

Real Happiness

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[0 : 00] For now, though, we turn to our Bible reading. We're going to be spending a couple of weeks looking at some Psalms, and this week it's Psalm 32. So do turn up in your Bibles to Psalm 32.

If you're using a church visitor's Bible, that's on page 462, and we'll read that together. Psalm 32, beginning verse 1.

A masculine of David. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts new iniquity, and in whose spirit there is new 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 forgive the iniquities of my sin.

[1 : 06] 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 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 brittle, 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. Amen. May God bless us.

This is word. Good. I'll please turn back to Psalm 32 with Josh read for us a little earlier.

[2 : 09] So Psalm 32. Now this psalm gives us the answer to the question that everyone asks all the time.

What is the key to happiness? What is the key to happiness? Well, that very venture is enshrined in the United States Declaration of Independence, the pursuit of happiness, a right endowed by our creator, it says.

And the pursuit of happiness is the very basis upon which the entire advertising industry is predicated upon. It fascinates us.

It consumes our thoughts, our time, our energy, our money. Recently, the people of my generation were surveyed, and they were asked this question, what would make you happy?

And 80% of those asked said that being rich would make them happy, and 50% said that being famous would, for them, make them happy.

[3 : 18] Now, I think many of us, if we're honest, would perhaps answer a little similarly. Who wouldn't want a bit more money? Now, maybe you've heard about the famous 15-minute TED talk.

You come across that? It's this big conference, and they invite all these speakers, and they have 15 minutes to deliver their talk on whatever it is. And one of their most viewed talks ever, it's been watched over 17 million times, has this title, What Makes a Good Life?

Lessons from the Longest Study on Happiness. And the man giving that talk, he is the director of the 70-year-long study into what contributes to general well-being and happiness.

And that study tracks the lives of over 2,000 men over 70 years. And they discovered a lot of things through that study. But it boils down to this.

The answer to happiness is not money or fame, but good relationships. And that finding should perhaps not surprise us. It shouldn't surprise the Christian.

[4 : 30] You see, the Bible is all about human life, and the Bible is interested in the happiness of people.

And at the very root of its answer is good relationships. And of one relationship in particular, it's the restored relationship between you and the God who made you.

That is the key to true and lasting happiness according to the Bible. And so the TED Talk I've just mentioned was good, but only up to a point.

Because it only considered relationships between people. It ignored the fundamental relationship, the relationship between the creator and those who he's created.

And it is that that our psalm addresses this morning. It is a psalm all about happiness. It's about the happy, the blessed believer. And it points us to the true source of happiness, which is the restoration of a broken relationship.

[5 : 41] And the source of that happiness, what this psalm points to is perhaps surprising, because at the heart of this psalm is penitence, repentance, confession.

The action of sharing regret for having done something wrong, turning around from our old ways and turning to the Lord. And there in verse 5, have a look at that.

We have the very essence of what repentance is. And it's profoundly relational. David says, I acknowledge 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 just a moment.

I thought you said this was a psalm all about happiness. Why all this talk of repentance? Well, notice the tone of the psalm. It begins, verse 1, with blessing. Blessed is the man.

[6 : 39] Verse 2, blessed. And it ends with that note of gladness and rejoicing and joy. The psalm starts and finishes with these wonderful outpourings of praise.

And yet at its core lies repentance. You see, this confession of sin in verse 5, this 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. Blessed, or happy, is the one whose transgression is forgiven. It's that blessing of belonging to the Lord when once we were alienated.

And David's message here in this psalm is that real happiness is found in sins forgiven. And that can't happen without confession. That is at the heart of our psalm this morning.

You see, true happiness, lasting happiness, is to do with God and the believers' relationship with God, made possible only through the forgiveness of sin.

[7 : 46] So let's look more closely at David's psalm. It splits into two sections. In verses 1 to 5, we see David's personal testimony. And then in verses 6 to 11, we see David's teaching.

You see, David's personal experience moves him to burst out with the passionate exhortation in the second half. So look first at verses 1 to 5, David's personal experience.

And firstly, he knows, verses 1 and 2, the joy of sin forgiven. Look how he begins. Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity. David's emphatic here, isn't he, with the description of the man whose transgression is forgiven. He describes such a man as blessed.

Blessed. So the forgiven man, in other words, is happy. He has complete wellness of being. Happy and fortunate is that man because he fully realizes the plight from which he has been rescued.

