s wife, impregnated her, and tried to cover it all up by conspiring to get her husband, who was a soldier in his army, killed in battle.
  
- ❖ So considering the greatness of the sins that David has in mind, it’s encouraging to read of the blessedness he received through forgiveness. In vv1-2, the term ‘blessed’ can literally be translated ‘happy’. It literally says, “**Happy is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.**” There is happiness (joy) to be had when we experience forgiveness.
  - ▶ *Don’t we all long for such happiness? Don’t you want to share in that joy? **I think we’re all familiar with that sickening feeling when you know you’ve done wrong.*** When you know you’ve committed a great offense. When you’ve sinned against God or fellow man.
    - Perhaps you lost it and snapped at your spouse, your children, or your parents. Perhaps you betrayed the trust of someone you love. Perhaps you returned once again to the same sin and filth that you’ve promised time and time again to walk away from.
  
- ❖ Regardless of what you did (what you said, what you thought), do you remember how you felt afterwards? How those feelings of guilt weighed on you so heavily? How you carried it around like a burden everywhere you went, “*all day long*”?
  - ▶ You tried to explain it away. You tried to justify your behavior or blame-shift and put it on someone else. You tried to keep yourself distracted, but you couldn’t shake it. You felt a tightness in your chest, a constriction around your throat. It sapped your strength. It sapped your joy. You couldn’t think about anything else. It kept you up at night. The same scenes kept running in your head. You literally felt sick about it.
    - **How many of us have experienced such agony, such torment?** How many of us are going through it right now? Don’t you want to be free? To have this weight, these guilty feelings, lifted off your chest, off your heart, off your mind?

- ❖ Well you're not alone. This perfectly describes David's experience as he remained silent about his sin – as he tried his best to cover it up, to ignore it, to forget about it, to put it in the past. But I want you to note that it's this same man (this same sinner) who somehow experienced the joy and blessedness of vv1-2. Somehow he got there. Don't you want to get there too?
  - ▶ ***Don't you want to be forgiven of your sin like David?*** But before we can identify with him in vv1-2 and claim this blessing for ourselves, we need to ask: *Can I identify with David in v5? Do I identify with the one who confesses his sins to the Lord?* I think it's easy to identify with a man who wants forgiveness. But it's hard to identify with a man who humbly confesses in order to receive it.
    - I've summarized the instruction of Psalm 32 like this: Make it a practice to regularly confess your sins to God since 1) Covering up has its consequences, 2) Confessing leads to blessing, and 3) Forgiveness can still be found.

### **Covering Up Has Its Consequences**

- ❖ Let's consider our first point: **Make it a practice to regularly confess your sin to God because covering up has its consequences.** Think of any famous cover up in history and note how each one ended with miserable consequences. Whether it's Watergate, Enron, Bernie Madoff, Penn State, a cover up never leads to greater blessing, only to greater misery.
  - ▶ In v5, David admits he tried to 'cover up' his iniquity. He thought he could get away with it, but he ended up facing consequences. He learned the hard way, and now he's written this psalm to instruct us to take a different path. So let's consider David's example of what *not* to do. There are three questions to ask: *What are we trying to cover up? Who are we really fooling? What are the consequences?*
- ❖ **First, what are we trying to cover up?** We're no different than David, so whatever sinful instincts led him to attempt a cover up will be found in each of us. *So what was he so ashamed of that he felt like he had to hide it?* If you notice, in vv1-2 and in v5, David identifies three things: transgressions, sins and iniquity. All three are obviously related, but they have their own distinctions. Let's consider each.
  - ▶ **In the Bible, a transgression is typically described as an intentional offense against a revealed law of God.** The image is of God's law being like a boundary fence wherein we're free to roam and live a blessed life. But to transgress is to intentionally cross over God's good boundaries.
    - For example, marriage is God's good boundary for the sharing of sexual intimacy. The true blessing of sex is only experienced within that boundary, so to sleep with someone you're not married to would be called a transgression. You've crossed over the line and violated God's good law.
- ❖ **Now sin, on the other hand, is the failure to obtain God's ideal for our lives.** It's a missing of the mark. The image here is of God's law like a target, and we were created to live righteous lives where all our actions fall within that target. But to sin is to miss the mark in the moral quality of our actions, to miss God's target of moral perfection.

