

## Confession: The Path to True Happiness

### *Psalm 32*

I'm sure a number of you have either walked or biked on the linear trail here in Manhattan. Three years ago in the spring I was on a ride and when I came to the south part of the trail where it circles around and goes under S. Manhattan Ave. bridge. The trail was covered with about three inches of mud under the bridge from some flooding that had occurred. I decided to go ahead and plow through the mud and continue on my ride. A bit later as I got to the part of the trail closer to Pecan Circle I came around a curve and as I did there was a huge cottonwood tree laying across the sidewalk and then a bit further the sidewalk was actually totally washed away. It was pretty clear that I would not be continuing my ride in that direction. There was a barrier that I was not going to be able to get around. And so I had to turn around and slop through the mud again.

When it comes to our relationship with God there is barrier every bit as real as that cottonwood tree that I encountered that can keep us from experiencing the joy of our relationship with God. The barrier is called sin. For the person who is not a believer in Jesus, this barrier of sin keeps him from a relationship with God. When we trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior, however, He forgives us for all of our sin - past, present and future. Sin as an ultimate barrier from God is removed. But make no mistake, sin still is a barrier for the believer - not from a relationship with God, but from experiencing the joy or our relationship with God.

The good news is that there is a way that this barrier can be removed. Today as we continue our study of various prayers in the Bible we are going to look at Psalm 32, which is a prayer of David. This psalm gives us wonderful guidance for how to pray in dealing with the barrier of sin.

Right from the start David lays out the central principle and that is that:

### **I. The Principle Stated: To Be Forgiven is a Truly Happy Condition (1-2)**

<sup>1</sup> *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven,  
Whose sin is covered!*

<sup>2</sup> *How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,  
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

To be *blessed* is to be truly happy. David says that the blessed person, the one who is a truly happy person, is the one who has the barrier of sin dealt with.

David uses three terms for sin here: *transgression*, *sin* and *iniquity*. Each of these terms has a slightly different nuance. In using a range of terms for sin, David poetically expresses the full range of sin whether its active rebellion or missing the mark or turning away from God's path.

There is also a three-fold description of God's forgiveness. *How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven.* *Forgiven* communicates the idea of sin and guilt being removed. How blessed is the one *whose sin is covered*. That sin is *covered* means that it is dealt with such that it is out of the sight of God. It is no longer a ground for God's displeasure. Third, he says *How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not input iniquity*. This means that God does not count sin against the one who is forgiven. These three terms are used to show the completeness the forgiveness that is possible.

David adds one last thought in the final line. He says that the one who is blessed is the one in *whose spirit there is no deceit*. The forgiveness that is implied in these verses presupposes repentance and confession. This blessed state of being forgiven is found as one comes to God without deceit. It comes from being honest with God about one's sin. The one who does that will experience God's forgiveness and the removal of the barrier of sin.

To be forgiven is a truly happy condition. That is the principles that will guide the rest of what David says. He moves from this point to illustrate how he knows this from his own personal experience. David says that forgiveness is experienced through confession of sin.

## **II. The Principle Obtained: Forgiveness is Experienced Through Confession (3-5)**

<sup>3</sup> *When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away  
Through my groaning all day long.*

<sup>4</sup> *For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me;  
My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. Selah.*

When he *kept silent* about his sin, in other words, in an unrepentant state, his *body wasted away*. His *vitality*, his strength, *was drained* out of him as with the *fever heat of summer*. His refusal to confess his sin had grave consequences for him spiritually, physically and emotionally and because of this he says he groaned *all day long*. He cried out in distress, but he did not talk to God about his sin. And it was sucking the life out of him.

It was God's hand upon him that caused his distress. The hand is a figure of speech that symbolizes God's power and might either in salvation or in judgment. In this case the hand of God's judgment pressed on him continually.

David eventually comes to a place where he gets honest with God about his sin. He says in verse 5:

<sup>5</sup> *I acknowledged my sin to You,  
And my iniquity I did not hide;  
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD";  
And You forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah.*

The same three words for sin are found here. David takes these three words for sin and matches them with a three-fold expression of his confession. He acknowledged his sin to God. He chose to not to hide his iniquities. And he says he confessed his transgressions to the Lord. He essentially decided that he would get real with God about his sin. He decided to stop being silent about his sin. And what did David find? Forgiveness. He says, *And You forgave the guilt of my sin.* How truly happy is the person who has such found forgiveness. The only path to that condition of experiencing God's forgiveness is through honest confession of sin.

