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**Series: Summer in the Psalms**  
**Message: The Blessing of Forgiveness**

**Transcribed Message**  
**July 30, 2023**  
**Psalm 32**

I think I was about 13 or 14 years old when I decided one afternoon that I would wash the family car for my dad. He liked a clean car. I thought I would surprise him and I'd wash it. The only problem was it was in the garage. The garage was a rather small single car garage with not a lot of room on either side. I either didn't have permission from my mom or I didn't have the courage to get the key to start the car and back it up, but I knew putting it in reverse it would eventually roll back and I could stop it in the driveway and wash it for my dad. Well, in the attempt to get the car moved, which wasn't that easy for 13 or 14-year-old boy, as I jumped into the car just in time the wheel evidently turned just enough and I clipped off the side view mirror and I scraped the front fender and I bent up the garage door rail just a little bit. The car stopped. The pit in my stomach was right there. I washed up the car, went to my room for the rest of the day, waited for my dad to come home, dreading that encounter with him. I didn't dread it because I was necessarily fearful of the discipline that he would bring, although that's easy to say now today. The dread was more the disappointment that I was going to have to explain to my dad and the foolishness of my decision to try to do something good but not do it in a very smart way. I remember just dreading that encounter with my dad. Eventually he came home and I explained the situation to him. He probably didn't fully understand why I would be compelled to do that, but I'm sure at some point he appreciated my effort even though it might not have been that afternoon.

All of us have made mistakes. All of us have failed. All of us have sinned. Sometimes in little ways and sometimes in really big ways. When we do, obviously we have a choice to make. We can own it. We confess it. Or we can ignore it and try to cover it up. David in Psalm 32 knew both of those responses. He brings that to us in this 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm as he tells us about it. We're going to see this morning confession is not

only good for the soul, it's essential to our spiritual health. There is freedom and there is forgiveness in confession.

Let's do a quick background of this 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. We look first of all at the fact that this is just a unique psalm. It's unique for a number of reasons and not the least of which is the combination of psalms that it presents to us. As you notice in your Bible, one of the very first statements in the superscription is a *maskil* of David. That word, while is not fully understood, in effect in the ESV at the bottom of the page it says it's a musical term. That is not necessarily agreed upon by all Hebrew scholars. In fact, many of them think of it more as a word of instruction. This 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm might very well be first of all a word of wisdom to us. But it is not just a word of wisdom, it is also a penitential psalm. There are six penitential psalms in which the psalmist cries out in penitence to God. But it's not just that either. It's a psalm of thanksgiving. David is going to be crying out with the voice of thanksgiving. And then in addition to that he is going to be speaking words of praise. So it's a unique psalm and it brings all of these different elements together.

David, as he agonizes over his sin in this particular psalm, doesn't say one word of confession or one word of repentance. That's not what's happening in this psalm. In this psalm, he is reflecting on the confession that he had made. Which brings us to the second point and that is that this psalm corresponds to another psalm. The other psalm that it corresponds to is Psalm 51. If you remember that 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm; I'm just going to read the opening lines: "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin." This is a psalm of confession. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment." Here in the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm is David's psalm of confession. This is the one that David is reflecting on in Psalm 32. Here David makes the petition. Here David seeks God's forgiveness. It is of course in relation to the sins that he committed in regard to Bathsheba and Uriah. Psalm 51 then chronologically is before Psalm 32.

The third thing we notice. The events that are in view as I said are David's sin of adultery and murder. Just think about that for a moment. We come to this 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. This psalm of penitence, the psalm of praise, a psalm of thanksgiving, this psalm of a petition, psalm of wisdom. It's in reflection upon what we read about in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12 when David committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba, when he arranged for the death and ultimately what turned out to be the murder of Uriah her husband to cover his sin. In that regard, David remains quiet for at least nine months. The weight of sin is heavy upon him. He is consistently numbing his soul to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit. He's covering his sin. He's seeking to suppress it and to hide it and to ignore it. Finally, and don't miss this, finally God sent Nathan. God sent Nathan the prophet who told the story that elicited a response from David only to have Nathan turn to him and say David, you are the man that I'm talking about.