- ▶ So a husband may be able to avoid a transgression such as adultery, but he can still be guilty of sin (of missing the mark) if he goes on loving himself more than his wife. God's target is for husbands to love their wives as themselves (Eph. 5:28). So to put your own interests over hers would be sin.
- ❖ Now in v2 we have this term *iniquity* (the NIV translates it as *sin* but it actually says *iniquity*. It's the same word in v5 which they got right). ***Iniquity refers to an inward perversity – the moral distortion of our fallen nature.*** We often call it one's sin nature. So in our example, iniquity would be the root cause behind a husband's adultery or simple neglect of his wife. It's what leads us to feed our lust and selfishness in the first place.
  - ▶ Well like David, our natural instinct when faced with the guilt and shame of our ***intentional transgressions***, our ***imperfect sins***, or our ***iniquitous nature*** is to try and cover them up. We try to hide them from the sight of others and even God himself.
- ❖ But the second question is this: ***Who are we really fooling?*** Certainly not God! Do we really think we can cover up these things from the eyes of an all-knowing, all-seeing God? **The only person we're fooling is ourselves. Like David, we're lying to ourselves.**
  - ▶ Look at the second half of v2. He says the blessing of forgiveness is available to the one "*in whose spirit there is no deceit*". This statement is contrasted with the next statement in v3 about keeping silent about sin.
    - So the one who is blessed is the one who is not deceived about his sinfulness and therefore does not keep silent about it. By implication, the one who does keep silent – who tries to cover up – has deceived himself.
- ❖ It doesn't matter how smart you are. We're all susceptible to self-deception. **Like our first parents, our instinctive reaction to sin is to hide, and we fool ourselves into thinking fig leaves will do the job** (Gen. 3:7). But God sees our sin. Others see it too. Sadly, we're the only ones blind to how bad we really are.
  - ▶ But if we won't acknowledge it, then God, in his mercy, will intervene and put us through some miserable consequences. This is exactly what happened to David. In vv3-4, he's likely speaking out of his experience of that tumultuous time between his affair and his eventual confession.
    - Judging by the fact that his child with Bathsheba was already born when he finally confessed, that means for almost a year David refused to recognize his sin and remained in a state of unrepentance, suffering the consequences.
- ❖ That leads to a third question: ***What are the consequences of a cover up?*** Now Scripture is clear that the ultimate consequence for never confessing sin is a loss of eternal life and a punishment of eternal hell. But at the same time, we're promised that those who confess their sins and trust in Jesus who died for those sins will be forgiven.

- ▶ Yet even believers, who are rescued from eternal consequences, can still experience earthly consequences if we try to cover up sin. Look at vv3-4. *“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.”*
- ❖ In v3, David laments at how silence about his sin led to physical and emotional turmoil. His inner agony could be felt in his bones. In v4, he describes a loss of physical strength, sapped as in the heat of summer. I think we’ve felt that before.
  - ▶ The physiological symptoms of guilt are very real! You can’t get over it because you can’t get out from under it. It weighs on you. It’s exhausting. You don’t want to do anything. You have no desire for anything. Guilt can dry you up.
- ❖ And notice how all this was coming from God! In the first half of v4, David says, *“For day and night your hand was heavy upon me.”* The heavy hand of God is a biblical term for God’s rebuke, so being on the receiving end of his heavy hand means you’ve done something wrong and he’s making you aware of it (cf. 1 Sam. 5:6-7).
- ❖ **So the very physical and emotional misery you’re going through could very well be the Lord’s rebuke for (and revelation of) unconfessed sin in your life.** But I hope you’re starting to see that instead of despising his rebuke, you should welcome it. Because it’s a sure sign that God is still working in your life – that he has not abandoned you.
  - ▶ The scary thing is when God refuses to rebuke you, when he gives you over to the sinful desires of your heart. **Proverbs 3:11-12** says, *“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”*
    - So it’s because he loves you as a son or daughter that he disciplines you, so rather than resenting your Heavenly Father’s discipline – thank him for it!
- ❖ **For those of you tempted to cover your sin, I urge you to consider the consequences of unconfessed sin.** You might be telling yourself that life will be so much easier if this particular sin just stays covered up, but you’re actually adding greater misery to your life.
  - ▶ In your attempt to hide, you’ll grow more distant from those you love, including God. In the end, you’ll deprive yourself of fellowship with God – of true spiritual blessedness. **Proverbs 28:13** says, *“Whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper; but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy.”*

### Confessing Leads to Blessing

- ❖ Now the promise of finding mercy through confession leads to our second point: **Make it a practice to regularly confess you sin to God because confessing leads to blessing.** In vv1-2 and in vv5-8, I observe four distinct blessings that are given to those who acknowledge their sin: the blessing of forgiveness, a new reputation, protection and instruction.