As David moves to verse 6, he draws an implication from what he has experienced personally and he applies the principle to others. He says that everyone should confess their sins to God.

### **III. The Principle Applied: Confess Your Sins to God**

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore, let everyone who is godly pray to You in a time when You may be found;  
Surely in a flood of great waters they will not reach him.*

David's point is this: Since it is true that to be forgiven is a truly blessed condition. And since it is true that one can go to God and confess his or her sin, and find that God is ready and willing to forgive, then pray – pray and confess your sins to God! Why wait? Why not do this? In doing this the one who prays will find that God willingly forgives. And the one who will seek Him in this way experiences that He is a *hiding place*; that He will *preserve . . . from trouble*; and *surround . . . with songs of deliverance* (v. 7).

And so, here's a question for you. Do you sin? Hopefully, as you grow as a Christian you sin less and less, but the reality is that we will always struggle with sin. 1 John 1:8 says that:

*If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.*

Scripture is clear, we all continue to sin. Since that is true, I have another question for you: Is it your practice to regularly confess your sin? Is confession part of your prayer life with God? David is saying to each one of us that it **MUST** be if you want to keep the barrier of sin from affecting your fellowship with God. It **MUST** be if you want to be truly happy.

David wants everyone to have the experience he did when he confessed his sin and so he urges us to pray and confess our sins and experience the blessed condition. But he doesn't stop there. He continues by extending principle and showing that God not only wants to forgive us; He promises to counsel the forgiven.

### **IV. The Principle Extended: God Promises Counsel to the Forgiven (8-10)**

At verse 8, God enters the conversation and speaks directly. It is a form of speech known as Divine Discourse. God says:

*<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you.*

Again we find a 3-fold description. God says that he will *instruct, teach* and *counsel* us in our spiritual journeys. God offers not only to be our forgiver, but also our leader. He wants to be our wise and loving counselor. In the context of this psalm it makes sense that this instruction will guide us away from the path of sin and into the ways that please Him.

The speech then returns to David's words and he adds:

*<sup>9</sup> Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding,  
Whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check,  
Otherwise they will not come near to you.  
<sup>10</sup> Many are the sorrows of the wicked,  
But he who trusts in the LORD, lovingkindness shall surround him.*

The point David seems to be making is that we should not be like the horse or the mule that need to be constrained by bits and bridle to do what you want them to do. While it is possible that David is speaking of stubborn sinfulness in general, the context would suggest that the primary thing he is talking about is stubbornness in resisting confessing one's sins. Don't be stubborn. Don't refuse to confess. Don't be like a horse or a mule. Rather willingly come to God and honestly confess your sins. To refuse to confess brings *sorrows*, but for the one *who trusts in the LORD*, and confesses his sin *loving-kindness shall surround him*.

It is possible that some of us, for whatever reason, are like the horse or mule. We are stubbornly resisting God. We are keeping silent about our sin - not willing to it. We are not willing to align our lives to God's path. If you chose to stay there, God's hand will be pressing on you day and night. He loves us too much to let you stay there.

As we come to the end of this psalm, David states the result of experiencing God forgiveness and that is joy in the Lord.

## **V. The Principle's Result: Joy in the Lord (11)**

*<sup>11</sup> Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones;  
And shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart.*

To stand in a position of forgiveness and right relationship with God is a place of great joy. David has said that the one who is forgiven is a blessed person - they are truly happy. He has said that confession of sin is the critical path to getting there and that

since God is so ready and willing to forgive that we should pray to him about our sin. And when we do there is joy.

### **Application:**

Confession is a wonderful gift from God. It allows us to continually remove the barrier of sin and to stay rightly related to God in a way that fills our lives with joy and true happiness. Confession is the path to the blessed life. And so, if confession is such a critical element it seems important for us to spend a few moments talking about what confession actually is.