[8 : 56] And unless we see the darkness, the horror of human sin, they will never appreciate why a man is considered blessed when he's been forgiven that sin.

David uses three different words here to describe and illuminate for us the true state of the unforgiven man. Transgression, sin, and iniquity there in those first two verses.

And transgression is a deliberate wandering away from the Lord. A deliberate rebellion, a turning away. Knowing full well what he demands of us, we walk defiantly in our own direction, denying his rightful rule over our lives.

The word sin carries with the idea of missing the mark, falling short. Like an arrow aimed at a target, it falls miserably short of the target. And so we, every human being that's ever lived, falls short, far short of God's standards.

And the word iniquity, well, it just means a twistedness of character. A crookedness. Inability to do what is right. Now, I suppose that most of us don't tend to think of ourselves in that way, do we?

[10 : 15] We don't think of ourselves as being crooked or deliberately rebellious or twisted people. But the problem is, God says that we are. And all this, all the words David uses here, transgression,

sin, iniquity, is whatever we might think, a rejection of the right ruler of our lives.

Sin is a grave problem. It's an affront to the Lord. And we need sin to be utterly removed from us. Not just explained away. Not just overlooked, but rather forgiven. Totally, utterly removed. How is that possible?

If you're honest with your own self, your own heart, how is it possible that that can no longer be counted against us? Well, look at verse 2. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity.

It's what God 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.

[11:28] And the New Testament tells us how that can be possible. It's possible only through the cross of Christ. In 2 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul says this, For our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Now isn't that just staggering? As we pause to think about that. These words can almost become so familiar, can't they? But listen again.

For our sake, he made him that knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we, you, me, might become the righteousness of God.

Because of the cross, God counts the righteousness of Jesus to the believer. And the sin of the believer is counted to Jesus on the cross.

But the Old Testament message isn't any different either. The Bible's not one on this issue of forgiveness of sin. And David knew that confession led to forgiveness. That is the very first and primary thing we must do.

[12:40] There's no other way to the truly happy, blessed life. The life of being counted righteous, forgiven, before our Creator and Lord.

Unforgiven transgression. That bars the way to the Lord. There's no way through it. And that 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. So that's the first element of David's testimony.

It's the joy of forgiveness. And how he came to know that joy, how he came to enjoy that forgiveness, we'll see in a few moments in verse 5. But before we get there, we've got to consider verses 3 and 4.

And here we see that David knows the pain of stubborn refusal. David's confession in verse 5 wasn't immediate.

[13:43] For a time, he said nothing, refusing to turn to the Lord in repentance, verses 3 and 4. And David's delay did not go well for him. His time of silence led only to misery.

Disaster. Look at how he describes that silence. 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. That was by the heat of summer. David's unconfessed sin, it utterly weighed him down, gnawing away at his very being. He was unable to forget about it. Unable to let it go. All day long, it was like a millstone around his neck. His strength dried up like the heat of summer.

Now that requires a bit of a stretch of imagination for the Glaswegian. When was the last time we had heat like that? It's not too often we experience it. But if you've ever been a holiday away in a hot place, and you go out in the midst of the day in the strength of the summer sun, you try and do anything, and pretty quickly you feel sapped of energy.

[15:04] You become drained, and you're just dying to dive into the shade. That's how David describes the feeling of refusing to repent. His strength utterly dried up.

It's quite a contrast, isn't it, to what he describes in verse 1, that blessedness he speaks of. And the source of his pain and anguish is perhaps surprising.

Look again at the start of verse 4. It was the Lord's heavy hand convicting him that brings David to this low ebb.

But it is a merciful and gracious heavy hand. Why? Because his misery, well, it drove him, didn't it, to confession in verse 5. And sometimes the Lord must bring us to a place like that.

He must bring us to the low moments where the weight of our sin seems utterly unbearable.

Perhaps you look back on things in your life, things done, things said, maybe many years ago, and you look back with a heavy heart.

[16:22] You can't possibly begin to imagine knowing happiness when you've made such a mess of things. You look back with regret. You don't think you can bear it.

Well, perhaps the Lord has his merciful heavy hand upon you. You're being led to that point where you cannot do anything but turn to him.

And we see this in other areas of life. A merciful sorrow, a real pain, drives us to seek the solution. An aching tooth causes much pain, much distress, but the pain alerts us to the fact something's wrong.

