

The Pursuit of Happiness

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[0 : 00] We're beginning a short series in the Psalms for the next three weeks, and this afternoon we'll be looking at Psalm 32. So please would you turn in your Bibles there, the Church Bibles, you can find on page 462.

Psalm 32 on page 462 in the Church Bibles there. The Psalm is a mascal of David. 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. 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. 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.

Therefore, let everyone who is godly offer prayer to you at a time when you may be found.

[1 : 24] 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 shouts of deliverance. 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. Many are the sorrows of the wicked.

But steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord. Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

We will consider these verses in just a moment, but let's gather together for a moment of prayer.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, our creator and Lord, as we consider the world around us full of beauty, sunshine, and splendor, we are humbled as we are reminded of your infinite power and majesty and beauty and of our weakness, fallenness and plainness.

[2 : 54] Thank you that we come before a great and powerful Lord and King. Remind us of your goodness to us, a sinful fallen people, as we gather this Wednesday lunchtime.

Thank you that in the midst of a busy city where people strive for happiness and meaning in all sorts of ways, you provide true happiness in the forgiveness of our sin.

Your amazing grace saves even a wretch like me. Your amazing grace first taught us to fear as we're confronted with our own sin and affront to you, our maker.

But your amazing grace relieves our fears as you forgive through Christ's death on the cross and as we confess and repent. So, please would you help us now as we consider your word.

Would you speak to us through your word and might we hear with eager ears and obey with eager wills. We ask this for your name.

[4 : 04] In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Well, do you have Psalm 32 open in front of you there? And we'll spend a few moments just thinking about these verses.

The United States Declaration of Independence reads like this. And don't worry, I'm not going to read the whole thing, just a small snippet. We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal.

That they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights. That among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Familiar words. The pursuit of happiness. That's what we're all after in life, isn't it? That's what our work colleagues are seeking after, our friends, our families.

It's what parents want for their children. But just what do we mean by that? What do we mean by happiness? I wonder how most people would finish off the first line of our psalm this lunchtime.

[5 : 15] It says, blessed is the one. And how would most people finish that off? Blessed is the one who has more money, more stuff, more friends, a better job.

We could go on. But our psalm this morning is all about happiness. Which is perhaps surprising because this psalm is all about penitence.

Now hold on a minute, Paul. What on earth is penitence? Well, it means repentance or confession. That action of showing sorrow and regret for having done something wrong.

There in verse 5, we have the very essence of what repentance and confession is. Just look down at that verse 5. 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. Now hold on. I thought you said this psalm was all about happiness.

[6 : 23] Well, it is. Notice the tone of the psalm. Look at verse 1. Blessed. Verse 2. Blessed. Look down to verse 11. Be glad. Rejoice.

Shout for joy. This psalm starts and finishes with wonderful outpourings of praise. And yet, at its core, lies confession.

You see, this confession of sin in verse 5 is the means by which men and women are led afresh into the joy of the Lord. It's right there in the very first verse.

It's the blessing of belonging to the Lord when once we were alienated. David's message in this psalm is that real happiness is found in sins forgiven.

And that can't happen without confession. So let's look a bit more closely at David's psalm here. It falls into two sections. His personal experience in verses 1 to 5.

[7 : 21] And that leads him to burst out with passionate exaltation in verses 6 to 11. David's testimony leads him to teaching. So let's look first at David's personal experience.

David's personal experience. In verses 1 and 2, we see that he knows the joy of sin forgiven. David knows the joy of sin forgiven.

Look again at verses 1 and 2. David is emphatic here with his description of the man whose transgression is forgiven. He describes such a man as blessed, happy, and fortunate because he fully realizes the plight from which he has been rescued.

And unless you and I see the horror and the darkness of sin, then we'll never appreciate why a man is considered blessed when he's been forgiven his sin.

There are three words that are used here which illuminate for us the true state of the unforgiven man. Just look at these in verses 1 and 2. Transgression. Sin.

[8 : 30] End of verse 1. And then verse 2. Iniquity. So transgression. It's a deliberate wandering away from the Lord. Knowing full well what he demands from us, we walk defiantly in our own way.

Denying his rightful rule over our lives. And then he uses the term sin at the end of verse 1. And that carries with it the idea of missing the mark.

Of falling short. Imagine someone's got a bow and arrow and they're aiming at the target. And the arrow falls miserably, miserably short.

And that's what sin is. It's falling far, far short of God's perfect standards. And then iniquity. It's a fundamental crookedness of character.

A twistedness in the very core of our being. Now, I suppose that most of us don't think of ourselves as crooked, deliberately rebellious, twisted people, do we?