Many years ago as a Christian I was taught that to confess means to agree with God concerning my sin – agree that I sinned, agreed that God has paid for it on the cross and agree that I need to change. And this is in fact true. But this agreeing is not merely a matter of mouthing words to God without our heart's involvement. All too often, I've said the words, in a formulaic way, but have not really confessed my sin. What is true confession then?

John Piper describes it this way:

Confession to God is not merely admitting our sin as real but also rejecting our sin as repulsive. There is deceit in the spirit of the person who admits with his mind that he sins but feels no revulsion in his heart at those sins. . . This is deceit because sin is repulsive and horrid in God's eyes and ought to be hated and shunned. So to come to God admitting to sin and feeling no grief or repugnance is to come with deceit, for what you are acknowledging is not really acknowledged as sin. The prerequisite therefore of divine forgiveness is admitting our sin as real and rejecting our sin as repulsive.

(<http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper80/080380e.htm>)

So, true confession is not is not merely intellectual agreement that we have sinned, but it is actually coming to see it from God's perspective. When we do that we are grieved and we want to fully turn away from our sin and to God's ways. That is biblical confession. That is the pathway to true happiness.

In closing I want to address two groups of people here today. Some here today have never come to the point of agreeing with God concerning your sin. You are standing outside the family of God. God wants you to be a part of his family and experience the blessedness of forgiveness. But to experience this, the barrier of sin needs to be dealt with. You need to confess your sin. God is not asking you to clean up your life, do good deeds or anything else to merit His forgiveness. He simply wants you to come to Him in faith and yield your life to him confessing that you have sinned against a Holy God. He has done everything to make your forgiveness possible through Christ's death on the cross. Christ has paid the penalty for your sin. He has made it possible for God to lavish you with his forgiving grace. The question is, will you accept it? Will you con-

fess your sin? When you do that, Jesus will forgive you for all your sin and sin will no longer be the ultimate barrier between you and a holy God.

Others of us here today have made this decision to trust Christ for the forgiveness of our sins. All of our sin has been forgiven – past, present and future. We have the promise of eternal life. For the believer confession of sin is never about maintaining an eternal relationship with God. That was settled when we trusted Christ. For us confession of sin is a matter of continuing to align our lives with God and continuing to experience the forgiveness that we have and the joy of that forgiveness.

Suppose one of my boys goes off and rebels and disobeys me. Would he stop being my child? No. Even in his disobedience, he would always be my son. But what would the nature of our relationship be like? Distance? Alienation? There certainly would not be warm, close fellowship would there? But now, suppose that son, comes to his senses and comes to me and confesses his disobedience. What would that change in this situation? It wouldn't make him my son again, because he didn't stop being my son, but what it would do would be to restore the relationship. For the believer, this is the nature of confession. And so, let me suggest some points to help you genuinely confess your sins:

First, invite God to identify any specific sins in your life. You may want to periodically use some private worship time to invite God to convict you of anything that needs confessing, then spend a few minutes in meditation so he can direct your mind. Expect God to identify very specific sins if there are any.

Second, look through the eyes of God at the sin long enough to feel sorrow – to come to this sense of repulsion that Piper talked about. Think about it in light of the cross of Jesus. The sin you are confessing, was part of the reason that Jesus died a horrible death on a cross. The sin is no small matter. Understand your sin from God's perspective. Too often I think we want to move to claim God's forgiveness before we really have seen the sin from His perspective.

One of the reasons that times of extended solitude have been so important in my spiritual life is this very reason. Sometimes it takes me more than a few moments to see sin from God's perspective. But when I can get away and spend several hours in prayer, I've found that God often is gracious to break through the hardness of my heart and help me truly feel sorrow for me sin. We need to take time.

Finally, determine to turn from that sin in the future. Any confession that does not include a commitment to turn from the sin is not true confession. Certainly, we need God's help to resist temptation, but we also need to resolve to turn from it. It may be very possible that part of this will mean confessing your sin to a trusted friend who can help you turn from it. Sometimes the power of sin is broken as we bring it out into the light in this way.

I am convinced that it is the desire of every genuine believer in Jesus Christ to experience a relationship with God that is so full of life and joy and intimacy and power and love and peace. Is that not your deep desire? Don't you want to actually experience God and His love? I believe that you do. And since you do, it would make sense to make confession a regular part of your interaction with God. It is the pathway to a truly happy life.

Amen.