It drives us to go to the dentist to get it seen to. Ignoring that pain is not a good idea. It's a merciful pain because it drives us to seek out the solution. And so it is with the Lord sometimes for us. Maybe that's you even this morning. You've been brought to that point of absolute misery. The reality of the disastrous consequences of your selfless actions.

[17:31] You just can't escape them. You can't sleep. You can't even think straight. You can't eat. You know you've really messed up and the question haunts you. How can I ever get up from this?

Is there any hope? It's misery. It's real misery for you. But if so, let me tell you that it's a merciful misery. Now it may not feel like it, but it is because the Lord is driving you to confession.

That is the only path towards forgiveness. So how can you, if that's you this morning, how can all of us know the Lord's forgiveness?

How can we know this joy and happiness that David speaks about in verse 1? Well, the key that is there in verse 5. That is where your road to recovery begins.

So David knows here, verse 5, he knows the necessity of confession. After all that groaning silence of verses 3 and 4, all of a sudden, we have verse 5, this outpouring of confession.

[18:44] I acknowledge 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.

Three simple things to note here. Three lessons for us. We need to acknowledge our sin. Before confession can take place, there has to be acknowledgement of sin.

David was eaten up by his refusal to face up to his own sin. He let the guilt fester until it got to the point where he just had to acknowledge it. And so we too must acknowledge our sin.

It's fundamental that we come to that very point. And it's not just the consequences of sin that need to be acknowledged. Look at the end of verse 5 where we have that slightly curious phrase.

David writes that the Lord forgave the iniquity of my sin. It doesn't just say the Lord forgave my sin, but it says the iniquity of my sin.

[19:47] It is the sinfulness of sin that needs to be acknowledged and confessed. We're to be sorry for the sin itself, not just its consequences, not just we've been caught out.

But really our sin is primarily an assault on the Lord and his rule over this world, over your life, my life. And so we must come to that point where we acknowledge the sinfulness of our sin, sin in all its fullness.

Acknowledge our rottenness to our core. And yes, that is sobering. That's painful. Who wants to admit that about themselves?

But we must come to that point, that point of seeing ourselves as we really are. And without coming to that point, we can make no claim on the blessed life.

Without acknowledging our sin, we can't begin to confess it. So whatever it might be, whether it's spiteful words aimed at a close family member, whether it's some secret but fundamentally destructive pleasure that no one else knows about, whatever it is, we need to confess the iniquity of it.

[20:59] How it is caused an affront to our Creator, a rejection of His, right rule. So have you made an accurate self-assessment of your own life and heart?

Is God's Word being held up as a mirror to you this morning? Have you acknowledged that sin? But it's not just mere acknowledgement.

Second thing to see is that we must confess our sin. That's what David does. He confesses. So following acknowledgement, we speak, we confess, but to whom?

It's to the Lord. Look at the second half of verse 5. I will confess my transgressions to the Lord. He is our first point of call when it comes to confession of sin, not some other human being.

David knows that confession leads to forgiveness. Confession is the only path to true blessedness, true happiness. And so, we must confess.

[22 : 06] How do you do that? How do you go about it? Well, maybe use Psalm 51, David's great song of repentance. Use that in your own words. Perhaps turn to it later as you confess your own sin to the Lord.

So not only do we acknowledge it, not only do we confess it, but thirdly, we must receive forgiveness of sin. The link between the confession and the forgiveness is seamless. It's immediate, isn't it? I said I'll confess my transgressions to the Lord and you forgave. The Lord's forgiveness is definite, immediate. How's that possible?

Well, as we've seen already, the Lord wonderfully does not count sin against the believer. It is instead counted against the Lord Jesus Christ. It's done. But that poses a question.

Do you, do I, have the humility to receive from another something we know we can't do for ourselves? Proud hearts can't receive gifts easily, especially the gift of forgiveness.

[23 : 16] No, you can do nothing about it yourself. But humble acknowledgement, humble confession, that's the only path to receive forgiveness of sins.

And David knew that. And that is the very first and primary thing that we must do. There's no other way to the truly blessed life than this. And that is David's personal testimony.

It's a rapturous outburst from a heart that has known and felt the reality of divine forgiveness. forgiveness. From the depths of despair in verses 3 and 4 comes the acknowledgement of sin and confession which brings that wonderful life-transforming forgiveness that leads him to call in verse 1, blessed is the one who is forgiven.

