

Psalm 32:5

“I will confess my transgressions to the LORD” - and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

Unlike our friends in the Anglican and Presbyterian Churches

- Who either regularly chant or sing metrical versions of the Psalms
- Methodists have often been guilty of neglecting the Psalms
- I have sought to put that right through including a Psalm most Sunday mornings
- And today we are going to look at another Psalm in detail

The Psalms are first and foremost a record of God’s word to his people

- And of his people’s response in faith to him
- The Psalms invite us to experience how God’s people in the past related to him
- The Psalms represent God’s prescription for a complacent church
- By focusing on God and revealing how great, wonderful, wise and awe-inspiring he is

Today we are looking at Psalm 32, one of the seven penitential Psalms

- The others being Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130 and 143
- These are Psalms that deal with sin and forgiveness
- Though this Psalm includes elements of thanksgiving (3-8) and wisdom (1-2, 9-11)

Because the Psalm is Hebrew poetry where the second half of the Psalm

- Follows the themes of the first half of the Psalm in reverse order
- The last two verses of this Psalm really form a good introduction

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD’s unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

(Psalm 32:10-11)

There is a strong possibility that King David was the author of this Psalm

- And that it reflects a considered reflection on his need of God’s forgiveness
- Following his adultery with Bathsheba
- and his arranging for her husband, Uriah, to be killed in battle
- the contrasts in the Psalm between the wicked and the righteous
- the believer and the unbeliever are plain to see
- the Psalmist reflects that the woes of the wicked are many
- but the righteous rejoice and be glad – because of God’s unfailing love

‘Righteous’ means being in a right relationship with God, a right standing before him

- in our generation, little store is put on the importance of being right with God
- the general assumption is that if there is a God at all
- he is a benevolent, indulgent grandfather in the sky
- who is never truly angry at all
- but the picture of God from the Bible is of a God who is implacably opposed to sin
- whose judgement will come against those who do not believe in him or reject his rule
- but whose grace and mercy are free to those who seek his forgiveness

And so this Psalm declares that the ground of our joy is God's unfailing love

- but the blessing that we can know (1-2)
- presupposes our experience of sorrow, confession and forgiveness (3-5)
- that experience of forgiveness encourages the godly to take refuge in the Lord (6-7)
- and to be instructed by him (8-10)
- so that the righteous might rejoice in the Lord (11)

In the New Testament the very person of God is revealed in Jesus

- when we measure our life against the life of Jesus
- we can quite easily see what the Bible means when it says
- 'all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23)
- when we measure our life against the life of Jesus
- we can quite easily see what the Bible means when it says
- 'we all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way (Isa. 53:6)
- when we measure our life against the life of Jesus
- we can easily see what the Bible means when it says
- (we) 'became arrogant and disobeyed your commands' (Nehemiah 9:29)

It is the exemplary, perfect, godly, humble and obedient life of Jesus

- to which we must compare our own lives
- indeed, in the gospel narratives we find people just like us doing just that
- with the end result that they betray him, reject him and crucify him
- too often we attempt to deceive ourselves that if we had been in the crowds
- that even if we did not stand beside him that we would have sided with him
- when our lives, our words and our actions, so often prove the opposite to be the case

Psalm 32 was a favourite of that great Christian, St Augustine, who wrote

- 'The beginning of knowledge is to know yourself to be a sinner'
- For what we need is a mirror to the inner self, that we could see ourselves as we are
- Or, if we dared, a glimpse of ourselves as God sees us

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
sapped as in the heat of summer.

(Psalm 32: 3-4)

I THE BLESSING OF FACING UP TO THE PAST

In the BBC series, *To Play the King*, Ian Richardson was played by Francis Urquhart

- The programme was made all the more intriguing
- Because Richardson confided his private thoughts to the viewer
- Enabling us to know what was really going on his mind as well as what we saw

Would you like to run the film of your life for us all to see?