[9 : 33] That's not how we tend to think of ourselves. But the problem is, God says that we are. His word is clear. And all this transgression, sin, iniquity, is whatever we think directed towards our creator and rightful ruler of our lives.

It's a grave problem. It's an affront to the Lord. And we need our sin to be utterly removed from us. Not just explained away.

Not just overlooked. But rather forgiven. Totally. Utterly removed. But just how is that possible?

Well, look again at the first bit of verse 2.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. It's what God himself reckons that matters. Not us. And according to God, when we confess our sin, the Lord forgives us because he does not count our sin against us.

Unforgiven transgression bars the way to the Lord. Which is why David is able to say that the blessed man is the forgiven man. The forgiven man enjoys relationship and belonging with the Lord.

[10 : 56] And this is the first element of David's personal experience. It's that joy of knowing that sin has been dealt with, has been forgiven. Now, how David came to know and enjoy this

forgiveness we'll see in a moment in verse 5.

But before we get there, we've got verses 3 and 4 to think about. And in these verses, we see that David knows the perils of stubborn refusal.

He knows the perils of stubborn refusal. David's confession in verse 5 was not immediate. For a time, he said nothing, refusing to turn to the Lord in repentance.

Look at verses 3 and 4 again with me. 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 in the heat of summer. David's delay in confessing his sin did not go well for him.

[12:01] His time of silence led only to misery. His unconfessed sin just weighed him down. He says his strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.

Now, this requires a bit of a stretch in the imagination for the average Glaswegian. It's not too often that we experience extreme heat in the middle of summer, is it? But perhaps you've been away on holiday to somewhere a bit warmer in the peak of summer.

If you head out in the middle of the day and try to do anything, you quickly become quite tired, low in energy, longing to get away from the shops your wife is dragging around and enjoy a cool lemonade.

This is how David describes the results of his unconfessed sin. His strength was dried up. Quite a contrast to the blessedness he speaks of in verse 1, isn't it?

And the source of his pain and anguish is perhaps surprising. Look again at the first part of verse 4. It is the Lord's heavy hand convicting him that brings David to this low ebb.

[13:15] But it is a merciful and gracious heavy hand. Why? Well, because his misery drove him to his confession in verse 5.

Sometimes the Lord must bring us to moments like this when the weight of our sin just seems absolutely unbearable. Now, we see this in other areas of life, don't we? A merciful sorrow drives us to find a solution.

An aching tooth causes much pain and distress, but the pain alerts us to the fact that something needs to be done about it. We need to get ourselves to the dentist to get it seen to.

It is a merciful pain because it drives us to seek out the solution. And so it is with the Lord sometimes for us. Maybe this is you in the middle of a very difficult week or month or year.

You've been brought to the point of misery. The disastrous consequences of your selfish actions. You just can't escape them. You can't sleep.

[14:23] You can't think straight. You know you've screwed up. And the question haunts you, how can I ever get up from this? It is misery for you.

Real misery. But if that is the case, let me tell you, it is a merciful misery. It may not feel like it, but it is because the Lord is driving us, driving you to confession.

That is the only path to forgiveness. So how can you and the rest of us know this joy and happiness that David speaks about in verse 1?

Well, the key is there in verse 5. That is where your road to recovery begins. We see here that David knows the necessity of confession. He knows the necessity of confession.

After that groaning silence of verses 3 and 4 comes, all of a sudden, the outpouring of confession in verse 5. I acknowledge my sin to you and did not cover my iniquity.

[15:31] I said, I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. There's three simple things to notice here in this verse.

Firstly, we need to acknowledge our sin. We need to acknowledge it. Before confession can take place, there must be a real acknowledgement of sin. Now, David was eaten up by his refusal to face up to the fact of his sin.

He let the guilt fester until he got to the point where he just had to acknowledge it. I'm sure you know that feeling. And so we must acknowledge our sin.

It's fundamental that we come to this point. If we don't, then we can make no claim to the blessed life. Without acknowledging our sin, we cannot begin to confess it.

So whether it's spiteful words we aim at our closest family, whether it's some secret but fundamentally destructive pleasure that no one else knows about, whatever it is, we need to acknowledge it for what it is.

[16:37] How at this very core, it's an affront to our Creator and Lord, a rejection of His right rule. So ask yourself, have you made an accurate self-assessment of your own life, your own heart?

Is God's Word perhaps being held up as a mirror to your life? Have you acknowledged that sin? So once we've acknowledged, secondly, we need to confess our sin.

That's the second thing we see in verse 5. We need to confess. Following acknowledgement, we speak, we confess our sin. To whom? Well, it's to the Lord. Look at the second half of verse 5.