## The Blessing of Forgiveness

- ❖ In **1 John 1:9**, after charging those who claim to be without sin with self-deception, John continues with, “*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.*”
  - ▶ The biblical witness is clear: **A true confession leads to the blessing of forgiveness.** David testifies to this in v5. “*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.*”
    - Notice how, in vv1-2 and v5, there is a threefold description of forgiveness that accompanies David’s threefold description of sin: Sin is taken away, covered, and not counted against us.
  
- ❖ In v1 it says, “*transgressions are forgiven*” and in v5 God forgives the iniquity of David’s sin. The word ‘*forgiven*’ literally means ‘*to lift up or to take away*’. When used in this context, we are to imagine sin as a heavy burden on a sinner’s back. **Forgiveness, then, is a lifting of the burden – a taking away.**
  - ▶ This is a great way to picture how our sins are removed by the sacrificial death of Christ. **On the cross, just picture Jesus lifting the burden of sin off your back and placing it on his own.** And then he goes and dies the death your burden deserves. That means he didn’t just throw your burden into the trash. If he had done so, the guilt of your sin (cf. v5) would still cry out for justice from inside that trashcan. Gross injustice was committed by your sins, and to simply throw them away would only add to that injustice. A penalty must be paid. Justice must be served.
    - **That’s why, in love, the Father removed the crushing weight of sin from off our backs and, with it, crushed his Son.** Jesus bore the penalty that our sins deserve, and justice was satisfied. So now to be forgiven, we only need to confess our sins in light of Jesus’ sacrifice on our behalf. This is good news!
  
- ❖ **So in forgiveness our sins are taken away, but also in v1 they’re described as *being covered*.** They’re put out of sight. It’s like how we would cover up something offensive to us. Maybe an unsightly hole in the wall with a picture frame or an ugly stain in the carpet with a well-placed throw rug.
  - ▶ In the same way, God’s eyes are too pure to look upon our sins (Hab. 1:13). They’re offensive to his holy nature. So the only way the sinner can approach the Holy God is for our sins to be covered.
  
- ❖ Notice the irony here. **God agrees with the sinner that there needs to be a cover up.** Sin needs to be covered. But the question is, “*Who will do it?*” If we try to cover our sins and not confess them, then God will not cover it. It will remain in plain sight to condemn us.
  - ▶ But if we confess our sins and stop our feeble attempts to cover up, then God, in mercy, promises to cover them for us with the blood of Christ, which can fully and finally cover sin forever.

- ❖ **So in forgiveness our sins are taken away, covered, and lastly they're *not counted against us*.** In v2 we read about the man "*against whom the Lord counts no iniquity*". This is language borrowed from the realm of accounting. To not count your sins (iniquity) against you is to not impute them to your account, to not reckon (consider) you guilty of these sins.
  - ▶ So imagine standing in the courtroom of God. David is saying "Blessed is the criminal who the Lord does not count his crimes against him because his crimes have been covered by the blood of his Savior and taken away from his sight – never to be seen again." That's the blessing of forgiveness.

### **The Blessing of a New Reputation**

- ❖ **The second blessing that comes with true confession is the blessing of a new reputation.** I am so thankful that God promises to pardon the one who confesses, but to be honest, a pardon is not enough. *What do I mean by that?* Think about it: **The reputation of an unpunished criminal is still that of a criminal.** As commentator Leon Morris puts it, "*The pardoned criminal bears no penalty, but he bears a stigma. He is a criminal and he is known as a criminal, albeit an unpunished one.*"
  - ▶ Think of George Zimmerman. Regardless of what you think about the final verdict. Regardless if you think he's guilty of murder, the reality is that even though he was pardoned by a court of law, he will always carry around with him the stigma of murderer who got away with it.
    - **In the same way, to be pardoned of my sin is wonderful, but I don't want to live under the stigma of a criminal who evaded punishment.** I need a new reputation. I need the reputation of the man in v11 who is called "*righteous*" and "*upright in heart*".
- ❖ The Apostle Paul recognized this dilemma and actually found the solution in our Psalm. When he wrote **Romans 4**, he explained that if you trust God as the kind of God who justifies the wicked – your faith is counted to you as righteousness. **In other words, because of your faith in Christ (not your works) you're given a new reputation as a righteous one.** Paul then goes on to quote Psalm 32:1-2 to back up his point. So the blessing of vv1-2 includes not only a pardon of sin but a crediting of righteousness.
  - ▶ This is what's so great about the gospel! **If you confess your sins, instead of counting them against you, God will count Jesus' righteousness to you.** Jesus' righteousness will be your new identity, your new reputation!
    - **That means we'll no longer carry around the stigma of an unpunished criminal.** If you're a Christian, God does not know you by your sins anymore. You have a new reputation in Christ!