- I suggest that if you did you would subject it to judicious editing
- And even if you managed to polish up the film to your liking
- That you would not want us to know what was really going on in your mind

Viewing the film of our lives and the inner workings of our minds hardly bears contemplating

- It would probably be too painful even for us to watch – as individuals in private
- But if watching it with family, friend, critics and others is bad enough
- Then how about watching it while standing accused before a holy God?

The Psalm writer knows the pain of keeping the record of his sins locked up and unaddressed

- He feels that there is an inner agony about it – judgment is upon him
- And his strength is sapped as in the heat of a summer's day
- There is undoubtedly a misery of unconfessed and unforgiven sin
- Unconfessed sin is simply a festering sore
- Even those who do not believe in the grace of God would have to accept
- The hopelessness and meaninglessness of it all without him
- Certainly the Psalm writer did know any relief until he recognised sin for what it was

There can be no real, open and harmonious relationship with God the Heavenly Father

- Through the Lord Jesus Christ while we harbour unconfessed and unaddressed sin
- And there is no presence, no power of the Holy Spirit in our lives
- That is why, in verse 5, in a truly repentant spirit, the psalmist confessed his sin
- Here the three different Hebrew words used for sin in vv. 1-2
- Translated in the NIV transgressions, sins and sin
- Are used again, though in a different order
- And are associated with three synonyms for forgiveness
- Two positive and one negative
- And with three verbs for confession
- Two positive and one negative
- 'I acknowledge my sin to you'
- 'I did not cover up my iniquity'
- 'I will confess my transgressions to the LORD'

It is here, therefore, that I invite you to share the blessing of facing up to your past

- you have no responsibility to face up to my past or anyone else's past
- you have the responsibility of facing up to your own past
- right up to your coming inside these doors today
- indeed, right up to one minute ago
- God already knows all about your past – and knowing all about it still loves you
- But what about you? Are you prepared to face up to your past?

The psalm writer acknowledged his past – that is the big step that you have to take

- You can avoid it if you like, you can try to fool us, you can even fool yourself
- But you cannot fool God – and a past that is not dealt with
- Is a past that can haunt you – to the grave and beyond
- But a past that is acknowledged is a past that is ready to be dealt with

The psalm writer did not cover up his iniquity

- The thing that we would most like to do with our iniquities is cover them up
- We 'cover up' as an inappropriate way of dealing with all kinds of things
- But in the Bible 'cover' can also be used in a special way

- In the sense of hidden from God or covered in the sense of accounted for
- The good news is that this is accomplished by the work of Jesus on the cross
- For by his death, Jesus has secured the possibility of our forgiveness
- His blood, therefore, covers our sins
- Both in the sense of hiding them from God's views and accounting for them
- Neither stain of sin nor debt of sin need stand against our name
- Because of the blood of Jesus
- It may well be that at the moment both stain of sin and debt of sin stand against you
- The pages of the book of your life are full of mistakes, errors and even wilful sins
- As the traditional prayer renders it
- 'through ignorance, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault'
- if you do not acknowledge it God cannot forgive it
- if you try to bury it, God cannot cover it with the saving blood of Christ
- but if you acknowledge it and do not cover it, it can be dealt with

The psalm writer uses the word 'confess' to express this

- Unless it is something that needs to be put right with another person
- I don't believe that you need to confess it to anyone else
- But you do need to confess it to God – for the Bible promises

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

(1 John 1:8-9)

The verse rightly focuses on the faithfulness and justice of God

- But notice that confessed sins are not simply forgiven but also purified
- No stain or debt stands against our name
- For the blood of Jesus, God's sin, purifies us from all sin (1 John 1:7)

When I was a student minister I was sent to work with Notting Hill Methodist Church

- And I was able to attend a black Pentecostal Revival with the Church of God
- At one of their Saturday evening services they sang the wonderful hymn
- By Robert Lowry – who was a friend of Ira Sankey who produced the hymnals

What can wash away my sin?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus;
What can make me whole again?
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

For my cleansing this my plea,
Nothing but the blood of Jesus.