I will confess my transgression to the Lord. Lord, confession is the only path to true blessedness, true happiness. So we confess.

How? Well, you might pray something like this. Lord, I can hardly imagine what it's like to create and sustain someone and then be ignored by them day in, day out.

[17:48] To have promises broken, to have them live just as they like. Lord, I'm sorry for how I've lived, thought, spoken without a second thought for you. Lord, I'm sorry for you.

The link between the confession and the forgiveness is seamless and immediate, isn't it? I said I will confess my transgression to the Lord, and you forgave.

The Lord wonderfully does not count sin against the believer. It is instead counted against the Lord Jesus Christ. It is done. But this poses a question.

Do you have the humility to receive from another something that you know you cannot do for yourself? Proud hearts can't receive gifts very easily.

Least of all, the gift of forgiveness. Are you willing to receive the forgiveness of sin? Humble acknowledgement and humble confession is the only path to receive forgiveness of sins.

[19:25] And David knew this. And this is the very first and primary thing that we must do. There is no other way to the truly blessed, truly happy life than this.

This is David's personal experience. From the despair of verses 3 and 4 comes the acknowledgement of the darkness of sin in verse 5.

And confession to the Lord, which brings that wonderful, life-transforming forgiveness. David can't help but move to teach in verses 6 to 11.

His personal experience drives him to share that. He cannot contain himself. In other words, here is the application. Here David is saying, here's what I did.

Now do what I did, but only quicker. So we'll think about verses 6 to 11 now, where we look at David's teaching. And firstly, verse 6, we know the necessity of confession.

[20:26] Therefore, confess today. Do you sense the urgency of his plea there in verse 6? Offer prayer to the Lord at a time when he can be found.

That is, don't wait as David did. Learn the lesson he has shared about the misery of living with unconfessed guilt. It's no way to live. So heed David's warning.

Confess. And confess today. Confess while the Lord can still be found. Secondly, verses 7 to 9.

We know the perils of stubborn refusal. Therefore, remember the benefits of the forgiven. We know the perils of stubborn refusal.

So remember the benefits of the forgiven. In contrast to the misery of verses 3 and 4, David here outlines the wonderful benefits of living as one who is forgiven.

[21:27] The forgiven man lives under the Lord's protection. Verse 7. He is our hiding place, keeping us from trouble. He surrounds us with shouts of deliverance.

What a turnaround to the groaning of verse 3. Not only does the forgiven man enjoy the Lord's protection, but he sits under the Lord's instruction.

Notice the change of speaker in verse 8. It's the Lord who speaks now. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go. I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

The response of the blessed man is to sit gladly under the Lord's instruction. Don't be like that stubborn mule without understanding, constantly needing to be yanked and pulled back on track.

It is a wonderful thing to be able to live under the instruction of the Lord who made you. So remember the benefits of the forgiven. And then verses 10 and 11.

[22:35] We can know the joy of sin forgiven. Therefore, rejoice. We can know the joy of sin forgiven. So rejoice. The psalm closes on a wonderful note of praise and joy.

David reminds us of the sheer wonder and attractiveness of the gospel of grace. That our sin is not counted against us. That those who know the forgiveness of sin be glad and rejoice.

Let us shout for joy. So as we pursue happiness, remember blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven.

Whose sin is covered. Not blessed is the one who gets the promotion at work. Good though that might be. Not blessed is the one who earns the most money in 2014.

Not blessed is the one who gets the house with the extra bedroom and the jacuzzi. These things are not bad in and of themselves. But the route to happiness, true happiness, is not to be found in them.

[23 : 44] Yes, they might bring enjoyment for a time. Well, they certainly will. But it won't be long before your eyes on the next promotion. The bigger house. The next paycheck.

Or whatever it is. True happiness. True blessedness. True fulfillment is found only in the forgiveness of sin. Acceptance by the God who created you.

Verse 10 sets out the contrast vividly. And we'll finish with this. Many are the sorrows of the wicked. But steadfast love surround the one who trusts in the Lord. For those who refuse to turn from their sins, there is only sorrow.

David is quite clear, isn't he, about that. But what a glorious contrast for those who trust in the Lord for forgiveness. David has learned that true joy, true happiness, is found in knowing that his sin has been totally covered, dealt with, gone.

[24 : 52] The Lord and you, with nothing in between. That is true happiness and joy. Let's pray.

Amen. Father, we thank you for this psalm of David, which speaks so clearly of the true source of blessing, the true source of happiness, which is not to be found in worldly possessions, not to be found in anything else, but in knowing you through the forgiveness of our sin.

Thank you that you have made a way for our sin not to be counted against us. And it is through your amazing grace that we can know this wonderful joy.

We thank you in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.