And from David's profound personal experience comes his exhortation verses 6 to 11, David's teaching.

And he can't help but move from testimony of what has happened in his own life to teaching for how we are to respond to his listeners. Here is his application.

[24 : 28] In other words, here's his so what. And David is saying in these verses, here is what I did. Now do as I did.

But don't hang about. Look at verse 6. We know the necessity of confession. Therefore, says David, confess today.

He senses urgency there. Therefore, he says, 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. Urgency. Offer prayer to the Lord at a time when he can be found. That is, don't wait as David did. Learn the lesson that he shared about the misery of living with unconfessed guilt.

That's no way to live. But what is it that holds us back? Well, usually it's pride, isn't it?

[25 : 29] Pride in not wanting to admit that we fall short of a standard. Pride in not wanting to admit fault, to lose face, to admit our need for forgiveness. It is profoundly humiliating to pride and to the self-made man.

It renders all religious efforts meaningless, irrelevant. We can do nothing to contribute to our salvation, our forgiveness. It's all of him.

It's all God's grace. So hear and heed David's warning. Confess. Confess today.

Confess whilst the Lord may still be found. Don't let pride get in the way. Humble yourself today. Second part of David's teaching, verses 7 to 9.

We know, we've seen the pain of stubborn refusal. Therefore, remember the benefits of the forgiven. In contrast to verses 3 and 4, David here outlines the wonderful blessings and benefits of living as one who's forgiven.

[26 : 42] Look at verse 7. we see the great privilege of protection. The forgiven man lives under the Lord's protection. He is our hiding place, keeping us from trouble, surrounding us with shouts of deliverance.

What a turnaround from the groaning of verse 3. But 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 now the Lord who's speaking. 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, the forgiven man, is to sit gladly under the Lord's instruction.

Don't be like, verse 9, the stubborn mule.

Don't be like an animal needing to be constantly yanked back on track with his bridle. Don't be like that. Sit under the Lord's instruction gladly.

[27 : 46] That's a great privilege. It's the God who made you. The forgiven man is a fool if he wanders away from his instruction. It's glorious to live the Christian life.

That is the way of blessing. So we see here the privilege of living under the Lord's instruction and his protection. But thirdly, verses 10 to 11, we know the joy of sin forgiven.

We've seen that with David's experience. And so David says, therefore 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 and the God of grace.

those that turn to him in repentance, he will not turn away. He delights to forgive. And what joy it is to know that our sin is not counted against us.

If you're here this morning and you know the joy of forgiveness, if you know your sins are forgiven, be glad, rejoice. That is what it is to be happy and blessed.

[29 : 00] Sin's forgiven. Not blessed is the one who gets the promotion at work, good though it might be. Not blessed is the one who gets the most money.

Not blessed is the one who gets the house or the extra bedroom and a new car. Now these things in and of themselves are not wrong, not bad. But the root to happiness is not found in them.

They will in the end only disappoint. They will bring enjoyment for a time. But I won't be long before your eyes on the next promotion, the bigger house, the faster car.

True happiness, true blessedness, true fulfillment is found only through the forgiveness of sin, acceptance by the God who made you.

And verse 10 sets out the contrast so vividly for us and we'll finish with this. many are the sorrows of the wicked but steadfast love surrounds the one who trusts in the Lord.

[30 : 06] For those who refuse to turn from their sins, there is in the end only sorrow. David's clear, isn't he? But what a glorious contrast for those who trust in the Lord, who know forgiveness.

David has learned that true joy, true happiness is found in knowing that his sins have been totally covered, dealt with, gone. Will David's joy be your joy even now, even here this morning?

And the question is, will you repent? Will you turn to him? The Lord who made you and you with nothing in between, nothing hindering, that is true happiness and joy.

That is the great restoration of what was once fractured. Only through that is true happiness to be found. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we thank you for your amazing grace, for the wonder of knowing sin's forgiven.

[31 : 39] and so help us to respond to what we've seen here of David's personal experience and help us to be thankful for all that you've done for people like us and unworthy people, people without you, utterly lost, walking in darkness.

amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost, but now found was blind, but now I see.

Thank you, Heavenly Father, for your offer of forgiveness. we thank you in Jesus' name. Amen.