I can hear those lovely Caribbean Christians singing the song in their distinctive way

- As if it were yesterday – and the message is still true
- Pride will tell you that you are not really a sinner
- When you win that battle pride will tell you that you can make it right

- By a life of religion or good works – but humility accepts that it is all of Jesus
- What can wash away your sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus
- A humble prayer in faith to God – brings relief
- It is possible to leave the church today
- With the festering sore of unconfessed sin in your heart
- It is possible to wear your Sunday face, to fool everyone of us
- You might even be moderately successful in fooling yourself
- But you cannot fool God – and one day you will have to stand before him
- Then the reel of life’s film will run (with all our thoughts as well)
- What we failed to acknowledge, tried to conceal, left unconfessed
- Secret pride and subtle sins will all be revealed
- But what we acknowledged, uncovered and confessed is washed away
- For the blessing of facing up to the past brings:

II THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS IN THE PRESENT

No wonder the psalm writer begins with what are in effect two Beatitudes

Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit.

(Psalm 32:1-2)

The believer is no longer locked in an unrepentant silence

- Through the grace of God are transgressions are forgiven
- Our sins are covered
- And are no longer counted against us
- Transgressions are acts of rebellion or disloyalty – stepping out of line
- Sin is an act that misses the target, like an arrow falling short
- Sin or iniquity is a crooked or wrong act, often intentional
- But by the grace of God – sins of every kind can be forgiven
- Whether against God or humanity, great or small, conscious or inadvertent
- By omission or commission – it is all covered and accounted for by the grace of God

The nature of the sin is almost lost in the blessedness of forgiveness

- Acts of rebellion are forgiven (carried away) transported far away from us
- Shortcomings are covered by the blood of Christ – the sinner reconciled to God
- Sin is in the past and God does not bring it up anymore
- We try in vain to cover it but it will not stay covered for ever
- But God covers it through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus – for ever
- The apostle Paul quotes these verse in his great letter to the Romans (4:6-8)
- All our sins that cry against us do not count because of the grace of God
- They are forgiven, carried away, covered and do not count against us

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the LORD” - and you forgave the guilt of my sin.

(Psalm 32:5)

There is a joyous excitement as the psalm writer realises that his sins are forgiven

- And he breaks into spontaneous praise

Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. You are my hiding-place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

(Psalm 32:6-7)

Even in times of trouble the psalm writer can rejoice

- For he can draw near to God who will protect him and deliver him from adversity
- Who also gives

III THE BLESSING OF GUIDANCE FOR THE FUTURE

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in him.

Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

(Psalm 32:9-11)

Although God is angry with us – he is angry because of the dangers of sin

- And all he wants is our long-term good, so he disciplines us because he loves us
- His assurance and forgiveness must be coupled with a readiness to learn
- God has promised to instruct his children, give them wisdom, and watch over them
- Like the wise father to the apprentice son
- Like the attentive mother teaching her child to walk
- God guides his children so that we learn and do not fall

The encouragement to wise living concludes with an exhortation to rejoice

- Not a vain effort to be happy when we do not feel like it
- But because we are mindful of all his benefits

I THE BLESSING OF FACING UP TO THE PAST

II THE BLESSING OF FORGIVENESS IN THE PRESENT

III THE BLESSING OF GUIDANCE FOR THE FUTURE

In October 1871, the great fire of Chicago, left Horatio Spafford in financial ruin

- Shortly after, his wife Anna and four daughters were crossing the Atlantic
- But following a collision with another ship, all four daughters died
- Leaving Anna to send a message home 'saved alone'
- Several weeks later as Horatio passed the spot he wrote 'It is well with my soul'
- Phillip Bliss, composed the music for the hymn, shortly before dying in a train crash