Let's look at David's dreaded encounter with God. What I want you to see is nobody wants to have their sin uncovered. Nobody enjoys acknowledging failure and mistakes and sin. But what I want you to see. The thrust of this psalm is not on that. It's going to speak to that, but that's not the primary thrust of this 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. The primary thrust of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm is the joy of the forgiveness of the grace and mercy of God. That's what we get to delight in this morning as we lead up to communion at the end of our time.

The way the psalm begins verifies that because it begins with a jubilant beginning. Look at verses 1 and 2 again: "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." This is the second blessing. This is the second blessing. Where did we see the first blessing? We saw the first blessing in Psalm 1. Blessed is the man, blessed is the woman who does not and who does. That was Psalm 1. That was the first blessing. Just like in Psalm 1 now in Psalm 32, it's not just blessed or blessing or blessed singular. It's in the plural. It's blessednesses. David wants to underscore just how jubilant his heart is with regard to what God has done on his behalf. It's a happiness that's not circumstantial. It's a joy that he believes and feels in his heart because he is in a place of favor and he has experienced the grace of God.

Notice secondly it is even greater here. This blessedness is even greater here. Psalm 1 is the blessing of walking with God. We all want to experience that. We all want to enjoy that. We all want to pursue that. But also we all know that we don't always do it. Psalm 32 comes and speak to us of the blessedness of the one who has failed to walk with God, come to understand and realize it, and has now confessed it and been forgiven rather than ignoring it and using it and justifying it. Guilt, just like pain, is a blessing. Guilt, just like pain, is a blessing. Pain is a blessing. It doesn't feel like it at the time but it is truly a blessing that we feel pain in response to something that's dangerous or hurtful. So too is what David is saying here. He's saying yeah, this is a greater blessing to be in this place before God. Even though he is pointing out to me my sin, He is also pointing out to me the way that I can be restored. That's what he's focusing on here. Blessed is the man, blessed is the woman who comes to know that truth.

That's why, my friend, when we think in terms of discipline in our life and David is going to speak to that as we go on. That's why no discipline at the time seems pleasant, but a godly discipline, a biblical discipline, always has a better end in view. Even when we think of those scary words "church discipline", the first thought shouldn't be negative and run from what is going on. The first thought should be somebody loves somebody enough to speak into their lives so that they understand God's heart for them. That's what David is saying here. I was blessed by the pain of the convicting work of God's spirit.

Now I want you to see a poetic parallelism in these verses. There's two sets of three words. There are actually three sets of three words but we're going to step into the other set later so I'm just going to do these first two. The first set of three is obviously what we've done. David mentions three kinds of sin or three different words for sin. It's almost as if to say I can't just describe what I have done with one word. I have to speak it again and then I have to speak it again. That's what he's saying to us.

Notice here the first word that he uses to describe his failure is the word "transgression". Transgression. Transgression is the idea of rebellion. It's the idea of defiance of God's authority. That is what he is talking about. In Psalm 51 when David did cry out in confession and he said in Psalm 51 God, against you only have I sinned. We know the story well. We know that statement from the psalms, and every time we

read that we go, wait a minute, David. What about Bathsheba? You certainly sinned against Bathsheba. You took a married woman out of her life context, you involved her in a sexual affair, and you've ruined her life. you sinned against her. And good grief, what about her husband Uriah? You arranged for him to be killed. Of course, you sinned against him. And what about the whole nation? David, you are the covenant king over God's covenant people. You failed them all. And what does David do and say? God, it's against you and you only that I have sinned. And why is that? Why does he say it that way? David understood ultimately the nature of sin is rebellion against God. Every time we sin, it's our way of establishing our authority over that of God. That's what David points us to here. It's rebellion.

Secondly, it is the word "sin". Very similar to the Greek word *hamartia* which is to miss the mark. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. For all have sinned and missed the mark. If we think of archery, which is what this word brings to mind, there's a target out there. The archer is trying to hit the target and when he doesn't hit the target he misses the mark. *Hamartia*. He doesn't hit the target. But here in David's experience the target is the law of God. Remember in Psalm 19 a few weeks ago when David underscored all of the beauty of the law of God and he just rehearsed for seven different ways how he loved the law of God. Here he's acknowledging that I've missed it. I did not obey. God, I have sinned against you.