### **The Blessing of Protection**

- ❖ The third blessing of true confession is divine protection. We find this in v7. "*You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance.*" This is good news. **If we confess our sins, not only is God no longer against us, but now he is totally for us (ie. he protects us and fights for us).**

- ▶ We need his protection because the enemy will continually attack us with flaming arrows of lies. Every time you fall, every time you transgress a law or miss the mark, the devil is going to throw sharp accusations at you. *“You call yourself a Christian? A real Christian wouldn’t do that or think that. You’re too bad to be forgiven!”*
  - But for those who have confessed, God has become their hiding place. And his defenses are strong. His walls are lofty and thick. No arrow will graze us. No accusation will stick. This is the blessing of God’s protection.

### The Blessing of Instruction

- ❖ The fourth blessing that comes when we confess our sins is that of divine instruction. **To the repentant, God promises direction as well as protection.** This is important because though God will be our shield, the goal is not to stand in the middle of the battlefield to just get pummeled with a constant barrage of arrows. We need the Lord to lead us into battle. We need direction to a life of holiness. Thankfully, we find such a promise in v8. Here the Lord takes the pen from David, in a sense, and address us directly. *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.”*
  - ▶ This is good news. **We are not simply forgiven and left to fend for ourselves in this evil and trying world.** No, we are forgiven and then filled with God’s Spirit to be instructed, to be taught in the way to go, to be counseled and watched over.
    - When we’re faced with a moral dilemma or a tempting situation or just an everyday life decision, God promises guidance, so that we can make wise, God-honoring decisions. He will counsel us with his eye upon us.
- ❖ We could go on to describe more blessings that accompany a true confession of sin, but these four are highlighted in Psalm 32: the blessing of forgiveness, of a new reputation, of divine protection, and of divine instruction.

### Forgiveness Can Still Be Found

- ❖ **The last reason to make it a practice to regularly confess your sin to God is because forgiveness can still be found.** I get this from the first half of v6. *“Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found”*. David’s logic goes like this: If such blessing can come from confessing our sins, then let’s make every effort to pray to God in confession while he may be found. And v6 is David’s positive example of doing just that – an example we ought to emulate.
  - ▶ But he also gives a negative example to avoid in v9. *“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.”*
- ❖ For that entire year, David remained a stubborn mule, not willing to budge an inch. No way was he going to admit wrongdoing. No way was he going to confess. He dug in his heels. **But God, in his mercy, put on the bit and bridle and dragged David through a slew of consequences until he was broken and humbled.**

- ▶ So when Nathan finally showed up at David's door, he was ripe and ready to confess. There was no need anymore to drag him into repentance. So we read in **2 Samuel 12**, David saying, "*I have sinned against the Lord.*" And instantaneously, he hears the comforting words, "*The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.*"
  
- ❖ **If you're a Christian, I urge you to not be like the mule.** Let's learn from David's experience. Don't be stubborn and insist on learning for yourself. As I've matured in my faith, I've discovered that there are some things are best learned by reading another's experience and not by living through it myself.
  - ▶ Here we have clear testimony that any attempt to cover up your sin will fail and lead to miserable consequences. **God is the only one who can fully and finally cover sin for good, and he promises to do so for those who confess and trust in Him.**
    - So don't be like the mule. *Why learn the hard way like David?* Why have God use the bit and bridle and drag you through such unhappiness? Won't you freely come to Him in humble faith and repentance? He's ready to receive.
  
- ❖ **If you're not a Christian, I leave you with a dire warning and a word of encouragement.** David was fortunate to have prayed to the Lord while he could be found, but v6 implies that there will be a day when God will no longer be found. **There will come a day when sinners seek to confess but, in their terror, discover no one is listening.**
  - ▶ David is warning us against presuming that we can simply confess at our own convenience. Such thinking is nothing short of self-deception. The Bible teaches that there is a window of opportunity within which we can receive the blessings that flow out of a genuine confession of sin.
    - **Thankfully that window is still open for each of us today.** We are still breathing and Christ has yet to return, so the window is open. *But for how long?* The Bible says, "*Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.*" (Heb. 3:15). **As long as it is called Today, come to Jesus.** Come and repent. Come, confess, and discover a storehouse of blessings waiting for you.