Then the third word. Iniquity. That word means to twist. It means to corrupt. It means to distort. The first requirement for blessing is simply honest confession before God. David rehearses in these three different words – transgression, sin, and iniquity -- what he has done.

Now notice the second set of corresponding three in relation not to what we have done but now to what God has done. In the second three it is what has God has done. Correlate each of those first three words with each of the responses that God offers. The first one is he has forgiven. Blessed is the man, blessed is the woman, blessed is the young person, blessed is the child whose transgression is forgiven. This is a beautiful word picture. It means to lift something off. It means to take the burden off of somebody's back. It is like a backpack that's heavy.

We're not that far off from school starting. It brought to mind watching those Pre-K and kindergartners go into the building for the first time. They've got a backpack on that is as big as they are. Thankfully it is empty or whatever is in it is not very heavy because if you imagine filling that backpack it would just take them right over like a turtle on its back. That's the picture that he gives to us here. It's a picture of *Pilgrim's Progress*. When Pilgrim finally gets rid of the burden, it's lifted off. He's forgiven. That load of rocks that he's been carrying around, the weight of sin that has weighed him down, and now he finally takes it off and it's like he's experienced release and forgiveness. That's what he says here. David in Psalm 103 verse 12 is going to say God has removed our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. The east and the west never meet so that he has taken them from us forever. As Jesus says in Matthew when he called out to the people, come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden I will give you rest. You're carrying on your back the weight of sin that is unconfessed. Jesus says come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.

The second word is the word "covered". Transgression is forgiven. Sin is covered. Again, we have a beautiful word picture. It takes us to the Old Testament to the Day of Atonement. The high priest one time a year would go to the altar, sacrifice the animal, take the blood, go into the holy place, and then beyond that in through the curtain and into the Holy of Holies. There he would walk trembling towards the Ark of the Covenant. Within the Ark of the Covenant would be the law of God. Over the Ark of the Covenant is the Mercy seat. He would take on behalf of himself and the nation to cover the sins of the people and he would sprinkle the blood over the Mercy seat over the Ark of the Covenant within which was the law of God. The blood would offer that covering. In verse 5 David is going to talk about that: "I acknowledge my sin to you and I did not cover my iniquity."

When David stopped covering his sin, what did God do? God covered his sin. When David stopped covering his sin, God covered it. So that is the second word. The third word or phrase: "does not count". Does not count. Our iniquities are not counted against us. Again, we have a wonderful term. A bookkeeping term. It's a term of accounting. But what we have here is the New Testament word for imputation. To

impute. He does not take our iniquities and impute them to our account. He doesn't put them in our account.

There are three great imputations in the Bible. There is from the very beginning Adam and Eve's sin. Adam's sin was placed on the human race. You and I, every one of us born into this world, were born into Adam's sin because Adam's sin was imputed to us. You might say, that doesn't sound very fair. We already did that in Romans so I can't go back to that. But what happens in the second imputation? Our sin was put on Christ at the cross. That doesn't seem very fair either. Do you want to know what is even less fair? The righteousness of Christ. The third great imputation is put to our account. It is accounted to us. That's what he's saying to us here. God does not count my sins against me because my sins have been put on Christ and Christ's righteousness has been put on me. It takes us to Genesis 15:6, arguably the greatest verse in the Old Testament. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness. That was the beginning of justification by faith as Abraham looked forward to one who would in fact provide that covering and that imputation.

Or, as we are reminded in Paul's statement in Romans 4 where he quotes from Psalm 32 and he talks about the imputing work of Christ on our behalf. Look at the end of verse 2. Don't miss how the end of verse 2 closes out. "and in whose spirit there is no deceit." That's the importance of confession. It can't be true confession if there's deceit in our heart. We're surely not fooling God. I don't know who we're fooling, but it's not God. John says in 1 John 1 if we say we have no sin the truth is not in us. We don't want to say that, do we? We don't want to cover our sin. When we cover our sin, there's no remedy. When we uncover our sin, God covers our sin.

Now look at the great testimony in verses 3 through 5. Start off by looking at the effect of sin. David does rehearse the effect of sin in his life in verses 3 and 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." One thing is certain, my friends, and that is this. The world, the flesh, and the devil will never tell you the truth about sin. The world will never tell you the truth about sin. What the world does a really good job of is glamorizing sin. What the world does a really good job of is enticing us with sin. Whatever it is, it's always made to be attractive.

It's always made to be positive. These people are living happily ever after supposedly. Their joy and happiness quotient is off the chart. We know that's not true. The Bible tells us the truth about that. David does in his personal experience. Yes, the writer of Hebrews says there is pleasure in sin but it is only for season. It's only for a season.

Look at the beginning of verse 3. It starts off with the word "for". We know we have a word of explanation here. He is going to explain to us the loving discipline of God in his life. sin's impact was on him heavily. It was on him spiritually of course, but it was also on him emotionally. It was on him even physically. He felt the weight every day of his unconfessed sin. It was the loving discipline of God in his life that began to point him in the right direction. Hebrews chapter 12 reminds us that no discipline at the time seems pleasant. God's hand was heavy.

Now look at the right column on your Bible and the word you see there. *Selah*. *Selah*. A little bit of debate as to what that exactly means, but most Hebrew scholars think it's an indication to us to just stop right at this point. Pause. When David says my strength was dried up as the heat of summer, he has just rehearsed the weight of sin upon his life and the impact of that unconfessed sin. We're just supposed to stop at this point and just reflect on that and think about that and allow that to sink in. but then comes the good news. Then comes the good news. This psalm is not as I said primarily about the agony of sin even though David rehearses that. It is primarily about the joy and the pleasure of God's grace and mercy and forgiveness.

Look at the second thing which is the thoroughness of forgiveness in verse 5. Look at this verse: "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." This is the longest verse in the psalm and look what he says. David doesn't hold back. David doesn't hold back. The floodgates open. Just as there were three different words for sin – transgression, sin, iniquity – there were three words that spoke of what God did – forgave, didn't count it against, and covered. Now we have three different words for confession. I acknowledged my sin which just means I made it known. I stopped covering it. I stopped suppressing. I stopped denying it. I just put it out there. Yes, I own this. This is me. I did that. I did those things. This is where I sinned against you and you only, Father. Just think of the first parents back in the garden and they did the exact



opposite of that. They sinned. They knew they sinned. Their eyes were opened and they went and hid themselves and they proceeded to blame everybody but themselves. David says that's not my heart. I acknowledged it. I made it known.

He says secondly, I didn't cover it. When we uncover, as we've seen, God covers. He said I uncovered it. I will confess. That speaks of intentionality. It speaks of commitment. He owns this. Look at that 5<sup>th</sup> verse. What word in verse 5 is repeated four different times? My. My. David is taking responsibility. That's what he has to do in order to enjoy and receive God's forgiveness. David asked and God forgave. That's what you see in this 5<sup>th</sup> verse. His forgiveness is immediate. His forgiveness is complete. There are no pauses in verse 5. There's no hesitation. There's no indication that God said, David, I'm going to have to think about this. What you did was really bad stuff. Let me get back to you in a day or two and we'll figure out what we need to do from this point. No, none of that. He said I confessed it and God forgave.

What story comes to mind that speaks about this beautiful picture of the immediacy and the completeness of forgiveness? In the New Testament in the Gospel of Luke in the 15<sup>th</sup> chapter – the prodigal. The prodigal who goes off and lives a wasted life. He wakes up finally to the convicting work of the Spirit in his life and says I need to go back to my dad. He rehearses this plan and all the things he's going to say and Luke says in that amazing story “and the father seeing his son still a long way off”. He took off his outer garment, which would've been totally uncalled for for a man of that dignity. He wrapped it up and ran to his son and fell upon him and begin to welcome him home. isn't that what David is expressing here? Isn't that the picture that he wants us to see here? The picture, as Timothy Keller says, is not just of the prodigal son, an extravagant son who wasted his life, but of a prodigal God, of a God who was himself extravagant in his love and his mercy and his forgiveness of us.

What's at the end of verse five? To the right of the column, there it is again. *Selah*. He wants us to stop. He wants us to think about this. so at the end of verse four when he talked about the weightiness of sin and the impact and effect of sin he wants that to sink in. Because, my friend, as John Owen said either we're killing sin or sin is killing us. Then at the end of verse f5, he wants us to stop and think about and meditate

on the fact that yes, God in his great love and mercy has extended forgiveness to us now.

Notice in verses 6 and 7 a lesson is shared. "Therefore let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found; surely in the rush of great waters they shall not reach him. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with the shouts of deliverance." He is saying do it now. Do it today. These are the words of Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 55:6, "Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon." Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:2 says today is the day of salvation. This is what David is driving home. The sobering reality is that God's patience will not endure forever, so he says do it now. Do it today. there is a time of accounting coming. We don't want to be the one that John speaks of in 1 John 2. We don't want to be ashamed and shrink back at his coming. What could possibly cause the believer to be ashamed and shrink back at the coming of Christ? The only thing I can think of would be sin, living a life that we know is contrary to what our Savior wants, living with unrepentant unconfessed sin.

Now verse 7. Be safe and secure. The contrast in verses 3 and 4 were David was expressing the fact that he was hiding from God. Now in verse 7 he is hiding in God. We have this picture of David naming God as doing three things for him. He is a hiding place. He is going to preserve me and he is going to surround me. Don't you like the way he ends verse 7? With a shout of deliverance. With a shout of deliverance. We can't avoid discipline because we're all prone to failure and God has promised to discipline us to bring us into an understanding of our walk in relationship with him. But here he is reminding us that judgment does come. There is an accounting that does come, and that we can avoid by means of repentance and confession.

Now notice an amazing promise is made in verses 8 through 10. I want to begin with verses 8 and 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." This amazing promise. First of all, David is speaking almost certainly a word from God.

This is like an oracle from God that David is giving. It's not likely David is telling us that he is going to counsel us his eye. He is speaking in effect for God. He says if we're teachable, God is going to teach us. If we're teachable, God will teach us. If we're not teachable, we're going to still learn, we're just going to learn the hard way through this. Don't be like a horse or mule that has to have a bit and a bridle. Be teachable. There is a reason we can take the dog for a walk but we can't take a cat for a walk. You can teach a dog. A cat teaches you things. But here we're supposed to be teachable. Let God teach us. The good news is either way we're going to learn and God loves us.

Then finally look at verse 10. He is going to teach us to walk with God. "Many are the sorrows of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord." All kinds of parallels here. the sorrows of the wicked and the great waters in verse 6. We're surrounded by steadfast love. we're surrounded by shouts of deliverance in verse 7. The sorrows of the wicked. The steadfast love of those who are walking with God. Confession, my friends, is not only good for the soul, confession is absolutely essential to our spiritual health. That is what God has called us to. There is freedom and there is forgiveness in confession.

Now verse 11. Let's use verse 11 for what we take with us. What do we take away? Verse 11: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart." This is the last command of the psalm. This is the last imperative of the psalm. The idea of the thought of God's forgiving grace just filled David with a sense of gladness, with a sense of joy. Joy is what dominates ultimately this 32<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. It is the joy of a man who knows he's been forgiven. To experience true happiness and expressive joy, we have to keep short accounts with God. We have to keep short accounts with each other as well. David is going to shout. He is going to sing blessed is the one whose sin is forgiven.

That causes me to think of two things. There are only two ways for us to conclude this morning. One. Rehearse the joy of the gospel. I remind you again that every one of us is born into this world separated from God because of sin. There isn't anything that we can do to earn God's favor, to earn his grace, or to merit forgiveness. It is simply impossible to reach the standards of a perfect holy God on our part because that's what he demands. But that's what Jesus has provided in his death on the cross.

He's made it possible for all of us who have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, to have had our sins forgiven and removed as far as the east is from the west by simply believing and trusting in what Jesus did and what Jesus did alone. That's the offer of the free gift of salvation that I make to every one of us this morning. To rejoice in the joy of the gospel. Our sins are forgiven. It seems to me the second thing we need to do is we need to sing and lift our voices in praise to God. We're going to do that with the "Son of Suffering" as we prepare for communion.

Let me pray for us. Father God, we're so very grateful for this reminder in this psalm of joy, yet a psalm that this speaks with such honesty about a man who had failed so profoundly and yet who enjoyed your forgiveness so wonderfully. Father, he did so because of the wonder of the gospel. He did so because of the wonder of your grace. He did so because of the wonder of your mercy and love. We lift our voices in praise to you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We give shouts of adoration and declarations that you alone have done this for us and we are forever grateful. In Jesus's name, amen.